



The Impact of Instagram on Language Processing and Psychological Development

Benedikta Br Sembiring¹, Rifky Haidar Arash², Jasmine Aika Syifa Rambe³, Rafif Mar'ie Muhammad⁴

¹⁻⁴English Literature Departmen, Faculty of Language and Art, Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan City, North Sumatera Province, Indonesia

*Author Corresponding: benediksembiring@gmail.com

Abstract. Instagram has become a digital communication space that influences how individuals use language, construct identity, and interact with their social environments. This phenomenon is relevant to contemporary social and educational contexts because communication on Instagram involves not only text but also images, videos, emojis, and social responses that may be associated with meaning-making processes and users' psychological development. This study aims to examine the relationship between Instagram use, language processing, and psychological development through a qualitative literature-based approach. Data were obtained through document analysis of journal articles and scholarly publications addressing digital communication, language practices, self-identity, social comparison, and psychological well-being. Since the study did not involve direct interviews or observations, it included neither participants nor primary experiential data; instead, the analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis of relevant literature. The findings indicate three main patterns: changes in language processing through multimodal communication and informal language use; identity construction through self-presentation and social comparison; and an ambivalent relationship between Instagram use and psychological experiences, encompassing opportunities for social support as well as the possibility of social pressure or self-dissatisfaction. The study adopts Sociocultural Theory as its primary theoretical foundation, with Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory serving as supporting perspectives. Theoretically, the study highlights the importance of understanding language and psychological development as interconnected processes within digital environments. Practically, the findings may support the development of digital literacy and educational practices that encourage contextual communication, critical reflection, and healthy online interaction.

Keywords: Digital Communication; Instagram; Language Processing; Literature Review; Psychological Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways individuals communicate, interpret information, and construct their identities. Among various social media platforms, Instagram has become an important space for everyday communication, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Through captions, comments, direct messages, stories, reels, and visual content, users engage in communication that combines written language, images, symbols, emojis, and audiovisual elements. These interactions have gradually become part of everyday social and educational experiences, influencing not only how people express themselves but also how they interpret messages and respond to others (Widiarti & Prima, 2026).

From the perspective of Instagram users, digital communication offers opportunities for self-expression, social connection, and access to information. However, the platform also introduces new communication patterns that deserve closer examination. Users frequently encounter abbreviated expressions, informal vocabulary, slang, code-switching, visual

symbols, and context-dependent meanings. In such environments, understanding a message often requires more than interpreting its literal meaning; users must also consider the relationship between communicators, social context, visual representation, and implied intentions. These practices raise important questions concerning language processing, particularly how individuals recognize meaning, interpret expressions, and adapt their linguistic choices in digital interactions (Humaidi et al., 2026).

The influence of Instagram extends beyond linguistic practices to psychological development. Adolescents and young adults use social media as spaces for identity exploration, social interaction, and self-presentation. The visibility of likes, comments, followers, and curated personal images may shape how users perceive themselves and evaluate their relationships with others. Previous research has identified associations between social media engagement, social comparison, body image, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, these relationships are complex and may vary according to individual characteristics, patterns of use, and the content encountered by users (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022; Sepas et al., 2024). Consequently, Instagram should not be understood exclusively as a technological communication tool but also as a social environment in which linguistic and psychological experiences intersect (Rahmah et al., 2026).

The urgency of examining this phenomenon is evident in contemporary educational and social contexts. In Indonesia, Instagram forms part of the digital communication environment in which young people encounter Indonesian, English, regional languages, and various informal linguistic expressions. Such exposure creates opportunities for linguistic creativity, multilingual communication, and the development of digital literacy. At the same time, it raises questions about how users distinguish formal and informal language, interpret ambiguous expressions, and negotiate their identities through online communication. Globally, similar concerns have emerged regarding the relationship between social media engagement and adolescent psychological development. Senekal et al. (2023) emphasize that social media is increasingly integrated into adolescents' psychosocial development, particularly in relation to identity, self-image, mental health, and well-being (Rahmah et al., 2026).

Recent studies have explored several dimensions of this phenomenon. Research on Instagram and mental health has identified relationships involving social comparison, body image, self-esteem, and psychological well-being. A systematic review by The relationship between Instagram use and indicators of mental health (2021) highlighted the importance of distinguishing between different forms of Instagram engagement rather than treating platform use as a single uniform activity. Similarly, Pedalino and Camerini (2022) examined how

upward social comparison with peers and influencers relates to body dissatisfaction among young female users. Papageorgiou et al. (2022), through qualitative interviews with adolescent girls, further demonstrated the importance of understanding how users experience appearance-related comparisons and social media content in their everyday lives.

Other studies have investigated broader psychosocial consequences. Shankleman et al. (2021) synthesized qualitative research on adolescents' experiences of social media and well-being, identifying themes involving social connection, identity, learning, and emotions. Valkenburg et al. (2022) also reported that findings concerning social media and adolescent mental health vary across studies, indicating that the relationship is not adequately explained through simple assumptions about screen time or platform exposure. More recently, Sepas et al. (2024) identified associations between problematic Instagram use, psychological distress, and well-being, while also acknowledging conceptual and methodological differences among the studies reviewed.

In the linguistic domain, Instagram provides a dynamic environment for examining how language is used and interpreted in digital communication. The combination of textual and visual elements creates communicative practices in which meaning is frequently constructed through context, shared cultural knowledge, and multimodal expression. Informal vocabulary, abbreviations, emojis, and code-switching may function as resources for expressing emotions, establishing social relationships, and communicating group identity. These practices are relevant to language processing because users must interpret linguistic forms alongside contextual and visual information. They are also relevant to psychological development because language serves as a medium through which individuals express emotions, negotiate identity, and establish social belonging.

Despite the growing body of research, several gaps remain. Existing studies have frequently examined psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, body dissatisfaction, self-esteem, and well-being, separately from linguistic processes. Meanwhile, research on digital language has often concentrated on linguistic forms, language variation, or communication patterns without sufficiently connecting these practices to users' psychological experiences. Furthermore, quantitative studies commonly emphasize measurable associations between platform use and psychological variables, while qualitative research offers opportunities to explore how individuals interpret, experience, and assign meaning to their digital interactions. The relationship between language processing and psychological development therefore requires a more integrated examination.

To address this gap, the present study aims to explore the impact of Instagram on language processing and psychological development through a qualitative literature-based approach. Specifically, the study focuses on three interconnected dimensions: (1) the ways Instagram communication shapes users' interpretation of language, including informal expressions, visual symbols, and context-dependent meanings; (2) the psychological experiences associated with digital interaction, particularly identity construction, self-perception, emotional responses, and social comparison; and (3) the relationship between linguistic practices and psychological experiences in the Instagram environment. By integrating perspectives from psycholinguistics, sociocultural theory, and psychological development, this study is expected to contribute to a broader understanding of language and human experience in digital spaces. Practically, the findings may provide insights for educators, students, and digital literacy practitioners in developing more reflective communication practices and promoting responsible social media engagement.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Research on the impact of Instagram on language processing and psychological development requires theoretical perspectives capable of explaining the relationship between digital technology, communication practices, and individual experiences. Instagram functions not only as a medium for sharing information but also as a social space where users construct meaning, express identity, and develop interpersonal relationships. In this context, language processing and psychological development are understood as interconnected processes shaped through individuals' interactions with their digital environments.

This study draws on three main perspectives: Sociocultural Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory. These theories were selected because they offer different yet complementary perspectives for understanding how Instagram communication relates to cognitive processes, identity construction, and users' psychological experiences

Sociocultural Theory: Language Processing as a Socially Mediated Process

Sociocultural Theory, rooted in the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, views cognitive and language development as processes shaped through social interaction and the use of cultural tools. From this perspective, language is not merely a means of conveying information; it is also a resource that helps individuals organize their thoughts, construct understanding, and participate in social life.

On Instagram, communication takes place through a combination of text, images, emojis, videos, and digital symbols. Users do not always understand messages based solely on their literal meanings; they also consider context, social relationships, and shared cultural knowledge. For example, a particular emoji used in a comment may convey humor, sarcasm, support, or different emotions depending on the communication situation.

This phenomenon indicates that language processing on social media involves social and contextual interpretation. Users also adjust their word choices, language styles, and use of informal expressions according to their audiences and communicative purposes. Instagram can therefore be understood as a social environment that provides space for the development of language practices and the construction of meaning.

This perspective is relevant to the present study because it helps explain how digital communication experiences relate to language comprehension, the interpretation of symbols, and the development of social relationships.

Social Comparison Theory: Psychological Development and Self-Perception

Social Comparison Theory, introduced by Leon Festinger, explains individuals' tendency to evaluate their abilities, achievements, and circumstances by comparing themselves with others. In digital environments, this process may occur frequently because users have access to various representations of social life through posts, stories, and reels.

Instagram provides users with opportunities to view other people's academic achievements, physical appearances, lifestyles, and social activities. However, the content displayed often represents selected and curated aspects of people's lives. This may influence how users understand social standards and evaluate themselves.

Research by Pedalino and Camerini (2022), published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, demonstrates the relevance of social comparison to body dissatisfaction among young female Instagram users. Meanwhile, Papageorgiou et al. (2022), published in *BMC Women's Health*, explored adolescent girls' experiences of interpreting social media content and its relationship with body image.

From a qualitative perspective, this theory helps researchers understand that users' psychological experiences are associated not only with the frequency of Instagram use but also with how they interpret other people's posts and assign meaning to their own positions within the social environment.

For example, a user may feel motivated after seeing a friend's achievements but may experience self-doubt in another situation when comparing their appearance or lifestyle with content perceived as ideal. Such experiences illustrate that the psychological meanings of social media are shaped by subjective interpretation and social context.

Social Cognitive Theory: Learning, Modeling, and Digital Self-Development

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that human behavior develops through reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behavior, and the environment. One of the theory's key concepts is observational learning, the process through which individuals learn behaviors by observing the actions and experiences of others.

Instagram provides various behavioral models that users can observe, ranging from communication styles and identity presentation to emotional expression and social relationship-building. Users may adopt popular terms, communication styles, or particular forms of expression after observing their use by peers, content creators, or public figures.

In psychological terms, this observational process may be associated with the development of self-perception, beliefs about personal abilities, and the ways individuals respond to their social environments. Responses such as likes, comments, and other forms of interaction may also become part of social experiences that influence users' behavior.

Through a systematic review published in the South African Journal of Psychology, Senekal et al. (2023) examined the relationship between social media and adolescent psychosocial development, including identity, self-image, and psychological well-being.

In this study, Social Cognitive Theory helps explain how users learn communication patterns and social behaviors by observing Instagram content. However, this process is not understood as automatic imitation. Users retain the ability to select, interpret, accept, or reject the behaviors they encounter.

Comparison of Theoretical Perspectives and Selection of the Primary Lens

The three theories provide complementary perspectives for understanding Instagram's impact on language processing and psychological development. Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that language and meaning-making develop through social interaction and the use of cultural symbols. In the context of Instagram, this theory explains how users understand messages through text, emojis, images, and the context of digital communication.

Social Comparison Theory focuses on how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others, particularly when viewing representations of other people's lives on social media. Social Cognitive Theory, meanwhile, explains how individuals learn language, behavior, and interaction patterns by observing other users.

This study positions Sociocultural Theory as its primary perspective because its focus extends beyond Instagram's psychological effects to examine how digital communication practices relate to language comprehension and the construction of social meaning. Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory serve as supporting perspectives to deepen the interpretation of identity construction, self-evaluation, and behavioral learning in digital environments.

This selection is based on the understanding that language and psychological development do not occur independently of social context. When using Instagram, individuals interact with symbols, texts, images, and social responses that may influence both how they understand messages and how they perceive themselves. Therefore, the three perspectives are used complementarily to understand the relationship among language practices, social experiences, and the psychological development of Instagram users.

Research Conceptual Framework

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains that human behavior develops through reciprocal interactions among personal factors, behavior, and the environment. One of the theory's key concepts is observational learning, the process through which individuals learn behaviors by observing the actions and experiences of others.

At the same time, these changes in language practices reveal a tension between linguistic creativity and interpretive accuracy. Digital language provides greater flexibility for expression, but the meanings conveyed may not be understood uniformly by all users.

Based on the thematic analysis of scholarly literature concerning Instagram use, language processing, and psychological development, three interrelated main themes were identified. These themes include the transformation of language practices in digital communication, identity construction and self-evaluation through social interaction, and the complex relationship between Instagram use and psychological well-being. The findings indicate that Instagram is not merely a communication medium but also a social space in which users construct meaning, express their identities, and respond to various forms of social influence.

For example, a user may feel motivated after seeing a friend's achievements but may experience self-doubt in another situation when comparing their appearance or lifestyle with content perceived as ideal. Such experiences illustrate that the psychological meanings of social media are shaped by subjective interpretation and social context.

From a qualitative perspective, this theory helps researchers understand that users' psychological experiences are associated not only with the frequency of Instagram use but also

with how they interpret other people's posts and assign meaning to their own positions within the social environment.

In psychological terms, this observational process may be associated with the development of self-perception, beliefs about personal abilities, and the ways individuals respond to their social environments. Responses such as likes, comments, and other forms of interaction may also become part of social experiences that influence users' behavior.

In the context of Instagram, receiving positive comments may provide an experience of social acceptance. Conversely, receiving little response or being exposed to content that encourages social comparison may be associated with less favorable emotional experiences.

In this context, digital identity does not necessarily reflect the entirety of an individual's personal experiences. Users may display achievements, activities, appearance, or particular experiences while concealing aspects of their lives that they consider inconsistent with the image they wish to construct.

In this study, Social Cognitive Theory helps explain how users learn communication patterns and social behaviors by observing Instagram content. However, this process is not understood as automatic imitation. Users retain the ability to select, interpret, accept, or reject the behaviors they encounter.

Instagram provides users with opportunities to view other people's academic achievements, physical appearances, lifestyles, and social activities. However, the content displayed often represents selected and curated aspects of people's lives. This may influence how users understand social standards and evaluate themselves.

Instagram provides various behavioral models that users can observe, ranging from communication styles and identity presentation to emotional expression and social relationship-building. Users may adopt popular terms, communication styles, or particular forms of expression after observing their use by peers, content creators, or public figures.

Nevertheless, these influences do not occur uniformly. Instagram may serve as a source of social support for some users, while becoming a source of psychological pressure for others. This difference highlights the importance of understanding the context of use and the meanings individuals assign to their digital experiences.

On Instagram, communication takes place through a combination of text, images, emojis, videos, and digital symbols. Users do not always understand messages based solely on their literal meanings; they also consider context, social relationships, and shared cultural knowledge. For example, a particular emoji used in a comment may convey humor, sarcasm, support, or different emotions depending on the communication situation.

Overall, the literature findings indicate that Instagram provides ambivalent experiences. The platform creates opportunities for linguistic creativity, identity expression, and social connection, while also presenting challenges related to message interpretation, self-evaluation, and social pressure. This complexity demonstrates that Instagram's impact needs to be understood through the relationship among communication practices, social context, and users' psychological experiences.

Papageorgiou et al. (2022) demonstrated the relevance of social media experiences to how adolescent girls interpret appearance and body image. Meanwhile, Pedalino and Camerini (2022) examined the role of social comparison with peers and influencers in relation to body dissatisfaction among young female users.

Research by Pedalino and Camerini (2022), published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, demonstrates the relevance of social comparison to body dissatisfaction among young female Instagram users. Meanwhile, Papageorgiou et al. (2022), published in *BMC Women's Health*, explored adolescent girls' experiences of interpreting social media content and its relationship with body image.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study entitled "The Impact of Instagram on Language Processing and Psychological Development" employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method. This approach was selected because the study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the relationship between Instagram use, language processing, and psychological development through an examination of theories and previous research findings. A literature review enables researchers to interpret various scholarly findings without conducting interviews or direct observations of participants.

The research data consist of scholarly journal articles, academic books, and research publications relevant to Instagram use, psycholinguistics, digital communication, psychological development, self-identity, and social interaction. Sources were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, the credibility of their publishers, and the suitability of their content. Publications from 2021 to 2026 were prioritized, while foundational theories necessary to strengthen the study's conceptual framework were also considered.

This study does not involve human participants directly. Its unit of analysis consists of scholarly documents addressing experiences and phenomena related to Instagram use, particularly among adolescents and young adults. The research focuses on digital

communication environments in both social and educational contexts, with particular attention to informal language, abbreviations, emojis, multimodal communication, identity construction, social comparison, and psychological well-being.

Data were collected through documentation and literature searches using academic sources such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, and other reputable scholarly journals. The data collection process involved identifying keywords such as Instagram use, language processing, digital communication, psychological development, social comparison, and online identity. Publications were then selected based on their titles, abstracts, content relevance, and availability of methodological information. Sources meeting the criteria were recorded in a literature matrix containing publication details, research objectives, methods, main findings, and their relevance to the research focus.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, adapting the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke. The analytical process involved repeatedly reading and familiarizing oneself with the literature, identifying relevant information, conducting initial coding, grouping codes according to shared meanings, developing themes, and interpreting relationships among the themes. The main themes focused on three areas: language processing in Instagram communication, users' psychological development, and the relationship between language practices, identity construction, and social experiences. The analysis was conducted manually using a categorization table to organize findings and compare perspectives across sources.

Data trustworthiness was maintained through the credibility of the sources, comparison of findings across publications, and consistency in the literature selection and analysis processes. Transferability was supported by describing the context and characteristics of the sources analyzed. Dependability was maintained by documenting the procedures for searching, selecting, and coding the data, while confirmability was addressed by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the literature rather than the researcher's personal assumptions. Since this study does not involve direct participants, informed consent and interview permissions were not required. Nevertheless, academic ethics were upheld through accurate citation, respect for copyright, and objective presentation of findings without altering the meanings of the original sources.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Senekal et al. (2023) identified connections between social media use and various aspects of adolescent psychosocial development, including identity, self-image, and psychological well-being. Meanwhile, Valkenburg et al. (2022) demonstrated that the relationship between

social media use and adolescent mental health is not straightforward, as users' experiences may differ according to individual characteristics and forms of engagement with social media.

Since this study adopts a qualitative literature-based approach, the conceptual framework is applied to interpret findings from scholarly literature rather than to measure relationships among variables or claim direct experiences of participants. Accordingly, the study seeks to understand Instagram as a communication space where linguistic and psychological processes intersect, while examining how these processes are related within users' social experiences..

Social Comparison Theory focuses on how individuals evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others, particularly when viewing representations of other people's lives on social media. Social Cognitive Theory, meanwhile, explains how individuals learn language, behavior, and interaction patterns by observing other users.

Sociocultural Theory, rooted in the ideas of Lev Vygotsky, views cognitive and language development as processes shaped through social interaction and the use of cultural tools. From this perspective, language is not merely a means of conveying information; it is also a resource that helps individuals organize their thoughts, construct understanding, and participate in social life.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the view that Instagram is a digital social environment where language practices, interpersonal interactions, and psychological experiences intersect. Language use in captions, comments, emojis, abbreviations, and multimodal communication is understood as a social practice involving interpretation and the negotiation of meaning.

The first theme indicates that Instagram brings changes to the ways users produce, understand, and interpret language. Communication on this platform relies not only on written text but also on images, emojis, videos, abbreviations, and digital symbols. In such situations, message comprehension often depends on the communication context and users' shared social knowledge.

The second theme concerns how Instagram serves as a space for users to construct and present their identities. Through photo posts, stories, reels, and interactions with other users, individuals can select which aspects of their lives they wish to make visible to the public.

The third theme indicates that the relationship between Instagram use and psychological development is complex. The platform provides opportunities to build social relationships, access information, express emotions, and find communities with similar experiences. However, digital interaction may also be associated with social pressure, self-comparison, and concerns about other people's judgments.

The three preceding themes demonstrate that language processing and psychological development cannot be understood as entirely separate processes. Language serves as a means through which users express identity, build social relationships, and respond to emotional experiences on Instagram.

The three theories provide complementary perspectives for understanding Instagram's impact on language processing and psychological development. Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that language and meaning-making develop through social interaction and the use of cultural symbols. In the context of Instagram, this theory explains how users understand messages through text, emojis, images, and the context of digital communication.

The use of informal language, brief expressions, and combinations of Indonesian and English has become part of digital communication practices. These forms of communication allow users to convey messages concisely and adapt their language styles to their social environments. However, expressions that depend heavily on context may also lead to different interpretations, particularly when a message is read without understanding the relationship between the sender and the recipient.

These findings are consistent with Sociocultural Theory, which views language as a tool for constructing meaning through social interaction. In the context of Instagram, users do not merely read words; they also interpret symbols, visual expressions, and communicative intentions according to particular situations.

These findings reinforce the relevance of Sociocultural Theory as the primary perspective of this study. Instagram can be understood as a digital social environment that mediates the relationship among language, cognitive processes, and psychological experiences. Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, meanwhile, help explain how self-evaluation and social learning occur within this environment.

This perspective is relevant to the present study because it helps explain how digital communication experiences relate to language comprehension, the interpretation of symbols, and the development of social relationships.

This phenomenon indicates that language processing on social media involves social and contextual interpretation. Users also adjust their word choices, language styles, and use of informal expressions according to their audiences and communicative purposes. Instagram can therefore be understood as a social environment that provides space for the development of language practices and the construction of meaning.

This phenomenon reveals a paradox in digital identity construction. Instagram provides users with the freedom to express themselves while simultaneously creating a space for social evaluation through likes, comments, and audience responses. Thus, digital identity develops through a dynamic relationship between the desire for self-presentation and the need for social acceptance.

This selection is based on the understanding that language and psychological development do not occur independently of social context. When using Instagram, individuals interact with symbols, texts, images, and social responses that may influence both how they understand messages and how they perceive themselves. Therefore, the three perspectives are used complementarily to understand the relationship among language practices, social experiences, and the psychological development of Instagram users.

This study draws on three main perspectives: Sociocultural Theory, Social Comparison Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory. These theories were selected because they offer different yet complementary perspectives for understanding how Instagram communication relates to cognitive processes, identity construction, and users' psychological experiences.

This study positions Sociocultural Theory as its primary perspective because its focus extends beyond Instagram's psychological effects to examine how digital communication practices relate to language comprehension and the construction of social meaning. Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory serve as supporting perspectives to deepen the interpretation of identity construction, self-evaluation, and behavioral learning in digital environments.

Through a systematic review published in the *South African Journal of Psychology*, Senekal et al. (2023) examined the relationship between social media and adolescent psychosocial development, including identity, self-image, and psychological well-being.

Through Social Cognitive Theory, these phenomena can be understood as part of the reciprocal relationship among individuals, behavior, and the digital social environment. Users observe other people's behavior, learn communication patterns, and adjust their self-expression based on their interaction experiences.

Through Sociocultural Theory, the study views language processing as a process mediated by social interaction and digital symbols. Social Comparison Theory is then used to examine how representations of other people's lives may relate to users' self-evaluation and emotional experiences. Social Cognitive Theory complements the analysis by explaining how observing other users' content and behavior may be associated with language learning and the development of social behavior.

Through the perspective of Social Comparison Theory, these findings suggest that representations of other people's lives may become a basis for individuals' self-evaluation. Posts displaying success, attractive appearances, or particular lifestyles may be interpreted as sources of inspiration, but in other situations, they may also give rise to feelings of inadequacy.

Word choices, emoji use, communication styles, and responses to comments may reflect how individuals present themselves and understand their social positions. At the same time, experiences of support, acceptance, or social judgment may influence how users communicate in subsequent interactions.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Instagram has a complex relationship with language processing and psychological development. Three main findings emerged: the transformation of language practices in digital communication, identity construction through self-presentation and social comparison, and the ambivalent relationship between Instagram engagement and psychological well-being. These findings demonstrate that Instagram should not be understood merely as a communication medium but as a digital social environment that also shapes how individuals interpret messages, present their identities, and make sense of their social experiences.

Instagram and the Transformation of Language Processing

The findings concerning the transformation of language practices indicate that Instagram communication involves meaning-making processes that extend beyond simply understanding written words. The use of emojis, abbreviations, informal language, images, and videos demonstrates that users rely on various sources of information to comprehend messages. In such situations, meaning is not always directly embedded in linguistic forms but is constructed through context, social relationships, and users' shared cultural knowledge.

These findings can be explained through Sociocultural Theory, which views language as a mediating tool in cognitive development and social interaction. Within the Instagram environment, digital symbols and visual expressions function as cultural tools that help users convey and interpret meaning. Emojis, for example, may reinforce emotional expression or replace longer verbal explanations. However, the meanings of these symbols remain dependent on context and shared understanding.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, this phenomenon indicates that language processing in digital communication is contextual and multimodal. Users need to integrate verbal and visual information to understand communicative intentions. This broadens the understanding of language practices because communication does not occur solely through linguistic structures but also through combinations of different forms of representation.

These findings also reveal a tension between communication efficiency and interpretive accuracy. Brief and informal language may facilitate interaction but can potentially create ambiguity when context is not mutually understood. Therefore, changes in digital language should not automatically be regarded as a decline in language quality. Instead, they can be understood as forms of linguistic adaptation to communicative needs and the characteristics of digital environments.

Digital Self-Presentation and the Construction of Identity

The second finding indicates that Instagram provides a space for users to construct and negotiate their identities through self-representation. Users have the freedom to select photographs, write captions, share activities, and determine which aspects of their lives they wish to display. However, this freedom operates within an environment that also involves social evaluation through likes, comments, follower counts, and audience responses.

This phenomenon can be understood through Social Comparison Theory, which explains individuals' tendency to evaluate themselves by comparing their personal circumstances with those of others. On Instagram, social comparison may occur through exposure to other users' representations of appearance, achievements, and lifestyles. Pedalino and Camerini (2022) demonstrated the relevance of social comparison to body dissatisfaction among young female users. Meanwhile, Papageorgiou et al. (2022) highlighted the importance of understanding adolescent girls' experiences of interpreting social media content and its relationship with body image.

These findings strengthen the understanding that digital identity is not formed entirely at the individual level. Identity develops through the relationship between how individuals present themselves and how their representations are received or interpreted by their social environments. Thus, Instagram can function as both a space for self-expression and a space for self-evaluation.

However, this relationship does not always produce negative experiences. Representations of other people's lives may also provide inspiration, motivation, and opportunities to find communities with similar interests or experiences. This means that social comparison should be understood as a process dependent on context and individual interpretation rather than as a mechanism that always produces the same psychological effects.

In terms of psychological development, this finding indicates that digital identity is a process of negotiation among self-expression, social acceptance, and perceptions of standards emerging within digital environments.

The Ambivalent Relationship Between Instagram and Psychological Development

The third finding indicates that the relationship between Instagram and psychological development is ambivalent. On the one hand, Instagram provides opportunities to build social relationships, obtain emotional support, express oneself, and develop a sense of connectedness. On the other hand, the platform may create social pressure, self-comparison, and concerns about the judgments of others.

This finding is consistent with Senekal et al. (2023), who examined the relationship between social media and adolescent psychosocial development, including identity, self-image, and psychological well-being. Valkenburg et al. (2022) also emphasized that the relationship between social media use and adolescent mental health cannot be explained through a single pattern that applies to all users.

Through Social Cognitive Theory, this relationship can be understood as a reciprocal interaction among individuals, behavior, and the social environment. Users observe other people's behavior, learn communication patterns, and adjust their actions based on their experiences and the responses they receive. On Instagram, this process may be reflected in the use of popular terms, adjustments in communication styles, and the ways users present their identities.

Nevertheless, the influence of the digital environment is not deterministic. Individuals retain the ability to interpret, select, and respond to content based on their respective experiences and social circumstances. Therefore, psychological development cannot be adequately explained solely through the intensity of Instagram use; it is also necessary to consider how users engage with the platform and the meanings they assign to those interactions.

Conceptually, this finding reinforces the view that Instagram is a social space that presents opportunities and challenges simultaneously. Users' experiences develop through the relationship among platform characteristics, social environments, and individual interpretation.

The Interconnection Between Language Processing and Psychological Experiences

One important contribution of this study is its understanding that language processing and psychological development are interconnected within digital communication practices.

Language is used not only to convey information but also as a means of presenting identity, building social closeness, and expressing emotional experiences.

From the perspective of Sociocultural Theory, language comprehension occurs through interaction with the social environment and cultural symbols. When users write comments, respond to posts, or use emojis, they do not merely produce messages; they also participate in the construction of social meaning.

Meanwhile, Social Comparison Theory helps explain how interactions with representations of other people's lives may be associated with self-evaluation. Social Cognitive Theory complements this understanding by demonstrating how observation and social experiences may relate to behavioral learning and communication adjustments.

Together, these three perspectives demonstrate that language practices on Instagram cannot be separated from users' psychological experiences. Word choices, communication styles, and responses to audiences occur within an environment that also involves needs for acceptance, self-expression, and social connectedness.

Thus, this study broadens the understanding of Instagram by positioning language as part of social and psychological experience rather than merely as an independent communication tool.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of Sociocultural Theory for understanding digital communication as a process of meaning-making mediated by language, symbols, and social interaction. The use of Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory as supporting perspectives broadens the analysis by connecting communication practices with identity construction, self-evaluation, and social learning.

This study also proposes that Instagram's impact should not be understood solely through positive or negative categories. Users' experiences are more appropriately interpreted as dynamic processes in which opportunities for self-expression and social connection may occur alongside pressure to conform to social expectations.

In educational contexts, these findings have implications for the development of digital literacy and language awareness. Users need to understand that digital communication involves context, interpretation, and social responsibility. In addition, understanding social comparison and self-presentation may help educators develop discussions concerning digital identity, self-image, and reflective social media use.

This study has limitations because it employs a literature review and does not involve direct interviews with Instagram users. Consequently, the discussion of psychological experiences and language practices is based on interpretations of previous research findings rather than the direct experiences of participants in a specific local context. Future research could employ in-depth interviews or a phenomenological approach to understand how users from different social and cultural backgrounds interpret their communication experiences and personal development through Instagram.

Overall, this discussion emphasizes that Instagram is a digital social space where linguistic processes, identity construction, and psychological experiences intersect. This relationship highlights the importance of understanding digital communication contextually, with attention to how individuals construct meaning, negotiate identity, and respond to their social environments.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Instagram is a digital communication space where language processing, identity construction, and psychological development intersect. Based on the literature synthesis, three main patterns were identified: the transformation of language practices through multimodal communication, identity construction through self-presentation and social comparison, and the ambivalent relationship between Instagram use and psychological well-being. These findings indicate that Instagram is associated not only with how individuals communicate but also with how they understand messages, evaluate themselves, and build social relationships.

Conceptually, this study emphasizes the relevance of Sociocultural Theory for understanding digital communication as a process of meaning-making mediated by language, symbols, and social interaction. Social Comparison Theory and Social Cognitive Theory complement this understanding by explaining identity construction, self-evaluation, and behavioral learning in digital environments. Thus, Instagram's impact cannot be simplified as exclusively positive or negative; rather, it needs to be understood in relation to the context of use and individuals' social experiences.

These findings have practical implications for education and digital literacy development. Educators can integrate learning about multimodal communication, contextual language use, and awareness of digital identity into educational activities. In addition, strengthening digital literacy should include the ability to critically evaluate content, understand social comparison, and establish healthy online interactions. For policymakers and educational program developers, the findings may inform the design of social media education that considers both users' linguistic practices and psychological well-being.

This study has limitations because it employs a qualitative literature-based approach without direct interviews or observations. Therefore, the findings represent a synthesis of previous research and do not fully capture the experiences of Instagram users within specific

social and cultural contexts, particularly in Indonesia. Differences in age, cultural background, language proficiency, and platform usage patterns also could not be explored in depth.

Future research is encouraged to adopt phenomenological or case study approaches through in-depth interviews and observations of Instagram users from diverse social backgrounds. Further studies may also examine more closely the relationships among multimodal communication, pragmatic competence development, digital identity construction, and psychological well-being. By expanding the research context and methods, understanding of Instagram can become more context-sensitive while contributing to the fields of linguistics, education, and digital literacy in response to changes in contemporary communication.

REFERENCE

- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chua, T. H. H., & Chang, L. (2016). Follow me and like my beautiful selfies: Singapore teenage girls' engagement in self-presentation and peer comparison on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 190–197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.09.011>
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends”: Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
- Fardouly, J., Diedrichs, P. C., Vartanian, L. R., & Halliwell, E. (2015). Social comparisons on social media: The impact of Facebook on young women's body image concerns and mood. *Body Image*, 13, 38–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2014.12.002>
- Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
- Humaidi, I., et al. (2026). Pemikiran pendidikan Ibnu Sina dan relevansinya sekarang. *Al-Furqan: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, dan Budaya*, 5(2). <https://scirepid.com/articles/105707>
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge.
- Papageorgiou, A., Fisher, C., & Cross, D. (2022). “Why don't I look like her?” How adolescent girls view social media and its connection to body image. *BMC Women's Health*, 22, Article 261. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-022-01845-4>
- Pedalino, F., & Camerini, A.-L. (2022). Instagram use and body dissatisfaction: The mediating role of upward social comparison with peers and influencers among young females. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(3), Article 1543. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031543>

- Rahmah, H., et al. (2026). Integrasi budaya dan pengetahuan: Tradisi bedong terhadap pertumbuhan fisik dan perkembangan psikologis pada bayi. *Jurnal Psikososial dan Pendidikan (Psikosospen)*, 2(2). <https://scirepid.com/articles/106261>
- Senekal, J. S., Groenewald, G. R., Wolfaardt, L., Jansen, C., & Williams, K. (2023). Social media and adolescent psychosocial development: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 53(2), 157–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00812463221119302>
- Valkenburg, P. M., Meier, A., & Beyens, I. (2022). Social media use and its impact on adolescent mental health: An umbrella review of the evidence. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 44, 58–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.08.017>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Widiarti, J. A., & Prima, E. (2026). Analisis pengaruh keharmonisan keluarga terhadap kemampuan manajemen emosional dan prestasi belajar peserta didik. *Jurnal Psikososial dan Pendidikan (Psikosospen)*, 2(2). <https://scirepid.com/articles/106303>