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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Critical Reflection of Adolescents on Self-Expression Through Multimodal Texts on Social Media

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**ABSTRACT**

This research is motivated by the low ability of students to represent themselves to the phenomena that occur during learning. This low ability is allegedly due to the lack of student confidence. This research aims to discover how adolescents' critical reflection in representing themselves in adolescent life is influenced by various multimodal texts uploaded on social media platforms. This study investigates how adolescents develop critical self-representation reflection through multimodal texts widely shared on social media. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data was collected through in-depth participant observation of a group of adolescents who actively use social media. Data analysis in the form of self-representation content uploaded on various mass media platforms. The study results showed that students were more free and confident in conveying critical reflection on the phenomena around them in self-representation in the form of multimodal texts through social media.

**KEYWORDS**

critical reflection, self-representation, multimodal text, social media

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### 1. Introduction

The ability to think critically is an important skill for adolescents. This skill not only allows them to analyze information better but also aids in wise and responsible decision-making. As in the research of Veum et al. (2024), the study of multimodal analysis and self-representation production can be an effective framework for developing critical media literacy in the classroom. In a flood of information coming from various sources, the ability to distinguish between valid and invalid information is crucial.

Social media has become an integral part of modern teen life. Through various platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter, teenagers can express themselves and interact with others through various forms of multimodal text that include images, videos, text, emojis, and sound effects. This allows them to create and disseminate their self-image in a unique and creative form. However, behind this freedom of expression, there is also the challenge of maintaining authenticity and balance between the desired self-representation and the reality of the true self.

Self-representation generated through multimodal texts on social media is often influenced by various factors, including social trends, peer group influence, and popular culture. This can give rise to identity crises, social pressures, and a tendency to conform to existing social expectations, which do not always reflect the true self of adolescents. This situation raises the importance of critical reflection from adolescents on their self-representation on social media so that they can understand how they express their identity and the impact of that representation on their personal and social lives.

However, many adolescents still have difficulty developing critical skills, especially in their use on social media (Tight, 2024). Many teenagers are found to represent themselves on social media that are deviant and not in accordance with norms

(Sunday et al., 2021). This can involve making choices about what is posted, how they edit the photos, as well as the narrative they build about themselves (Darihastining et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023). Meanwhile, formal education often does not fully facilitate the development of these skills. Therefore, an innovative and effective approach is needed to encourage critical thinking skills among adolescents (Darihastining et al., 2023; Nur & Ahmad, 2017; Widiana et al., 2023). One of the strategies that can be done is the use of multimodal texts.

This research aims to understand adolescents' critical reflection on their self-representation through multimodal texts on social media. Specifically, this study seeks to:

1. Identify forms of self-expression that are commonly used by adolescents on social media.
2. Analyze the factors that affect the choice of self-representation in multimodal texts on social media.
3. Exploring adolescents' views on the self-representations they make, as well as their understanding of the differences between their true selves and those represented on social media.
4. Exploring the potential positive and negative impacts of self-representation on the psychological and social aspects of adolescents.

This study is designed to explore the influence of multimodal texts on user perception and behavior on social media. From the results of the research that has been carried out, the novelty offered in the study of self-representation through multimodal texts is that researchers can describe the role of multimodal texts in increasing the critical reflection of social media users as a tool for self-representation. In addition, various types of social media can be used as a tool to freely express their various critical reflections. By understanding the function and impact of multimodal texts, the results of this study are expected.

In the context of the use of social media by adolescents, several problems arise related to self-representation and how they understand and evaluate the impact of the image they build on social media. These issues include:

1. **Mismatch between Real Identity and Digital Identity**  
Many teens feel the need to conform to the standards that are popular on social media. This often encourages them to display a version of themselves that may be different from their real identity. How does this mismatch affect their self-perception and how do they understand its long-term impact on self-confidence and social relationships?
2. **The Influence of Social Trends and Pressure in the Formation of Self-Identity**  
Trends on social media often have a big influence on how teenagers choose to present themselves. This factor raises questions about the extent to which these trends shape adolescents' authentic identities and how much social pressure influences decision-making about how to express themselves.
3. **The Psychological Impact of Self-Representation Constructed on Social Media**  
Lack of authentic self-representation can trigger a variety of psychological problems, such as low self-esteem, social anxiety, and feelings of dissatisfaction. How does the representation constructed through these multimodal texts affect the psychological condition of adolescents, especially related to self-perception and social acceptance?
4. **Lack of Awareness of the Long-Term Effects of Self-Representation in the Media**  
Teens often don't realize how the self-representation they make on social media can have long-term consequences, both personally and socially. This raises questions about the extent of their awareness of the risks and how they reflect on the possible impacts in the future.
5. **The Need for Critical Reflection on Self-Understanding and Representation on Social Media**  
There are still many teenagers who cannot reflect critically on the self-image they build on social media. How can they better understand and evaluate their choices regarding self-representation on social media, and do they realize the importance of maintaining a balance between self-authenticity and social demands on social media?

## 2. Literature Review

### Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is a very important concept in the world of education. This concept emphasizes the need for adolescents to reflect deeply on their experiences, decisions, and practices from various perspectives (Lau, 2024; Reid et al., 2023). Critical reflection involves a thorough examination of events and experiences with a focus on understanding and reasoning behind decisions made (Philp-Clark & Grieshaber, 2024). This process aims to foster a critical attitude. In the context of education, critical reflection is often integrated into the curriculum to encourage adolescents to think critically about their processes (Veum et al., 2023). These activities can be facilitated through a variety of methods, including reflective journals or group discussions. These practices can encourage a collaborative learning environment so that from various perspectives it can improve the understanding of adolescents. For this reason, this critical reflection can be used as an important tool for educators to make changes or innovations in increasing the critical power of adolescents (Miftah et al., 2024). One form of critical reflection of adolescents is through self-representation.

### Self-Representation

Self-representation encompasses various dimensions, especially in the context of psychology, social media, and academic writing (Lima et al., 2024). Self-representation in the context of psychology deals with self-awareness and the cognitive processes involved in individuals perceiving and presenting themselves (Kosmanou & Vassilaki, 2023). Self-representation in the context of social media is often manifested through online self-presentation and self-disclosure (Veum et al., 2024). Online communication differs significantly from face-to-face interactions, leading to debates about whether individuals express their true selves or curate an ideal version of themselves (Hendraswara et al., 2021; Hoose & Rosenbohm, 2024). Key characteristics of online communication, such as anonymity and audience feedback, can influence whether users engage in self-disclosure or strategically manage their self-presentation (Zestanakis, 2023). Self-representation in an academic context not only conveys ideas but also represents themselves through their writings (Kuhi et al., 2012). The way writers position themselves in their writing can affect the acceptance of their work and their credibility in the academic community (Gakahu, 2024). Based on these three contexts in presenting themselves, the context in social media is the most widely used by the millennial generation.

#### **Multimodal Text**

Multimodal is a term used by a person to communicate in different ways at the same time (Herman, 2013). The use of multimodal text not only enriches the communication experience, but can also affect the audience's perception and attitude. Research shows that visual elements are often more eye-catching than text alone, and can affect the interpretation of messages (Meyer et al., 2018). In addition, the diversity of multimodal texts can improve the ability to listen to and understand information and encourage greater engagement from the audience (Wanselin et al., 2022).

#### **Social Media**

Social media has become the main platform for adolescents to express themselves, interact with friends, and form identities (Machmiah, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020). Multimodal text that combines images, videos, text, and other elements becomes an important tool for self-expression on social media (Lai, 2024; Veum et al., 2023). This use of multimodal texts allows adolescents to convey richer and more complex messages that reflect different aspects of their identity (Pan et al., 2024; Sobocinski et al., 2024). However, self-expression in multimodal texts on social media is not necessarily by reality. Young people are often under social pressure to display an ideal and perfect self-image, which can lead to identity crises and psychological problems (Maiorani, 2024). Eisenlauer's (2013) research that exposure to ideal body image on social media can have a negative impact on the body image and psychological well-being of adolescents. In addition, research conducted by Chua & Chang (2016) highlighted that excessive use of social media can lead to negative social comparisons and lower life satisfaction. In this context, it is important to think critically about how the younger generation expresses themselves through multimodal texts on social media (Lau, 2024). This critical examination includes the motivations behind the choice of representation, the psychological impact of such self-expression, and how media literacy is essential for understanding and overcoming the social pressures faced by young generations (Miftah et al., 2024). Digital devices and personal data are often closely integrated into the lives of adolescents. Personal data blurs social and cultural boundaries, crosses private and public domains, and shapes people's conceptions of themselves, education, careers, relationships with others, and understanding of social processes (Gorea, 2021).

### **3. Methodology**

Social media has become the main platform for adolescents to express themselves, interact with friends, and form identities (Machmiah, 2019; Zheng et al., 2020). Multimodal text that combines images, videos, text, and other elements becomes an important tool for self-expression on social media (Lai, 2024; Veum et al., 2023). This use of multimodal texts allows adolescents to convey richer and more complex messages that reflect different aspects of their identity (Pan et al., 2024; Sobocinski et al., 2024). However, self-expression in multimodal texts on social media is not necessarily by reality. Young people are often under social pressure to display an ideal and perfect self-image, which can lead to identity crises and psychological problems (Maiorani, 2024). Eisenlauer's (2013) research that exposure to ideal body image on social media can hurt the body image and psychological well-being of adolescents. In addition, research conducted by Chua & Chang (2016) highlighted that excessive use of social media can lead to negative social comparisons and lower life satisfaction. In this context, it is important to think critically about how the younger generation expresses themselves through multimodal texts on social media (Lau, 2024). This critical examination includes the motivations behind the choice of representation, the psychological impact of such self-expression, and how media literacy is essential for understanding and overcoming the social pressures faced by young generations (Miftah et al., 2024). Digital devices and personal data are often closely integrated into the lives of adolescents. Personal data blurs social and cultural boundaries, crosses private and public domains, and shapes people's conceptions of themselves, education, careers, relationships with others, and understanding of social processes (Gorea, 2021).

This research is descriptive qualitative research concerning the opinion of Moleong (2014:6) which aims to understand the phenomena experienced by the research subjects such as behavior, views, and self-motivation conveyed through written descriptions or images. Data collection is through three ways: (1) direct observation, i.e. observing content directly through social media platforms, (2) screenshots and documentation, i.e. taking screenshots of relevant content as references and evidence, and (3) field notes, i.e. making additional notes about context or observations that are not covered in the observation form. The instruments used are observation sheets and documentation. Data analysis and interpretation are carried out after

coding to identify patterns, themes, or relationships. The interpretation of the results of the analysis is carried out to answer research questions and evaluate how the results relate to existing theories or literature.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Result

This study aims to determine the use of multimodal texts in adolescent self-representation on social media. The subjects in this study are teenagers at the junior high school level with data analysis in this study using the content analysis method, the first stage carried out by the researcher is to collect data and code based on the provisions that have been made.

#### A. Self-representation of personal identity

Self-representation of personal identity on social media includes the way individuals (in this case, adolescents) shape and convey their self-image based on their personal and internal aspects. It involves how they perceive themselves and how they want others to see them. The analysis of self-representation at this stage is based on the findings presented by adolescents on TikTok and Instagram accounts which contain self-representation of self-identity, including interests and hobbies, achievements or aspirations, and self-appearance. The following self-representation of personal identity consists of:

##### 1. Personal identity (IP)



Figure 1 Personal identity regarding interests and hobbies

In the image above, the teenager displays his personal identity in terms of hobbies. It can be seen that the teenager has an interest in the hobby, namely playing football. This can be seen from the upload of the teenager who appeared to be on the field and wearing the number six football shirt. With the caption on the upload, he shows his confidence in his hobbies, building his personal identity in the digital world through his favorite hobbies.

##### 2. Personal identity regarding personal achievements or aspirations



Figure 2. Personal identity regarding achievements and aspirations

In the picture above, it shows the achievements and aspirations or ideals of adolescents. Picture 2, depicts her desire to become a female policeman, coupled with the information in the upload, which explains that this teenager wants to prove that she can become a female policeman to all social media users. Meanwhile, picture 3 uploads his achievement as a flag raiser in the

moment of commemoration of Indonesia's independence day which he captured with the local village head. The achievements and goals uploaded in pictures 2 and 3 build the personal identity of teenagers on social media because it is a personal strength that distinguishes them from other teenagers.

**3. Personal identity regarding self-appearance**



**Figure 3:** Personal identity regarding self-appearance

***(I still love you today, even after your departure yesterday. Your love is still behind here, every process that I went through by myself without you until now has never forgotten you in the slightest, losing you in my life hurts until I finally realize that everything is over).*** In the image above, building his identity on social media by uploading his photos coupled with filters makes this teenager look very attractive to those who see him. Some people who are confident in what they have will display it as a strength or special characteristic of themselves that others do not have. The teenager seems to like the world of beauty at a young age. Feelings and Emotions (PE).

**4. Expressions of happiness or joy**



**Figure 4:** Expressions of happiness

**(Thank you, teacher, the teacher remembered clearly when we were still innocent you accompanied our days in grade VIII, taught with patience guided us with sincerity, the day changed so quickly these three years will always remember your advice so that we are safe in the hereafter. My teacher, forgive us for always spoiling ourselves, forgive us for hurting our hearts, forgive our mischiefs, thank you for your patience and care to guide us until now, your services do not forget thank you, teacher).**

In the picture above, he expresses his happiness for the graduation he has achieved. This expression can be seen from the upload containing a gratitude poem conveyed by the account owner to the teacher who guided him during the education period. This upload is representative of the happy moments that teenagers can capture on their social media accounts.

## 5. Expressions of stress or anxiety



**Figure 5:** Expression of concern

### **(It turns out that living without a biological father is sick)**

In the picture above, you can see a teenager who feels worried about his life. He is a teenager who lives without a father. He revealed that he felt using multimodal text in the form of photos with the caption that living without a father was painful. This upload is one of the ways teenagers use social media to convey the feelings they are experiencing.

## 6. Expressions about general feelings



**Figure 6.** The general expression of feeling

### **(Every day is a new opportunity to learn and grow better than ever)**

The picture above illustrates the everyday feelings that teenagers feel. Describes his very inspiring personality on social media through uploads containing multimodal text in the form of motivational words for him to always learn and develop every day. Through this upload, it is hoped that all who see can be motivated to always take advantage of the opportunities that come every day to continue to learn better than the previous day.

## B. Social Interaction (IS)

### 1. Social interaction with friends



**Figure 7.** Social interaction with friends

***(Friends Like cocoons, always there is Together in joys and sorrows still together)***

In the image above, she re-uploaded a photo of her with her peers. This upload gives the impression of good social interaction between the account owner and friends. It can be seen that the account owner is taking a group photo after learning at school is over. Indirectly, this builds character in social media so that account owners are easy to interact with.

2. Social interaction with family



**Figure 8. Social interaction with family**

***(My nephew is cute, his adorable behavior makes everyone fascinated by his behavior)***

The upload above depicts the account owner who has a close relationship with his family, namely his nephew. When some teenagers who use social media become too lazy to interact, they upload their togetherness with their nephews on their accounts. This gives a positive impression related to the closeness of being with family for those who see it on social media.

3. Social interaction with a group or community



**Figure 9.:Social interaction with the group**

***Earth is the third closest planet to the sun which is the densest planet and the fifth largest of the eight planets in the Solar System. Earth is also the largest of the four planets, also called the world or "Blue Planet"***

The upload above is an invitation made to all social media users who see it. This shows that there is an interaction built into social media to be carried out together with the aim of protecting and protecting the earth. This teenager uses multimodal texts in the form of visuals and texts to build a very positive identity of himself in his personal account.



## C. Performance and Achievement

### 1. Academic achievement



Figure 10 Academic Achievement

**(Every small step you take right now will bring you closer to your goal. Never stop to step forward into deadpan, never stop to learn, because life always gives new lessons)**

The upload above describes the achievements of teenagers in their victory in the competition organized by the school in the context of the 22nd anniversary of SMPN 4 Terisi. Teenagers who feel proud of the achievements that have been achieved will not hesitate to capture the moment, including on their social media accounts. One of the goals of teenagers uploading achievements on their accounts is to build their character or characteristics so that they are easily recognized by the public.

### 2. Project or Task Milestones



Figure 11. Project or Task Achievement

The image above shows the activities that teenagers are doing that are uploaded. It can be seen that the account owner is completing his tasks outside the house, he captured the activity with photos and added music for a wider audience reach. She uses social media well by uploading positive activities. This indicates that teenagers are good at using and utilizing social media.



### 3. Achievements of Extracurricular Activities



**Figure 12.** Extracurricular activity achievements

The picture above shows an activity held by the school in extracurricular activities. *uploaded a video of herself splitting stones using both hands with her martial arts. He wants to show all social media users his intelligence in extracurricular activities. This is a special attraction for those who see it as well as a pride for the owner of the account.*

#### 4.2 Discussion

Self-representation of personal identity on social media includes the way individuals (in this case, adolescents) shape and convey their self-image based on their personal and internal aspects. It involves how they perceive themselves and how they want others to see them. Most of the findings show that adolescents build identities on social media through interests, interests, and hobbies. They try to display their favorite activities to form their character on social media.

Self-representation of feelings and emotions on social media involves the way adolescents, convey and express their emotional state through digital platforms. This includes how they describe their feelings, how they seek support or understanding from others, and how they manage their emotional responses on social media. The findings show that adolescents convey their feelings and emotions through their poems and rhymes.

Self-representation related to social interaction on social media includes how individuals, in this case adolescents, present themselves in the context of social relationships and interactions with others. It involves how they convey their self-image through the content they share, how they interact with others, and how they respond and shape their identities in a digital social environment. The results of the study showed that some adolescents showed social interaction on social media through uploads such as an invitation to always maintain the environment and the atmosphere of distributing report cards in class. Teenagers who upload such things are one of their ways to build their social identity by highlighting the interaction process that occurs in their lives.

Self-assessment of achievement plays a key role in shaping an individual's identity and self-esteem. Individuals who feel satisfied with their achievements tend to have higher self-esteem and feel more confident. Conversely, those who feel their accomplishments are inadequate may experience a decline in self-confidence and self-esteem. Individuals who have a positive view of their achievements are more likely to develop greater aspirations and show higher motivation in achieving their next goals. This emphasizes the importance of a positive attitude towards achievement as a driving factor in achieving further success.

#### 5. Conclusion

This research reveals that adolescents use social media to reveal and share their identities through various forms of content. This research provides important insights into how adolescents strive to build a self-image that fits their personal lives, as well as how they manage and display their feelings on social media. Based on the discussion of the research results, this study produced several findings that can be summarized in the form of conclusions, adolescents build their identity on social media by highlighting various aspects of their lives, such as positive social relationships, daily activities related to hobbies, and achievements in something. They choose a narrative that combines an ideal self-image with everyday experiences. In building an ideal self-image, they display it through visual forms and texts. These images and texts can create their own opinions for those who read them. Images often highlight visual elements of self-image, while text provides emotional and cognitive context. There are common patterns in the way adolescents present themselves, such as emphasizing happiness, achievement, and personal pleasure, which reflect their efforts to build a positive and accepted self-image among their peers.

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