

Between Efficiency and Authenticity: Generation Z Students Negotiating Artificial Intelligence in Everyday Social Media Practices

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

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The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into digital platforms has transformed the way social media content is produced and managed. For Generation Z, particularly university students, use of AI has become part of everyday communication practices that not only offer efficiency but also raise questions about authenticity and ethics in self-representation. This study aims to analyze how Generation Z students negotiate the use of AI in social media practices, particularly in the context of self-presentation. This research employs an interpretive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews with seven communication studies students who actively use social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. Results show that students actively use technology, including AI tools such as ChatGPT and editing applications like CapCut and Canva, in the content production process. However, AI is not used comprehensively; rather, it is selective, mainly to assist with idea development and caption writing. Students still maintain control over personal aspects to preserve the authenticity of their identities. The main findings indicate a negotiation between efficiency and authenticity in self-presentation practices. Although AI provides convenience in content production, students set boundaries when using technology to maintain authenticity and credibility with their audience. Additionally, these practices are influenced by ethical considerations, including the values of honesty (*sidq*), intention (*niyyah*), and caution against excessive self-display (*riya'*) on social media. This study contributes to the field of digital communication by demonstrating that the use of AI in social media practices is not deterministic but rather a process of negotiation involving technological, social, and ethical dimensions. These findings also enrich the literature by offering a contextual perspective on Generation Z in Indonesia, helping to understand the dynamics of self-presentation in the era of Artificial Intelligence.

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the digital ecosystem has emerged as a focal point in contemporary communication scholarship. The integration of AI-driven technologies into social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok has enabled users to produce, edit, and disseminate content with unprecedented efficiency and optimization. Notwithstanding these affordances, such developments simultaneously give rise to critical concerns regarding the

implications of AI for authenticity and the construction of identity in digital communication practices. In this regard, self-representation can no longer be understood as an exclusively individual-driven process; rather, it is increasingly shaped by technological mediation, thereby problematizing the boundary between authentic self-expression and algorithmically mediated construction.

In the context of this study, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is conceptualized as a mediating agent in self-presentation practices on social media, materialized through a range of embedded platform features. These include algorithmic recommendation systems, visual augmentation tools such as filters and effects, and content production affordances such as text generators and automated captioning systems. The integration of these AI-driven functionalities extends beyond facilitating content production; it actively structures the ways in which individuals curate, negotiate, and perform their identities within digitally mediated environments.

A number of studies in recent years have shown that AI, particularly in the form of generative AI such as ChatGPT, has changed the way individuals produce content and communicate in the digital space by offering efficiency, automation, and creative support (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Feuerriegel et al., 2024). Other studies highlight that algorithmic systems in social media encourage users to optimize content performance through specific strategies, including visual editing, narrative selection, and adaptation to audience preferences (Bucher, 2023; Sundar, 2023). In this context, social media practices are increasingly understood as curated and strategic rather than spontaneous. However, most of these studies focus on technological aspects or structural impacts and tend to use quantitative approaches that do not deeply explore users' subjective experiences in managing their self-representation.

This phenomenon becomes even more significant when considered alongside Generation Z, a group that is highly active on social media. Based on preliminary research involving seven female university students in Palembang, they regularly upload their daily activities to social media platforms and use applications such as CapCut and Canva, which have integrated various AI-based features to support digital content production and curation. This practice indicates that social media has become a space of planned social performance, where individuals consciously manage how they wish to be perceived by their audience. This perspective aligns with Erving Goffman's view of social interaction as a dramaturgical process, in which individuals actively engage in impression management through self-presentation to an audience. In the context of social media, this is reflected in how users construct and display their identities through published content as a form of front stage, where individuals strategically shape the image, they want others to perceive, including through the use of digital technology and AI-based features that support content curation and presentation.

Nevertheless, the literature still lacks studies that specifically examine how users, particularly Generation Z students, negotiate the use of AI in relation to the authenticity of self-representation. Previous research has not deeply explored the reflective processes through which users establish ethical and symbolic boundaries in their use of technology. Additionally, local contexts, such as Indonesia, have not been widely studied, creating an opportunity to provide a more contextually grounded understanding of AI-mediated digital communication practices.

In response to this gap, this study offers an approach that positions users as active agents who manage their self-presentation in a digital environment increasingly influenced by AI. Using a self-presentation perspective, this research seeks to understand how individuals not only utilize technology for efficiency but also negotiate its use to maintain authenticity, credibility, and identity. This approach enriches digital communication studies by highlighting the interaction between humans and technology in everyday self-representation practices. Furthermore, discussions of authenticity and ethics in social media practices cannot be separated from the values and norms that underlie users. In the Indonesian context, with its strong religious background, self-representation practices in digital spaces may also be influenced by ethical values, including Islamic ones. Concepts such as honesty (*sidq*), intention (*niyyah*), and the avoidance of excessive self-display (*riya'*) are relevant in understanding how individuals set boundaries in using technology, including AI, in shaping their self-image before an audience. Thus, the analysis of self-presentation practices extends beyond technological and communicative aspects to include ethical dimensions of a cultural and religious nature.

The objective of this study is to examine how Generation Z students in Palembang understand and negotiate the use of AI in their social media practices, and how they manage the boundary between technological efficiency and authenticity in self-representation. This study employs an interpretive, qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews to explore informants' subjective experiences of AI use in everyday digital life.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm to understand how Generation Z students negotiate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their everyday social media practices, particularly in the context of self-presentation in digital spaces.

Research Design

The research design used in this study is an exploratory qualitative study. This research began with a preliminary study involving seven university students in Palembang who are active social media users to identify initial patterns of social media use, including posting intensity and content editing practices. The initial findings indicate that users actively upload daily content and engage in visual curation before publication. The preliminary study served as the foundation for designing the main research, particularly in deepening the exploration of technology use, including AI-assisted tools, in content production practices and self-representation on social media.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of seven active university students in Palembang who fall within the Generation Z category (born between 2002 and 2004). The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: actively using social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok; regularly uploading personal content; and utilizing digital technology in the content production process prior to publication. All participants were known to use digital technology before uploading content, although the level and form of usage varied. Some informants used visual editing applications such as CapCut and Canva, while others also utilized generative AI such as ChatGPT to assist in creating captions or generating content ideas. Nevertheless, the majority of informants predominantly used technology for visual editing purposes rather than AI-based text production.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method was employed to explore the informants' experiences, perceptions, and subjective practices in using technology, including AI, in their social media activities. The interview guide covered several key aspects, namely: social media usage habits and posting frequency; the process of content production and editing before publication; the use of digital applications and AI-based features in content creation; perceptions of authenticity in social media content; and strategies for building and managing self-image in front of an audience. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at different times and locations, recorded with the informants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

This study employs the interactive data analysis model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting, focusing on, and simplifying data obtained from interviews and observations. The data are then presented in descriptive narratives to facilitate understanding of the phenomena under study. The final stage is conclusion drawing, which is conducted continuously throughout the research process to identify meanings and patterns from the collected data. The analysis focuses on how informants perform impression management in the context of the front stage, namely through content published on social media as a form of self-representation intended for an audience. In addition, the analysis also considers variations in the use of technology, both as a visual aid and as a source of text production, in supporting the self-presentation process.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility and validity of the data, this study applies several strategies, namely: triangulation among informants to compare patterns and differences in experiences, member checking by seeking informants' confirmation of data interpretation, and systematic documentation of the research process to maintain analytical transparency.

3. Result and Discussion

Self-Presentation as a Planned Practice Influenced by Academic Background

All informants are communication studies students who actively use social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. They regularly publish content on a daily basis; however, this is not done spontaneously.

One informant stated:

"I upload almost every day, but not randomly. I usually think it through first—whether it's appropriate or not, whether it looks good or not, and whether people will like it or not." (I3)

Another informant also emphasized:

"Because I'm a communication student, I feel that content must have value; it can't just be posted carelessly." (I1)

These findings indicate that self-presentation practices are planned and reflective processes. The academic background of the informants as communication students influences how they perceive social media as a strategic space. From the perspective of Erving Goffman, this reflects front stage practices, where individuals consciously manage their appearance to create certain impressions in front of an audience. Thus, digital identity does not emerge spontaneously but is constructed through careful consideration.

AI as a Creative Partner in Digital Content Production

Some informants utilize AI, particularly ChatGPT, as a supporting tool in the content production process, especially for generating ideas and composing captions. However, the majority of informants still predominantly use visual editing applications such as CapCut and Canva.

One informant explained:

"Sometimes I use ChatGPT to find caption ideas, so they are more engaging and not monotonous." (I2)

Another informant added:

"I consider ChatGPT as more of a discussion partner, helping me think when I have no ideas." (I5)

The use of AI in this context indicates that technology does not replace the role of individuals but rather acts as a partner in the creative process. Within the framework of self-presentation, the use of AI can be understood as part of an impression management strategy, where individuals seek to enhance the quality and appeal of their content. This also shows that users are aware of social media algorithm mechanisms, prompting them to utilize AI to optimize content performance without fully relinquishing control to technology.

Audience and Algorithmic Logic in Self-Presentation Practices

Informants indicate that they consider audience responses and the potential performance of their content in every post.

One informant stated:

"If possible, I want my content to get on the FYP, so sometimes I also think about content that is currently trending." (I4)

In addition, there are informants who have utilized social media for economic purposes:

“I have activated affiliate features on TikTok, so the content I create is also for business activities.” (I7)

These findings show that self-presentation practices are not only oriented toward self-expression but also have strategic and economic dimensions. From Erving Goffman’s perspective, the front stage is not merely a symbolic space but also a performative space directed toward achieving certain goals, including visibility and profit. This indicates a shift from mere self-representation toward instrumentalized self-representation.

Negosiasi Keaslian dan Batas Etis dalam Penggunaan AI

Although they use technology, informants demonstrate caution in AI use, particularly in aspects related to personal expression.

One informant stated:

“I prefer to write my own captions so that they feel more ‘like me’.” (I6)

Another informant added:

“I’m afraid that if everything uses AI, it won’t feel authentic, like it’s not really myself.” (I2)

These findings indicate a negotiation between efficiency and authenticity in self-presentation practices. Informants attempt to maintain boundaries in their use of technology to avoid diminishing the authenticity of their identities.

In the context of Islamic ethics, this practice can be associated with the concept of *sidq* (honesty), where individuals are expected to present themselves authentically and not misleadingly. Furthermore, excessive use of technology to construct a certain image may approach *riya*, which refers to displaying oneself excessively to gain social recognition. On the other hand, the use of AI for productive purposes, such as improving content quality or supporting business activities, can be understood within the framework of *niyyah* (intention), which emphasizes the importance of purpose in every action.

Thus, the use of AI in social media practices is negotiated not only technologically but also ethically, as individuals strive to balance the demands of digital performance with the moral values they uphold.

Results

Karakteristik Partisipan dan Pola Penggunaan Media Sosial

All participants in this study consisted of seven university students with a background in communication studies and who fall within the Generation Z category. All informants actively use social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, with a relatively high posting frequency.

Most informants upload content regularly every day, with an average frequency of two (2) posts per day. However, all informants emphasized that these posting activities are not carried out spontaneously but require some consideration.

“I upload almost every day, but not randomly. I usually think it through first...” (I3)

Table 1. Informant Characteristics

Informant	Platform	Intensity	Type of Content
I1	Instagram, TikTok	3x/hari	Daily life, self-image
I2	Instagram	2x/hari	Self-image, aesthetic

Informant	Platform	Intensity	Type of Content
I3	TikTok	3x/hari	Trend, entertainment
I4	Instagram	2x/hari	Self-image, aesthetic
I5	TikTok	2x/hari	Trend, daily life
I6	Instagram	2x/hari	Self-image
I7	TikTok	3x/hari	Komersial (afiliasi), lifestyle

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that all informants exhibit a high level of activity in using social media, with posting frequencies ranging from two to three times per day. This indicates that social media is not merely a means of communication but has become part of the informants' daily routines.

In terms of platforms, informants tend to use TikTok and Instagram as their primary media, indicating a preference for visual and audiovisual-based platforms. In addition, the types of content produced show variation, ranging from daily life and self-image to trend-based and commercial content.

The dominance of self-image and daily life content suggests that social media is used as a space to present personal identity and activities. Meanwhile, the presence of trend-based and commercial content suggests that informants also consider popularity and economic potential in their social media activities. Overall, this pattern demonstrates that the informants' social media practices are active, purposeful, and oriented toward managing diverse content in accordance with both personal and strategic objectives.

Use of Technology and AI in Content Production

All informants use digital technology in the content production process prior to publication. This use primarily involves visual editing applications such as CapCut and Canva. In addition, some informants also utilize generative AI such as ChatGPT, particularly to assist in creating captions and developing content ideas.

"Sometimes I use ChatGPT to look for ideas for captions..." (I2)

"I consider ChatGPT like a discussion partner..." (I5)

However, the majority of informants predominantly use technology for visual editing purposes rather than text-based AI.

Table 2. Use of Technology and AI by Informants

Informant	Editing Visual (CapCut/Canva)	AICaption (ChatGPT)	Purpose of Use
I1	Yes	No	Enhancing the visual quality and aesthetics of content
I2	Yes	Yes	Assisting with ideas and making captions more engaging
I3	Yes	No	Editing content to make it more suitable for publication
I4	Yes	No	Adjusting appearance to match trends and audience preferences

Informant	Editing Visual (CapCut/Canva)	AICaption (ChatGPT)	Purpose of Use
I5	Yes	Yes	As a “discussion partner” for developing content ideas
I6	Yes	No	Maintaining visual appeal while preserving authenticity
I7	Yes	No	Supporting commercial and affiliate content

According to Table 2, all informants use visual editing technology during content production. However, the use of generative AI such as ChatGPT is not evenly distributed among informants. Only some utilize it, mainly for idea development and caption writing. These findings indicate that the use of AI in social media practices remains selective and functions more as a supporting tool rather than a replacement for individual creative processes.

Content Orientation and Purpose of Social Media Use

The results show that informants not only upload content for self-expression but also consider audience responses and content performance.

“If possible, I want my content to get on the FYP, so sometimes I also think about content that is currently trending.” (I4)

In addition, it was found that one informant has utilized the affiliate feature on the TikTok platform as part of digital economic activities.

“I have activated affiliate features on TikTok...” (I7)

Perceptions of Authenticity in Content

Despite using technology, informants tend to maintain authenticity in the content they produce.

“I prefer to write my own captions so that they feel more ‘like me’.” (I6)

“I’m afraid that if everything uses AI, it won’t feel authentic, like it’s not really myself.” (I2)

This indicates that there are boundaries in the use of technology, particularly AI, in everyday social media practices.

Discussion

Self-Presentation sebagai Praktik Front Stage yang Terstrategi

Adjust their content to align with algorithmic logic and audience expectations. In addition, Sundar (2023) suggests that the affordances of digital technology encourage users to be more strategic in presenting themselves, particularly on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram and TikTok.

Furthermore, Dwivedi et al. (2023) emphasize that the development of AI in social media not only enhances the efficiency of content production but also reinforces self-curation practices. In this context, users are no longer merely communicating but also "designing" their digital identities. This is supported by Feuerriegel et al. (2024), who find that the use of AI in content production tends to encourage individuals to produce more structured and performance-optimized content.

However, the findings of this study reveal a more nuanced perspective. In contrast to some studies that emphasize technology's dominance in shaping user behavior, the results indicate that informants maintain reflective control over how they present themselves. This aligns with Cotter et al. (2022), who argue that social media users are not entirely subject to algorithms but can develop adaptive strategies to manage their visibility.

Additionally, research by Abidin (2022) shows that Generation Z has a high level of awareness regarding aesthetics and performativity on social media, leading them to curate content intensively before publication. This supports the findings of this study that a background in communication studies influences informants' level of awareness and skills in managing content.

On the other hand, Kaye et al. (2023) highlight that self-presentation practices on social media often exist in tension between authenticity and performativity. This is relevant to the present study, where informants demonstrate efforts to maintain authenticity despite strategically curating their content.

Thus, this study not only confirms previous findings on the strategic nature of self-presentation on social media but also makes a new contribution by showing that a combination of academic background, awareness of algorithmic dynamics, and individual reflection on authenticity influences these practices. In this context, self-presentation is not merely a performative practice but also a process of negotiation involving cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions.

AI sebagai Perluasan Strategi Impression Management

The findings of this study indicate that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), particularly ChatGPT, by informants is not perceived as a replacement for creativity, but rather as a “discussion partner” in the content production process. AI is used to assist in idea development, caption writing, and enhancing content appeal, while remaining under the user’s control.

This phenomenon shows that AI has become part of the impression management strategy in self-presentation practices. From Erving Goffman’s perspective, the use of AI can be understood as an additional tool for managing the front stage, where individuals not only arrange their visual appearance but also optimize the narratives and messages they convey to the audience.

These findings are consistent with studies on Generative AI in User-Generated Content (Hua et al., 2024), which show that AI can accelerate the creative process by helping users generate ideas, structure content, and simplify production workflows. This confirms that AI plays a role in reducing creative barriers and increasing the efficiency of digital content production. Furthermore, research by Lee et al. (2023) indicates that generative AI can serve as a collaborative tool in the thinking process, particularly in learning and idea-generation contexts, where users remain the primary decision-makers. This aligns with the findings of this study, where informants describe AI as a “discussion partner” rather than a substitute for themselves.

However, the use of AI in content production also presents more complex dynamics. Recent experimental studies show that while AI can increase the volume and speed of content production, it may simultaneously reduce perceived content quality and authenticity in the eyes of the audience. This finding reinforces the results of this study, which show that informants use AI selectively and maintain control over personal aspects.

Further research in digital marketing indicates that AI-generated content can influence perceptions of authenticity. A 2024 study found that fully AI-generated content tends to be perceived as less authentic than content that involves human contributions. This explains why informants in this study prefer to use AI as a supporting tool rather than as the primary source of content production.

In addition, an industry report by Deloitte (2023) highlights that although AI significantly improves content production efficiency, users still face a dilemma between efficiency and authenticity, particularly in the context of social media, which heavily relies on trust and closeness with the audience. This finding strengthens the argument that the use of AI cannot be separated from social and emotional considerations in digital communication.

Other studies also suggest that AI in content creation not only brings benefits but also raises ethical and creative challenges, such as the potential loss of personal touch and the risk of content homogenization (Shaw & Devgun, 2025). In the context of this study, this is reflected in the informants’ caution in using AI, especially in aspects related to personal identity.

Thus, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that the use of AI in students' social media practices is not deterministic. AI does not automatically replace human creativity; instead, it becomes part of a strategy actively negotiated by users. Informants not only use AI to improve efficiency but also reflectively determine its boundaries to maintain control, authenticity, and relevance in their content.

The main contribution of this finding lies in the understanding that AI, in the context of self-presentation, is not merely a technological tool but also part of a social process that involves strategic, cognitive, and even ethical considerations in constructing digital identity in social media spaces.

Negotiation Between Efficiency and Authenticity in Self-Presentation Practices

The findings of this study indicate that informants do not fully accept the use of AI in social media practices; rather, they actively negotiate it, particularly regarding authenticity. Informants tend to limit AI use to technical tasks, such as idea generation or visual editing, while retaining control over personal expression, such as writing captions. This suggests that the efficiency offered by AI does not automatically displace the value of authenticity in self-presentation practices.

From Erving Goffman's perspective, this condition reflects the dynamics of front-stage management, in which individuals strive not only to present themselves optimally but also to maintain a consistent identity perceived as authentic by the audience. In other words, self-presentation in the AI era is not only a performative practice but also a reflective process involving value-based considerations.

These findings are consistent with research by Kaye et al. (2023), which shows that social media users experience tension between the need to appear appealing and the desire to remain authentic. The study emphasizes that authenticity remains an important value in digital interactions, even within highly curated environments.

Additionally, research by Audrezet et al. (2023) on influencers found that audiences tend to trust content perceived as authentic more than content that is overly curated or appears "too perfect." This reinforces the findings of this study, which show that informants limit their use of AI to avoid reducing the perceived authenticity of their identity.

Another study by Duffy et al. (2022) shows that social media users actively manage the boundary between personal and performative aspects in constructing digital identity. This is relevant to the findings of this study, which show that informants maintain personal elements as part of their identity despite using technology in content production.

Furthermore, Cotter (2022) highlights how social media algorithms encourage users to optimize content, yet users do not always fully comply with these logics. In this study, this is reflected in the informants' selective use of AI, despite their awareness of its benefits for improving content performance.

Research by Bucher (2023) also emphasizes that social media users possess awareness of "algorithmic imaginaries," or subjective understandings of how algorithms work. In this context, the informants demonstrate such awareness but still choose to maintain authenticity as part of their self-presentation strategy. Additionally, Sundar (2023) highlights that although technology provides various affordances for modifying content, users retain agency in determining how these technologies are used. This aligns with the findings of this study, which show that AI is not used fully but rather negotiated according to individual values and preferences.

Dwivedi et al. (2023) also note that generative AI brings high efficiency in content production while simultaneously raising concerns about authenticity and trust. This supports the findings of this study, which show a cautious approach to AI use, particularly in aspects related to personal identity. Moreover, Feuerriegel et al. (2024) found that AI use in digital communication can increase productivity but may reduce personal differentiation if used excessively. This explains why informants maintain personal elements as a distinguishing factor of their identity.

Marwick (2023) further shows that self-presentation practices on social media are always situated within a tension between performativity and authenticity, where users attempt to balance audience expectations and personal identity. This is highly relevant to the findings of this study, which demonstrate an ongoing negotiation process in the use of AI.

Finally, Abidin (2022) highlights that Generation Z is highly sensitive to audience perception and tends to avoid self-representations perceived as “inauthentic.” This reinforces the finding that informants actively limit the use of AI to maintain credibility and audience trust.

Thus, this study shows that the relationship between technological efficiency and authenticity is not oppositional but dynamically negotiated by users. AI does not automatically eliminate authenticity; instead, it creates a new space for reflection in determining how individuals wish to be represented in digital spaces.

The main contribution of this finding lies in demonstrating that self-presentation in the AI era is influenced not only by technological capabilities but also by users’ reflective awareness of authenticity, trust, and identity. In this context, Generation Z users are not merely consumers of technology but active agents who negotiate the boundaries between efficiency and authenticity in their digital communication practices.

Dimensi Etis dalam Self-Presentation: Perspektif Nilai Keislaman

The findings of this study indicate that the use of technology, particularly AI, in social media content production is negotiated not only technologically and strategically but also ethically. Informants implicitly demonstrate boundaries in their use of AI, especially in aspects related to personal expression, such as caption writing and self-representation. This reflects an awareness of maintaining authenticity and integrity in presenting themselves in digital spaces.

In this context, self-presentation practices can be understood not only through Erving Goffman’s perspective but also through ethical values, including those within an Islamic framework. The concept of *sidq* (honesty) is relevant to explaining how individuals strive to present themselves authentically and avoid misleading their audience. The findings show that informants tend to avoid fully relying on AI in constructing personal narratives, which can be understood as an effort to preserve honesty in self-representation.

These findings align with research on digital ethics that emphasizes transparency and authenticity in online communication. A study by Floridi et al. (2022) indicates that the use of AI in communication must consider honesty and accountability, particularly when technology has the potential to shape audience perceptions of identity. In this context, the informants’ limitation of AI use can be seen as an ethical practice aligned with these principles.

Furthermore, the concept of *niyyah* (intention) is also important in understanding how informants interpret the use of technology. In this study, the use of AI to improve content quality or support productive activities, such as digital affiliations, can be understood as actions driven by specific intentions. This is consistent with Stahl’s (2023) research, which emphasizes that the ethics of technology use lie not only in the tools themselves but also in the user’s intentions in using them.

On the other hand, the findings also indicate caution toward excessive use of technology, which can be associated with the concept of *riya’*, or the tendency to display oneself excessively to gain social recognition. In the context of social media, overly curated or manipulated self-presentation practices may lead to inauthentic representations. Research by Marwick (2023) shows that the pressure to appear ideal on social media can encourage individuals to overcurate content, ultimately blurring the boundary between authentic and performative identity.

Moreover, a study by Fiesler et al. (2022) on social media ethics found that users often develop “informal rules” for using technology, including aspects of honesty, privacy, and self-representation. This aligns with the findings of this study, in which informants informally establish boundaries for AI use to maintain their personal integrity.

Another study by Jobin et al. (2023) on global AI ethics also emphasizes the importance of cultural and local values in shaping technology use practices. In this study, Islamic values are among the frameworks that influence how informants understand and limit the use of AI in their daily lives.

Thus, this study shows that self-presentation practices in the AI era are not only technological or social phenomena but also ethical and cultural ones. Users not only aim to optimize content performance but also consider the values they uphold in determining how they wish to be represented in digital spaces.

The main contribution of this finding is to provide a more contextual perspective in self-presentation studies by demonstrating that local values, including Islamic values, play an important role in shaping technology-use practices. In this context, Generation Z are not only adaptive technology users but also reflective individuals who negotiate the boundaries between efficiency, authenticity, and ethics in digital communication.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to understand how Generation Z students negotiate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in their everyday social media practices, particularly in the context of self-presentation. The findings indicate that AI use is not passively accepted but actively negotiated by users. Students use AI as a supporting tool to enhance the efficiency of content production, such as idea development and caption writing, while still maintaining control over personal aspects that reflect their identity.

Furthermore, this study shows that self-presentation practices on social media are planned and reflective processes in which individuals consciously manage their appearance to create certain impressions for an audience. In this context, the use of AI becomes part of an impression management strategy that supports content performance, but does not fully replace the individual's role as the primary actor in constructing digital identity.

The main finding of this study lies in the negotiation between efficiency and authenticity. Although AI offers convenience and speed in content production, students establish boundaries in its use to maintain authenticity and credibility. This indicates that authenticity remains an important consideration in Generation Z's digital communication practices.

In addition, this study reveals that the use of technology cannot be separated from ethical dimensions. In this context, Islamic values such as honesty (*sidq*), intention (*niyyah*), and caution against excessive self-display (*riya'*) play a role in shaping how individuals utilize technology. Thus, self-presentation practices are influenced not only by technological and social factors but also by users' cultural and moral values.

Overall, this study contributes to the development of digital communication studies by demonstrating that self-presentation in the AI era is a complex, multidimensional process that involves interactions among technology, communication strategies, and ethical considerations. This research enriches the literature by providing a contextual perspective from Generation Z in Indonesia, particularly in integrating technological dimensions and local values in social media practices.

As a recommendation for future research, it is suggested that the number and diversity of participants be expanded, including consideration of differences in gender, social background, and levels of digital literacy. Furthermore, future studies could explore more deeply the role of platform algorithms and the dynamics of the digital economy in shaping self-presentation practices in the era of Artificial Intelligence.

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