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The Phenomenon of Outfit Scenes: Building Self-Presentation on Instagram Social Media

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Abstract
Instagram provides university students with a digital space to express their identities through fashion. In Indonesia, skena outfits can communicate personal taste and group affiliation, while the preparation behind these public displays remains largely invisible. This study examined how university students used skena outfits to manage their self-presentation on Instagram. A qualitative phenomenological research design was employed, involving five purposively selected students from a single university. Data were collected through semistructured interviews, nonparticipant observation of publicly accessible Instagram accounts, and documentation and subsequently interpreted using Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework. The findings revealed that students used Instagram as a front stage to project their desired self-image, signal group belonging, and seek recognition from their peers. Backstage, they experimented with outfit combinations, considered comfort and fit, and curated photographs by carefully selecting camera angles, backgrounds, and color tones. Their accounts indicated that these decisions reflected both personal preferences and anticipated audience expectations. The analysis suggests that impression management begins with clothing selection and extends to decisions regarding how outfits are photographed, edited, and shared. This study concludes that skena fashion functions as a form of visual communication through which students negotiate individual expression and social acceptance, connecting private experimentation with the public presentation of identity on a visually oriented social media platform.

INTRODUCTION

Young people's clothing styles often reflect their identities and how they negotiate their positions within social environments (Abisya & Mutiah, 2022; Hendariningrum & Susilo, 2008; Lestari, 2014). One increasingly popular fashion style is the skena outfit, which is often associated with nonmainstream aesthetics, individuality, and freedom of expression (Alamanda et al., 2025; Berek, 2014). Skena identity is reflected in clothing choices that move beyond mainstream fashion trends and incorporate distinctive combinations of vintage clothing, streetwear, and products from independent local brands (Rugas, 2025). This phenomenon illustrates how fashion can function as both a form of resistance to dominant cultural norms and a symbol of community solidarity (Cakra & Setiawan, 2021; Hebdige, 1979).

With advances in digital technology, particularly social media, skena fashion has gained broader opportunities for representation (Kietzmann et al., 2011; Nasrullah, 2016). Instagram, TikTok, and other digital platforms provide spaces for young people to showcase their outfits, establish social networks, and seek social validation (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Muyidi, 2025).

Outfits shared on social media serve not only as a form of personal expression but also as a means of visual communication that can influence how individuals are perceived by others (Agustin, 2023; Gustina & Fachri, 2015; Ulfah et al., 2016). The term skena has also emerged as a popular online search trend, reflecting its growing significance in contemporary digital culture (Ramadhani & Rosa, 2024).

Several previous studies have examined the skena phenomenon. Arbina et al. (2024) identified a shift in the meaning of skena from its original association with music communities toward fashion trends influenced by social media. Ramadhani and Rosa (2024) examined skena fashion as a form of competition over visual self-expression, focusing primarily on interactions in physical spaces, such as coffee shops. Meanwhile, Gustina and Fachri (2015) investigated the relationship between Instagram use and students' self-presentation but did not specifically address the skena fashion subculture as the primary research focus (see also Nurfalah et al., 2021; Sari & Purwanto, 2024).

These previous studies reveal a research gap, as limited attention has been given to the backstage processes and communication strategies employed by individuals who use skena outfits to construct their self-presentation on Instagram as a digital stage. To address this gap, this study applies Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory to examine how young people construct and manage their self-presentation. Accordingly, the central research question is how young people interpret and use skena outfits within the context of their digital front-stage performances and backstage preparation.

Recent research has also examined audience responses to skena content online. Zega et al. (2025) analyzed comments on skena content shared by a TikTok creator and identified responses ranging from appreciation of the content to resistance to being categorized within the subculture. Across the studies reviewed, the relationship between university students' backstage preparation of skena outfits and their public self-presentation on Instagram remains insufficiently explored. Published images and audience comments reveal what audiences encounter, whereas students' personal accounts can provide insights into how they select outfits, what considerations influence their posting decisions, and why they present themselves in particular ways.

Examining these preparatory processes is important because visually similar social media posts may reflect different underlying motivations. Students may select outfits for comfort, experiment with particular fashion styles, express group belonging, or respond to expectations within their peer groups. Multiple motivations may simultaneously influence a single post. Examining the decisions preceding content publication therefore helps explain how students negotiate personal preferences and community expectations, including when they choose to conform to a recognizable skena aesthetic and when they feel comfortable deviating from it.

This study employs Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework to examine these decisions across the front stage and backstage. The front stage encompasses the visual performances that students present to their Instagram audiences through posts, Stories, and Reels. The backstage encompasses experimenting with clothing combinations, considering comfort and fit, selecting photographic angles and backgrounds, and determining which images to publish. The novelty of this study lies in examining how these backstage practices contribute to the public presentation of skena identity among university students. This approach connects

clothing choices with the processes involved in constructing visual representations for specific audiences.

The purpose of this study is to examine how university students use skena outfits to construct and manage their self-presentation on Instagram. Specifically, this study aims to identify the meanings students associate with skena clothing, describe how they prepare and curate outfit-related content, and examine how perceived audience expectations influence their decisions regarding what to display. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to explore the experiences of five primary informants from a single university. Semistructured interviews, nonparticipant observations of publicly accessible Instagram activity, and documentation enabled the researchers to examine students' personal accounts alongside the visual content they shared.

This study contributes to digital communication research by demonstrating how two interconnected decision-making processes shape fashion-related social media posts. Students first determine the appearance they wish to construct and subsequently decide how to represent that appearance through Instagram's visual formats. Integrating these decisions extends the application of dramaturgical theory to digital self-presentation by positioning impression management within both content preparation and publication. This study also contributes to research on Indonesian youth culture by documenting how university students construct and negotiate the meaning of skena through everyday practices involving clothing selection, photography, and content sharing.

The findings can inform discussions within universities regarding digital identity, peer expectations, and the role of audience feedback in students' self-presentation. For students, this study provides a basis for reflecting on how personal preferences, group affiliation, and anticipated audience reactions influence decisions about sharing content. For researchers, it provides a context-specific account that can support comparative investigations across universities, fashion communities, and social media platforms. Such comparisons may help identify which practices reflect the distinctive conventions of skena culture and which are more broadly associated with visual self-presentation in digital environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to explore young people's subjective experiences and the meanings they associated with skena outfits in their social and digital lives. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of the social and cultural contexts influencing their self-presentation on Instagram (Moleong, 2007).

Data were collected through semistructured, in-depth interviews, nonparticipant observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted using previously prepared interview guidelines. Nonparticipant observations involved monitoring the publicly accessible Instagram accounts of five primary informants, focusing on outfit-related posts, feed consistency, and interactions in comment sections. Documentation included screenshots of Instagram posts, Stories, and Reels, as well as field notes recorded during interviews and observations. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their familiarity with and experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Research trustworthiness was enhanced through source triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews with primary and neutral informants and Instagram observations. The

comparison focused on identifying similarities, discrepancies, and recurring patterns across data sources to strengthen the credibility of the findings (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021).

Data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and subjected to open coding to identify key concepts and recurring themes. The identified codes were subsequently organized into themes aligned with Goffman's dramaturgical framework, particularly front-stage performance and backstage preparation. During data display, the findings were presented as thematic descriptive narratives. Narrative analysis was also employed to examine individual experiences of identity construction through skena outfits. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the interpreted findings to address the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents research findings on how students interpret and use scene outfits in the context of self-presentation on Instagram social media, analyzed through the theoretical framework of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy. In accordance with the phenomenological qualitative approach used, the data presentation focuses on the informant's subjective experience obtained through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through reduction, narrative presentation based on emerging themes, and conclusion drawn.

Front Stage: Skena Outfit as Identity and Stage of Existence

Based on the interview data that has been reduced, the main theme that emerged related to the front stage was the use of scene outfits as a strategic tool in self-performance on the public stage, both digital (Instagram feed, story) and physical. It was found that informants consciously chose and displayed certain outfits with the aim of gaining recognition and social acceptance of the style of dress being the determinant of the first impression and the key to acceptance.

This discussion of these findings theoretically confirms Goffman's concept of impression management. The results show that the outfit (as part of the personal front) is a consciously chosen 'costume'. This quote specifically suggests that the outfit functions not only as self-expression, but as a 'social ticket'. Recognition ('faster to be accepted') is a social goal to be achieved, and fashion is a performative tool to achieve it. This validates Goffman's view that the individual is a rational actor who manages his or her appearance to control how the audience (in this case 'barge') defines the situation. The goal is clear, which is to achieve the specific social goal of 'being accepted on the barge'. This is no longer just passive self-expression, but an active 'performance' to gain validation from the audience (scene community). This shows that for informants, the identity of the scene is not something that is 'possessed' passively, but something that must be 'done' and 'proven' continuously on the front stage in order to be recognized.

The social assessment of the outfit scene on the front stage affects the way informants form their identity. If it is assessed positively and in accordance with the values of the community, they feel more accepted. Outfits are a way to show their identity, whether as an edgy, artsy, unique, or cool figure. Social media, especially Instagram, strengthens this role.

Through photos or videos of outfits that they post, young people can convey messages about themselves, their lifestyle, and the values they follow."

However, this performance on the front stage cannot be separated from social pressure. There are unwritten expectations or rules in the scene community regarding how to dress. The Dramaturgy theory explains that actors must constantly maintain their appearance to match the audience's expectations. This finding is also in line with what was identified by (Arbina et al., 2024) regarding the shift in the meaning of the scene to a fashion trend that has its own standards.

The discussion of these findings in the framework of Dramaturgy theory shows that scene outfits function as a crucial part of the personal front used by actors (students) in impression management. On the digital front stage of Instagram and other physical stages, they actively construct an ideal self-image through the choice of outfits to gain acceptance from the audience (other audiences). The social pressure felt is part of the dynamics of maintaining performance on the front stage.


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perform perfectly, they tried combinations that they might not dare to show in public. Because there was no pressure to perform perfectly, more creative outfit ideas emerged. It is this freedom backstage that often gives birth to stylistic originality, which is Goffman's classic backstage function as a space where actors can let go of their roles and experiment without audience supervision.

The process of choosing an outfit backstage is also part of the mental and physical preparation before performing. The informant explained how they "think about what outfit to wear" as a process of "setting persona". This effort involves finding an outfit that combines comfort, aesthetics, and conformity to the body shape, a strategy to be able to appear "skena" but not forced. Adjusting outfits before performing is considered important to increase confidence and intensity of interaction on the front stage.

In the digital context, the back stage also serves as a strategy arena. It was found that the process of selecting outfits for Instagram content is not only based on personal taste, but also involves strategic considerations related to the audience and social media algorithms.

Although the informants agreed that the front stage was a stage for validation, the interview data showed a difference in emphasis on strategy in the back stage. This difference shows that the digital back stage functions not only as a space for preparing properties (outfits), but also as a 'production space' of content where the concept of aesthetic labor occurs intensively. The informants do not only 'dress up', they also 'produce' images strategically.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with Goffman's concept of Back Stage, in which individuals prepare props (outfits) and rehearse roles before performing. Strategic considerations related to algorithms and audiences show how digital backstage also involves careful impression management. There are indications of a possible tension between the more authentic self backstage and the ideal image displayed on the front stage, where the informant acknowledges the difference between the self on stage and off stage.

Social Media as a Self-Presentation Media

Further analysis of the use of the Instagram platform specifically shows its central role as the main stage in the process of self-presentation through outfit scenes. It was found that Instagram is not only used as a passive gallery, but as an active tool to manage images. The main theme that emerged from the interview was the existence of conscious strategies in managing visual appearances to build the desired self-image. The informant openly explained their efforts in curating the Instagram feed.To maintain an image on social media, there are many strategies: take photos from the best angle, choose aesthetic backgrounds, make flatlay outfits, and use filters that suit the branding. All of this is part of managing your self-image so that it still looks cool.

By stating the need to "know a good angle, the right color tone, and the right filter" as part of an effort to "build a reputation in the digital world". The discussion of these findings shows that there is an intensive practice of aesthetic labor. Visual consistency, setting selection, and the use of filters that are "branded" are not random choices, but part of strategic work backstage to ensure that one's presentation on the front stage can be accepted by the audience.

In addition to the aesthetics of the feed, informants also strategically utilize Instagram features such as Reels to reinforce their identity narrative. The use of these features is not only for self-expression, but also to pursue digital validation. Within the framework of impression management, visual consistency and careful content selection are part of efforts to build and

maintain the desired self-image. Recognition is no longer only sought from physical barges, but also from digital validation in the form of likes, comments, and followers.

This focus on fashion as an identity builder is also found in studies (Darmawan & Andreas, 2025) and (Christanti & Cahyani, 2022). The findings of this study show that students (as users) use similar strategies to build subcultural identities and seek social acceptance. Thus, Instagram serves as a dramaturgical stage where scene outfits become the main personal front. The informants, as actors, actively use the tools on the platform to manage their self-performance, balancing authentic self-expression with strategies to gain audience recognition.

Based on the results of the interview, in Informant 1, it can be seen that what is displayed in the public space (front stage) through the scene outfit actually departs from the process that takes place behind the scenes. The appearance seen on social media and social environments does not appear spontaneously, but begins with the process of self-preparation, starting from choosing appropriate clothes, considering comfort, to adjusting the appearance to the character you want to display. Implicitly, there is an effort to build confidence and regulate how you want to be perceived by others. Thus, outfits not only function as a support for appearance, but also as a medium to form identity and gain social acceptance.

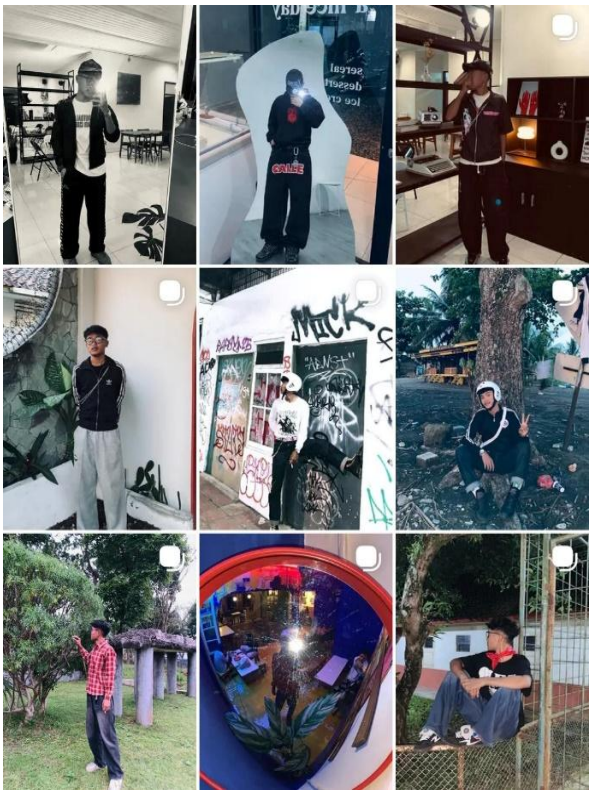


Figure 2 Instagram feed of informant 1
Source: Instagram @adjidrmwnn_

The results of the interview on Informant 2 show that the appearance that appears on the front stage is the result of a negotiation process that takes place in a private space. Explicitly, the scene outfit is used as a means to display a self-image that is considered in accordance with the social environment and developing trends. However, implicitly, there is an influence of group expectations and the need to adjust to remain accepted in the community. In addition, image management on social media is also carried out through stylistic consistency and

adjustment to audience preferences. This shows that the identity displayed is the result of a combination of personal expression and social demands.

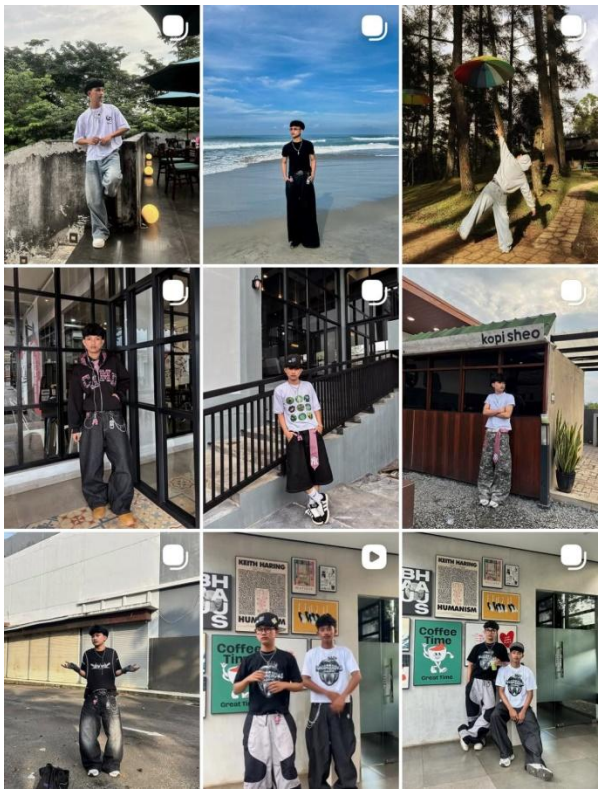


Figure 3 Informant Instagram Feed 2
Source: Instagram @mans.furzss

In Informant 3, the appearance of scene outfits seen in public spaces illustrates the internal process that precedes the formation of the image. Individuals not only choose clothes based on visual aspects, but also consider the sense of comfort and confidence that they want to build. Implicitly, there is a process of self-exploration that is carried out before appearing in front of others. In addition, interaction with the environment of friends also influences the development of clothing styles so that the identity displayed is not completely individual, but is formed through social processes that take place in a sustainable manner.

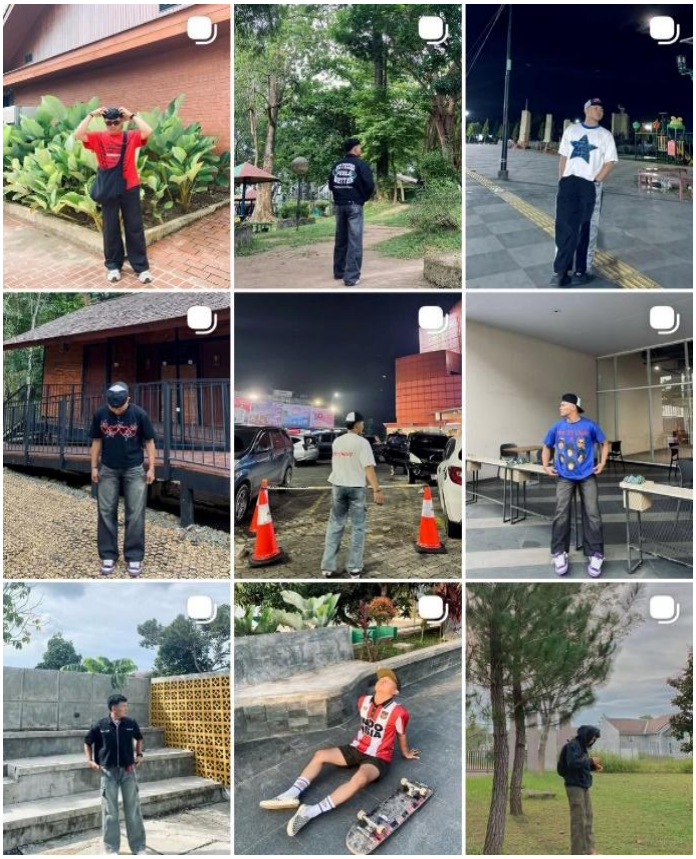


Figure 4 Informant's Instagram Feed 3
Source: Instagram @iwen_chtb

Based on the findings in Informant 4, the relationship between the back stage and the front stage looks more complex. The appearance of the outfit displayed to the public is the result of the image management process that is carried out consciously. Before uploading content or appearing in social spaces, there are various considerations such as determining the appearance concept, choosing the angle of shooting, adjusting the visual background, and using supporting elements to match the image to be built. Implicitly, the process shows the practice of impression management and aesthetic labor to create a self-representation that can be accepted by the audience.

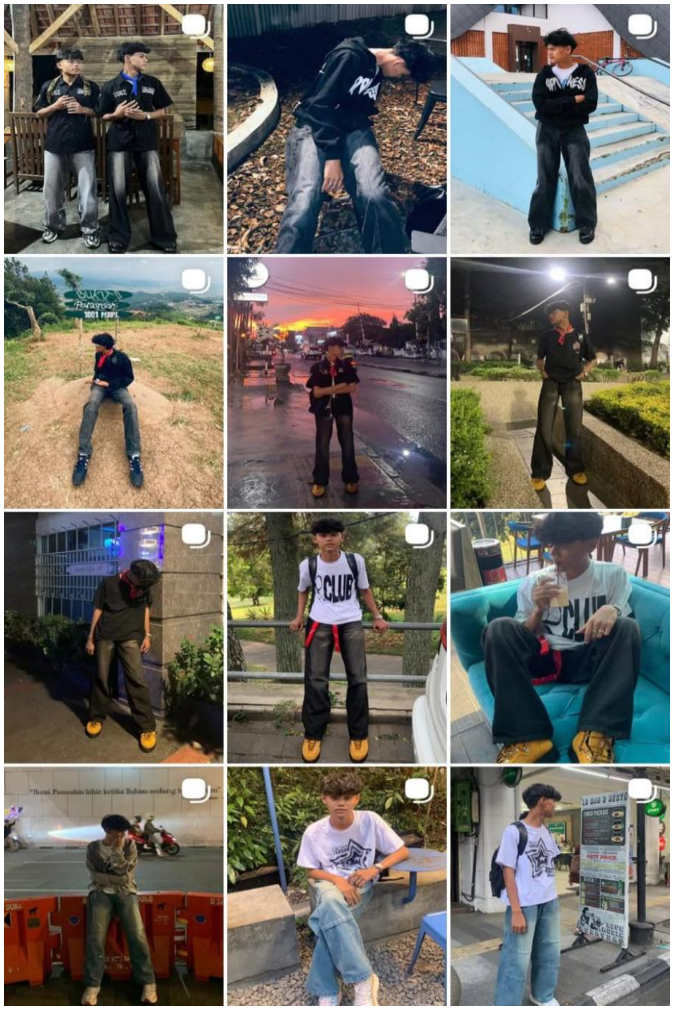


Figure 5 Instagram feed of informant 4
Source: Instagram @sydnfann

In Informant 5, the front stage is shown through an effort to display an identity that is in accordance with the character of the community and the image that wants to be built on social media. However, behind this display there is a process of reflection and self-regulation that is not directly visible. Individuals consider the chosen outfit, adjust it to the visual needs of social media, and pay attention to supporting elements such as color tone and appearance consistency. Implicitly, this process shows that the formation of digital identity is not only a form of self-expression, but also a strategy to build reputation and gain recognition from the social environment.

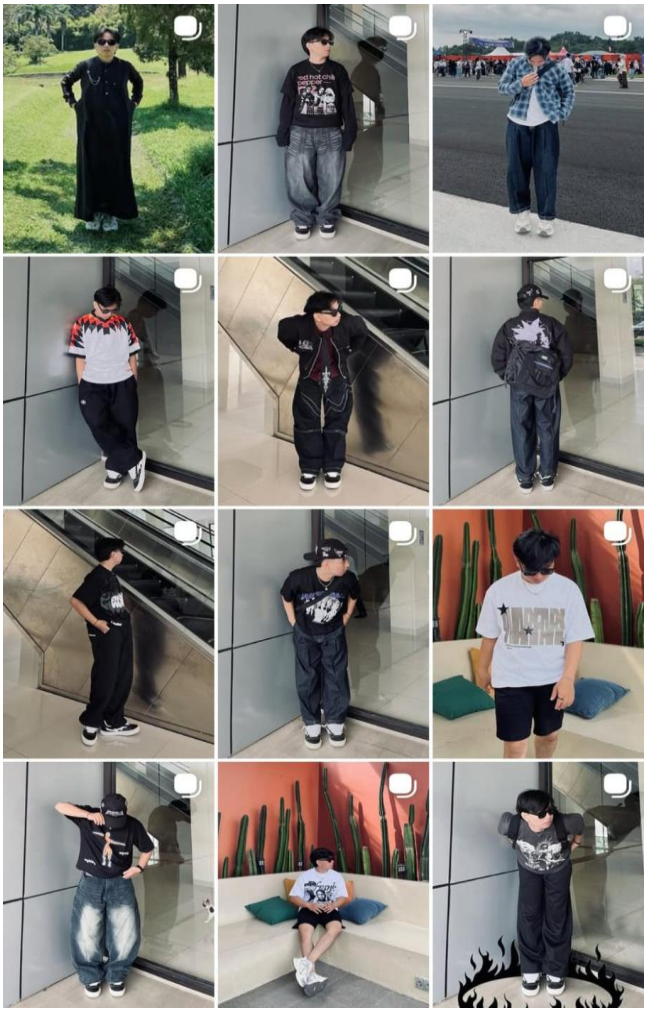


Figure 6 Instagram feed of informant 5
Source: Instagram @danimhmmdrstu

Based on the five informants, it can be understood that the explicit stage outside (front stage) is a representation of the implicit process that takes place inside (back stage). The appearance of the outfit, the aesthetics of social media, and the social interaction that appears in the public are formed through the stages of preparation, reflection, impression management, and adjustment to social and digital expectations. Thus, the self-presentation that emerges is not just a spontaneous expression, but the result of a dramaturgical process carried out consciously by the individual

Neutral Informant Perspective

For comparison, interviews with neutral informants provide perspectives from outside the scene community. A common theme that emerges is the perception that scene children on social media tend to be expressive, creative, and dare to appear different from anti-mainstream fashion styles.

They are also considered to be active in using social media as a space to work and build networks. He added that from the children of the scene "we can learn to be more courageous to be ourselves and not be afraid to be different".

This perspective suggests that the main informant's front stage performance seems to be quite successful in communicating an image of creativity and uniqueness to the audience.

However, this perception may only capture the surface aspect (front stage) without understanding the complexity of backstage preparation or the social pressure that may be experienced.

Overall, the findings of this study show that Instagram users actively utilize scene outfits as an important part of their performance, in line with the theory of Dramaturgy. There is a difference in meaning and function between the use of outfits on the front stage (as a tool for impression management and search for validation) and activities on the back stage (as a space for strategic preparation and freer expression). Instagram acts as the main digital stage where this identity performance takes place.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that university students' use of skena outfits on Instagram represents a complex practice of self-presentation consistent with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework. The main findings reveal that on the digital front stage (Instagram), skena outfits are strategically used as part of the personal front to project an idealized self-image, seek social recognition, and negotiate social positions within the community, often influenced by collective aesthetic expectations and group standards. In contrast, the backstage functions as a private space for performance preparation, where individuals have greater freedom to experiment with authentic personal styles and engage in aesthetic labor through strategic activities, including outfit selection, photo editing, and caption preparation, before presenting themselves on the front stage.

This phenomenon demonstrates that skena outfits are not merely fashion choices but also serve as meaningful instruments of visual communication in impression management and digital identity construction among young people. These findings highlight the importance of understanding how visually oriented social media platforms such as Instagram function as dramaturgical stages where young people construct, negotiate, and present their identities. However, this study was limited to a small number of informants from a single university, restricting the transferability of its findings. Therefore, future research should expand the scope of participants across different universities and explore other social media platforms to develop a more comprehensive understanding of digital self-presentation and identity construction within the skena fashion subculture.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors state that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial, professional, or personal, that can affect the conduct of the research, the data analysis process, the interpretation of the results, and the preparation and publication of this scientific article.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Writer contributed to the conceptualization of the research, the preparation of the research design, the collection of data through in-depth interviews, the observation of the informant's Instagram activities, the analysis of data, and the preparation of the initial draft of

the article. Writer contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, the refinement of the research methodology, the interpretation of the results based on the theory of Erving Goffman's Dramaturgy, as well as the review and revision of the substance of the article. Writer contributed to the supervision of the research, the evaluation of the methodology, the validation of the results of the analysis, the critical review of the content of the article, and the editing and approval of the final manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the article.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE STATEMENT

The author states that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) is not used thoroughly in the research process or preparation of this article. The use of AI technology is only limited as a tool to check and improve diction, grammar, and clarity of sentence structure to improve the readability of the manuscript. The entire process of data collection, analysis of interview results, interpretation of findings, and drawing conclusions is carried out independently by the author. The author is solely responsible for the originality, accuracy, and scientific integrity of the article.

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