LESBIAN IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON INSTAGRAM SOCIAL MEDIA

Elisabet Laura P. RITONGA[1], and Fizzy ANDRIANI[2]*
1-2Fakultas Imu Komunikasi Universitas Prof. Dr. Moestopo (Beragama), Jakarta, Indonesia
*fizzyandriani@dsn.moestopo.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Lesbians tend to be introverted, as a result of which lesbians are less well-known and understood than homosexual men. There are still many societies that reject the existence of lesbians and consider taboos in their mindsetand sexual order. The purpose of this study is to find out the impression management practices carried out by lesbians on Instagram social media and what obstacles lesbians face in building impressions on Instagram social media. According to Goffman's impression management theory, human behavior, including the clothes we wear, the location where we live, the house we live in, the way we move, and the way we speak, are used to show themselves. This research use descriptive qualitative by conducting interviews withseveral resource persons. The results found that most of these lesbians still close theiridentities from the family for fear of rejection. They will be closed when in front offamily and public circles, but when in their community they will open up aboutidentity. The impression they display also does not clearly highlight them as part ofthe Lesbians because they choose to be as comfortable as themselves in terms ofappearance, language style and social media style.

Keywords: impression management practices**,** Instagram**,** lesbian

INTRODUCTION

As social beings, someone needs others to interact and communicate daily, be curious about the surrounding environment, and convey her feelings, where she attempts to show her identity to others. This curiosity provides much information and indeed builds social relationships to achieve the goals in daily activities; thus, communicative interactions will continue. Communication can be done verbally, nonverbally, or both to facilitate and clarify the message; hence, the listeners can understand it.

Along with the development of increasingly sophisticated communication technology, technology-based media is emerged. One is the emergence of an internet network that assists people to convey and receive information from a distance. With the internet, social media is also emerged. Social media has the power to influence public opinion in various ways, including the creation of personal identity. One of the popular platforms among internet users nowadays is "Instagram". Instagram can be used to display and convey information instantly in the form of photos or images and sometimes accompanied by captions (descriptions or stories that describe visuals). Instagram can show each of its users to present themselves through their accounts by showing impression management.

Due to an incredible opportunity, Instagram is undoubtedly a way for people to show themselves through their accounts by displaying impression management (Trepte, 2021). Through an application that people can use, this social media can display and convey information instantly in the form of photos or images, sometimes accompanied by captions (descriptions or stories that describe visuals).

Someone's efforts to initially impress others are known as impression management. Impression management describes how someone uses non-verbal indicators in communication to help create the impression they want. The process of controlling the impression on others is called '*impression management*'. Impression control is another deliberate practice or unconscious effort to control the image projected in real or imaginary social interactions. Impression management usually involves hiding one's true identity to gain an advantage over others. In other words, it is not always true that someone displays a positive impression or a pleasant personality as seen in public. People who handle impression management understand that others can only benefit from a pleasant impression in a positive sense. Impression management has also been studied for its impact on close relationships. A study found that close relationships turn into success by other-benefitting impression management techniques, which aim at affirming and enhancing the partners'self-image as desired by them leading to formation of glorifying view of their personality (Schlenker & Britt, 2001). In addition, the closer the relationship, both the actor and the target would be more beneficially associated to each other.

The rapid flow of information can result in changes in norms and behavior in people, such as ongoing issues in Indonesia currently. The problem is that the number of *Lesbians*, *Gays*, *Bisexuals*, and *Transgenders* (LGBT) is increasing every year. There have been many parties involved in this topic yearly, especially those related to the issue of sexual orientation that is developing in society (Akbar, 2016). One of the sexual orientations in LGBT is Lesbians. Lesbian sexual orientation is a social phenomenon that can no longer be denied. Its existence is recognized as a reality in society and causes various reactions from the surrounding environment. It happens because lesbians (homosexual behavior in women), in general, are still considered deviant sexual behavior (Masyitah, 2016). Rejection and marginalization from the surrounding environment and broader scope make lesbians feel afraid, doubtful, and even ashamed to show their true sexual identity. It is an obstacle for them to communicate in daily interactions.

A person becomes a lesbian not because of their own will. The influence of the environment, relationships, experiences, and personal treatment received can also make someone become a lesbian (Ria et al., 2018). The research results by (Marthilda et al., 2014) showed that several things could make someone become a lesbian, such as economic problems, social environment, the view that heterosexual relationships were unpleasant, trauma from previous relationships with men, and previous sexual harassment.

Those who are attracted to this orientation begin to open up and admit their sexual desires, which may be different from others in society. However, the openness and recognition of lesbians do not happen instantly. A long and complicated process is needed for society to accept their existence gradually. It is due to heteronormative values that believe that heterosexuality is the only customary norm and must play an essential role in the formation of the state. These values make homosexuals usually closed and reluctant to stand out for a lesbian. Consequently, lesbians tend to be less well-known and understood than homosexual men. Many people reject lesbians and consider them taboo.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people are likely to be at risk of distress because of social exclusion, including the feelings of resentment, resistance, and rejection they might experience from society. (Cheung & Tsang, 2023)Rejection and discrimination against lesbians in society did not dampen their spirits to keep attempting to make their existence widely accepted by society. The encouragement of lesbians grew stronger after same-sex marriage was legalized in the United States on June 26, 2015, further strengthening the LGBT movement throughout the world, including Indonesia (Akbar, 2016). As sex actors who like the same sex in Indonesia, they began to dare to show their existence. They are on several screens and social media to voice their rights. They demand that their existence be recognized by society, recognized politically and religiously, and get the same rights in legal treatment as normal society, including the legality of same-sex marriage.

This research focused on lesbian groups (homosexual behavior in women). Those who are attracted to the same sex are starting to open up and admit their sexual desires. The openness and recognition of lesbians do not only happen instantly. However, a long and complicated process will be needed to accept their existence gradually by society. Some found that social media may support the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ youths through peer connection, identity management, and social support, but findings were limited by weaknesses in the evidence. (Berger et al., 2022).

Hence, this reality encourages the authors to intentionally research how a lesbian on Instagram social media carries out impression management practices. Goffman proposed the requirements that need to be met if an individual wants to manage an impression well, called the *front*. The front consists of *setting*, *appearance*, and *manner*. Based on these backgrounds, the research focused on the impression management practices lesbians carried out on Instagram social media. The study show that Instagram plays a significant role in shaping and strengthening an individual's identity. Instagram provides a space for individuals to express their personal views and interpretations (Fahmi et al., 2024).

In the research, the author formulated the research questions: (1) How were the impression management practices the lesbians carried out on Instagram social media? (2) What factors were obstacles or constraints for lesbians in impression management on Instagram social media?

Therefore, the research objectives were to (1) find out the impression management practices lesbians carried out on Instagram social media, and (2) determine the obstacles or constraints lesbians faced in the practice of impression management on Instagram social media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to (Deddy, 2018), a paradigm is a way of understanding the complexity of the real world. In addition, qualitative research frequently highlighted a paradigm as a fundamental way of feeling, considering, assessing, and behaving concerning certain aspects of the perception of reality. A paradigm helps researchers determine what to study, what questions to ask, how best to respond to those questions, and what rules to follow when evaluating the data that must be collected to answer those questions. In this study, constructivism is the paradigm. This research paradigm was a framework that clarified the researcher's perspective on the reality of contemporary social life. The paradigm also examined how researchers approach science and theory, as presented in the study (Noor, 2017).

However, (Deddy, 2018) also conveys that qualitative research intends to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and actions, descriptively in words and language in a specific natural context and using various scientific methods. This research also used a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was a research strategy emphasizing data depth to provide quality research findings.

The research design was qualitative descriptive. This description is interpreted as collecting data that can describe a situation and condition (Kriyantono, 2020). With descriptive, this research tried to describe in depth the impression management practices lesbians built on Instagram social media.

Furthermore, this research method was the case study method. It is in accordance with (Yin, 2017) understanding that the case study method is a study that uses the research questions "how" and "why" to find answers to phenomena or realities in depth; thus, answers can be found related to the ongoing phenomena.

The research object was the impression management practices lesbians built on Instagram social media. Then, the research subjects were three lesbians whose identities have been disguised, namely (1) Adinda, 38 years old, living in Bali, who lives her daily life as a café singer, with the role label as *femme*; (2) Kakanda, 35 years old, living in South Jakarta, and working as a live music singer in several bars in Jakarta, prefers to be called a *tomboy* for the reason that she does not want to be labeled with the role terms that existed in lesbians; (3) Ananda, 31 years old, living in South Jakarta, unemployed, with the role label as *butch*.

Data were obtained from primary sources, namely those collected directly from the main source, by interviewing the three lesbians who had been disguised, then analyzed by drawing conclusions using source triangulation. In this study, source triangulation was used, which meant comparing and rechecking the degree of trustworthiness of an informant obtained from different sources. It was done to *cross-check* what the source said (Moleong, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The existence of lesbians is still taboo to talk about and difficult to accept in Indonesian society. Therefore, there are still many lesbians who hide their true sexual orientation identity. The reasons they decided to become lesbians were also diverse, as expressed by (Ranuh, 2013), such as genetic and hormonal factors, social and environmental factors, trauma to men, and factors in the family environment. Not only in the general public, these lesbians also mostly still hid their identities from their families because they were afraid of rejection. Perhaps, it took them a long and winding process to slowly open up about who they were. It happens because lesbians (homosexual behavior in women) are generally still considered as deviant sexual behavior (Masyitah, 2016).

Based on the results of interviews with informants, all informants mentioned that they did not overthink society's views that considered the existence of lesbian' taboo. They lived their lives properly and acted normally. Lesbians lived their lives in society with a typical attitude and did not feel strange because, currently, lesbians had a forum or community to interact and socialize. Furthermore, they felt they were not free to show their true identity; thus, they chose to be closed in social interactions, as the results obtained from three informants. In addition, they still chose to be careful in showing their identity because they were afraid of views from their families and the general public. The attitude of lesbians in presenting themselves was due to two reasons: *first*, family reasons, and *second*, social and environmental reasons. Family was a consideration for lesbians to close themselves off because they were afraid of being scolded and tarnishing the family's good name. They were closed off to society because they feared society would not accept their existence. It was different if lesbians were in their community. They would be open as if they were living their daily lives. Even if some were open to the family environment, they must have gone through an uneasy process for the family to accept them.

The identity can also be shown through the use of accessories. Based on the interview results of the three informants, the use of accessories, like most normal people, was not a code or signal that stated that they were lesbians. These

accessories were only used according to their respective fashion styles. However, there was also one informant who dressed to show her identity where in lesbian terms, she was called a *butch*; she used accessories and clothes that showed her identity, such as the informant above named Ananda, who looked like a man, for instance, earrings, rings, and clothes must be black. As with the theory Goffman put forward, human activities are used for self-presentation, including the clothes they wear, the place they live, the house they live in, and the way they walk and talk. Everything open about ourselves can be used to tell others who they are. They do that from situation to situation. In short, the people "manage" the information they give to others. They also control the influence their clothes, appearance, and habits will have on others so that others see them as the people they want to show. Therefore, they are not only the perpetrators but also the audience (Liliweri, 2015).

However, when these informants posted their photos on Instagram, they dressed and uploaded themselves on Instagram without exaggeration and not to show their real identity. They just dressed as they felt comfortable. Social media, especially Instagram, has become a platform for discovering other people's lives. A posing style that was considered attractive to someone was not necessarily attractive to followers; thus, a lesbian needed to be careful in uploading photos and videos on Instagram. Instagram is a social network and web-based application for exchanging information using digital photos, which are often used by gadget users to exchange photos quickly. All social media have negative and positive impacts, as well as Instagram social media. Instagram social media has a positive impact on teenagers, namely in the world of friendship they can have many friends from all walks of life around the world. And teenagers can get information quickly and widely. While the negative impact is that there are some teenagers who abuse the use of Instagram accounts, many teenagers post their photos excessively and seem to want to show their possessions continuously. (Rahmayanti & Fauzi, 2021). A *smartphone* application called Instagram was used to share images and videos. Text or descriptions that described photos and videos could be included when posted. Instagram allows people to share photos and videos they have sent using the application with Facebook and Twitter. the relationship between social connectedness is considered with well-being to understand if photo sharing may influence the relationship. (Maclean et al., 2022)

Active users of Instagram accounts play an active role in searching and understanding the media, which is most important in their perception of their identity and behavior. Using Instagram continuously has subtly formed individual/ public perceptions in their understanding of social reality, especially concerning content or phenomena on Instagram. Based on the results of interviews with the three informants, they did not have a problem with other lesbians who flaunted their activities. However, most content uploaded by other lesbians could not provide a positive view to society or could not be proud of. It should be better to upload things that provide education to society. Not only that, these three informants also said that understanding the image of lesbians was partly significant and partly not. There were informants who on Instagram were only friends with fellow lesbians and who considered it necessary because they wanted to show the abilities and skills they had and could be helpful in society. As with the theory, personal branding is the process by which an individual actively tries to manage others' impressions of their skills, abilities and experiences. Self-awareness and understanding one's strengths and weaknesses in order to effectively present the self is essential to building a personal brand. They need to understand the concept of personal branding and how actions they engage today, especially in social media, can affect their future. To aware of the process of personal branding assists them in regulating their postings and disclosures on social media. Many tools are available on social media to convey one's personal brand such as LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, Vimeo, YouTube and blogs. The function and purpose of social media are twofold, namely, providing advantages in building personal branding for each of its users. Therefore, the audience determined that social media would be used to communicate, discuss, or seek popularity. (Johnson, 2017)

Then, other concerns were how to know the differences between the various roles of these lesbians, such as *butch*, *femme*, and *andro*. Moreover, the results of the three interviews to distinguish or identify lesbians in their roles as butch, femme, and andro could be seen in their physical appearance and the clothes they wore. Among lesbians themselves, physical appearance and way of dressing were not difficult to distinguish from the three lesbian roles themselves. When they communicated with fellow lesbians in their environment, they usually interacted based on their respective roles. Their roles, which used the terms "butch, femme, and andro", were in homosexual relationships with women.

As stated by (Hasyim & Sari, 2017), namely *butch*, better known as "*butchy*", was sometimes described as a partner who was more dominant in sexual relations. Sometimes, the relationship was one-sided, in which case butch was characterized as tomboyish, active, aggressive, protective, etc. Furthermore, butch could be divided into two categories, namely *soft butch* and *stone butch*. Soft butch was often considered to give a more feminine appearance with their hair and clothing choices. It did not imply that they were tough or strong, either emotionally or physically.

The phrase "Soft Butch" was often used to refer to "androgyne" in daily lesbian life. Stone butch often had a more masculine appearance in terms of clothing and hair. Wearing clothes made for men, sometimes bandaging their chest to make it look flatter and wearing something under their underwear to make it look like they had a penis. When a butch dressed masculine, they often behaved more like a "man" both in their romantic relationships and during sexual activity. In other words, Stone Butch was also known as Strong Butch for this lesbian label.

In addition, there was *femme*, popularly known as femme, who adopted a more "feminine" role in a relationship with her partner. Femme who dressed "femininely" were always depicted as having long hair and feminine clothing. Femme were often depicted as passive partners who waited or accepted. Then, there was the *andro*, which was a combination of butch and femme mixed into one. Usually, an andro with short hair and behavior appeared half male and half female. The partner chosen by andro was femme. These three types of roles were also mentioned in the book "*All About Lesbian*" (Agustine, 2007). The environment in Indonesia are not permissive and cons with the presence of LGBT / LBT this organization even dare to "coming out" , if it is not supported by an enabling environment through social networks. (Setiawati, 2017)

Based on the research results, these informants still did not show their real identities to their families and the public. They were open only in the community and on Instagram. On social media, because most of their followers were fellow lesbians, they were not afraid of "negative" views. They were also free to show off their lives with their partners. These three lesbian informants, who still maintained their identities on Instagram social media, usually chose to lock their accounts (private accounts) or hide their accounts from some of the followers on their accounts to maintain privacy and to limit the audience from consuming information that would be conveyed on the accounts of the three informants. Social media usage is heavily influenced by individual interactions, as supported by empirical research. These interactions shape the cultural and social contexts of social media, resulting in diverse usage behaviors. Social media's ability to transcend temporal and spatial barriers amplifies this dynamic. Interactions are fundamental to understanding social media as a systematic behavior occurring in both micro and macro systems, serving dual purposes of maintaining equilibrium and facilitating changes. They help systems achieve collective goals beyond individual capacities while also enabling necessary changes to adapt to the external environment. (Nie et al., 2024). There are two typologies approach the interactivity of new media, namely, the "Open" type and the "Closed" type. In the "Open" type, the entire audience can access whatever they want through new media. In the "Closed" type, new media will limit the audience's ability to consume news according to the choices or structures made.

They also did not emphasize their identity in dressing, like most people. They chose to wear what was comfortable to wear. Besides, displaying their role in the lesbian world was also not highlighted obviously. However, the butch's role could be seen clearly because this butch was the one who played the role of a man in the sexual life of lesbians. Often, they have a more masculine appearance in terms of clothing and hair to give the impression of being masculine. It was also one of the characteristics of a lesbian, as stated by (Nasri & Koentjoro, 2015). Wearing clothes made for men, sometimes wrapping their chest to make it look flatter and wearing something under their underwear to make it look like they had a penis. When a butch dressed masculine, they often behaved more like normal men in general, in their romantic relationships and during their sexual activities. The others dressed and appeared like women in general and tended to have more flexible characters. Similar to Goffman's impression management theory, namely, a front to manage a good impression. Front consists of *setting*, *appearance*, and *manner* (Liliweri, 2015).

In communication, language style is vital in conveying intent and purpose to others as expressed (Effendy, 2017). Through the language style lesbians use, people will know their communication ability. For lesbians to get a positive impression, before posting on Instagram, they need to prepare the language style they want to use to convey the message. Based on the research results, the language style used by the three informants who were lesbians was more to show their identity, which was not as a lesbian role and the impression of social status in society. The use of unnatural language styles would be avoided by lesbians, especially the three informants when posing on Instagram. Although some spoke by giving the impression of a man because they felt they had demanded the butch role in the lesbian community.

The research findings with the three informants were obtained if they chose not to be excessive in showing their impression as lesbians. The first informant was closed, but she could show her identity on Instagram because her friends on Instagram were all lesbians. Meanwhile, because she has many followers, the second informant preferred showing other things and her work or talents only. Then, the third informant was open enough to show her identity, and she did not overthink other people's views. However, the three informants also mentioned that they agreed not to show too much impression and excessive things that highlight that they were lesbians. Thus, they chose to be themselves for the impression management displayed on Instagram for these three informants.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and interview results obtained from informants, the practice of impression management of lesbians on Instagram emphasized that lesbians were still closed to their existence as part of LGBT on social media and the social environment, they only showed their identity in the community and to the closest people who have known their identity. The impression they displayed also did not highlight them as part of the lesbian community because, in terms of fashion, language style, and social media style, they chose to be as comfortable as they were. The obstacles and constraints experienced by lesbians in the practice of impression management on Instagram were that talking about lesbians was still taboo for Indonesian society, making it difficult for them to be open about their true identity, and there was still rejection from their families regarding their identity.

As for suggestions, hopefully, there will be the latest theories and research results that can be used as references for further related research. Then, the next researcher could add more sources to obtain more results so that the research can be better and the results can be found for their application in the community. The author's suggestion for building an impression on Instagram is to pay more attention to important things and matters considered taboo in society to maintain the image for the Instagram audience.

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