



# Analysis of Cultural Identity among Generation Z in the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung Community through Instagram

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to analyze how Generation Z members of the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung (GPL) Community construct and represent their cultural identity through the social media platform Instagram. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, Instagram content observation, and visual documentation. The study is guided by Cultural Identity Theory and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory. The findings reveal that the cultural identity of GPL members is shaped through five key dimensions: (1) existence and self-actualization, (2) social and cultural representation, (3) social connection, (4) personal branding and digital aesthetics, and (5) motivations behind digital identity construction. The results indicate that Instagram is not merely a platform for visual communication, but a strategic space for youth to actively and creatively negotiate cultural identity. Social media serves as a crucial arena for Generation Z in building personal and collective identity in the midst of digital culture development.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural Identity, Generation Z, Instagram, Representation, Community.*

## Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies over the past two decades has profoundly transformed human interaction, communication patterns, and expressions of identity. Generation Z, those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s represents the first generation to grow up entirely in a digitally connected world (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009; Prelnsky, 2001). Often referred to as “digital natives,” members of this generation have been exposed to smartphones, tablets, and social media platforms from an early age, making digital communication a core part of their social experience (Ito, 2013; Yakob, 2009).

This generation's proximity to technology shapes not only their communication styles but also the ways in which they form and present their cultural and social identities. Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular group and the expression of shared values, beliefs, and practices (Barker & Jane, 2016; Hall, 2015). In the digital era, such identity formation is no longer restricted to physical environments such as family, education, or peer groups but extends significantly into virtual spaces, especially through social media interaction (Deogracias, 2015; Leurs, 2015).

Among the social platforms widely used by Generation Z, Instagram has emerged as a dominant space for identity performance and representation. Its visual-based features

such as photos, videos, captions, and stories, offer users an expressive medium to construct and communicate their identities, both personal and collective (Markman, 2012; Marwick, 2013). As of 2021, Instagram had over 85 million users in Indonesia, making it one of the most widely accessed platforms in Southeast Asia (Wearesocial, 2021). This digital saturation has rendered Instagram not just a tool for socializing but also a space for active cultural narration and social participation (Abidin, 2016; Boyd & Marwick, 2011).

A notable example of this phenomenon in a local context is the **Gebyar Pelajar Lampung (GPL)** youth community in Indonesia. This organization consists of 53 active members aged 17 to 25 and is engaged in educational, social, and cultural initiatives. The community leverages Instagram as its primary platform to showcase activities, spread cultural values, and build a strong digital identity. Preliminary research conducted in May 2025 indicates that 45 out of 53 members are active Instagram users surpassing usage rates for WhatsApp (42), TikTok (33), Facebook (10), and Twitter (4). This clearly demonstrates the strategic role Instagram plays in the digital existence of young people, particularly in shaping cultural identities.

This research seeks to understand how members of Generation Z in the GPL community utilize Instagram to represent their cultural identity. Previous studies have suggested that social media platforms enable performative and symbolic identity expression, allowing users to carefully curate content that reflects both personal values and group affiliations (Boyd & Marwick, 2011; Christanti & Cahyani, 2022). In many cases, this representation extends beyond individual identity to include collective self-presentation, underscoring the shared values and goals of the community (Buckingham, 2007; Leurs, 2015).

By analyzing how Instagram is employed by GPL members as a site for cultural representation, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of identity construction among digitally active youth. It is expected to contribute both theoretically by enriching literature on digital media and youth culture and practically, by offering insights into digital literacy and the preservation of local cultural identities in contemporary Indonesia.

## Literature Review

### 1. Cultural Identity Theory

In today's digital era, platforms like Instagram have transformed into key spaces for youth to construct and express their cultural identity. Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is deeply engaged with digital communication. As digital natives, they actively use Instagram to reflect their personal and collective cultural values in visual form. According to (Christanti & Cahyani, 2022), Generation Z expresses identity through aesthetic choices such as photo arrangements, captions, and symbolic representations that reflect their social, religious, or cultural values.

(Manovich, 2016) emphasizes that visual representation in social media is not merely aesthetic but functions as a strategic narrative tool. Visuals such as clothing, ethnic patterns, local settings, and symbolic gestures serve as cultural markers curated to express identity. Likewise, (Gunawan & Mulyana, 2021) suggest that

digital communication style, including language, emojis, and hashtags, helps reflect group belonging and identity.

## 2. Representation Theory

Stuart Hall's theory of representation argues that meaning is not reflected, but constructed through language, symbols, and discourse. Representation in media plays a central role in shaping how cultural identities are communicated and understood (Hall et al., 2024). Hall introduces three approaches to representation: reflective, intentional, and constructionist, with the latter viewing meaning as a product of social interaction and cultural codes.

Instagram content such as captions, reels, and stories become a site where users consciously build identity through curated visuals. (Andriani & Putri, 2023) in their study of Citayam Fashion Week show that symbolic expression in youth subcultures becomes a tool of affirmation and resistance. Similarly, (Ayuanda et al., 2024) uses Hall's theory to explain how films and media content reconstruct cultural symbols and challenge existing narratives.

Representation theory provides a framework for analyzing how Generation Z in the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung community use Instagram to produce cultural narratives visually and symbolically in alignment with their social roles and values.

## Methodology

### 1. Type and Approach of Research

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The purpose is to explore in depth how Generation Z members of the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung community construct and represent their cultural identity through Instagram. This approach enables the researcher to understand the meaning behind visual symbols, narratives, and expressions shared in the digital space. As stated by Sugiyono (2021), qualitative research emphasizes meaning, context, and interpretation of social phenomena from the perspective of the research subjects.

### 2. Research Location and Time

The research was conducted in Bandar Lampung, specifically focusing on the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung (GPL) community. The community is known for its active engagement in social, educational, and cultural activities among students and youth. Data collection was carried out from December 2024 to July 2025, with the main research activities occurring between March and June 2025. The main location of observation and interviews was at the GPL community base, located on Jl. Mata Intan No.42, Segala Mider, Bandar Lampung.

### 3. Data Collection Techniques

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and digital documentation of Instagram content. The informants were selected purposively based on criteria such as age (17–25 years), active participation in the community, and frequent use of Instagram. Observations were made on both personal and official Instagram accounts of community members, focusing on visual content, captions, and interaction patterns. Documentation included screenshots and field notes of Instagram posts relevant to cultural identity construction.

Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, digital archives, and previous research related to cultural identity, youth communication, and social media studies.

#### **4. Data Validity**

To ensure the validity of data, this study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was done by comparing information from different informants, while technique triangulation involved comparing data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Researcher reflexivity and continuous field engagement were also employed to enhance credibility.

#### **5. Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, consisting of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Data reduction involved selecting relevant information related to cultural identity representation. Data display was carried out through categorization and thematic grouping based on five identity dimensions. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the findings using Cultural Identity Theory and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory.

### **Result and Discussion**

This study found that members of Generation Z in the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung (GPL) community represent their cultural identity through five major dimensions: (1) existence and self-actualization, (2) social and cultural representation, (3) social connection, (4) personal branding and digital aesthetics, and (5) motives behind digital identity. These dimensions reflect how youth negotiate their identities in digital spaces through visual, symbolic, and narrative forms on Instagram.

#### **1. Existence and Self-Actualization**

Instagram serves as a platform for self-expression and recognition. For GPL members, visibility on Instagram is closely tied to a desire for acknowledgment not only from peers but from the larger social network. Posts that highlight participation in events, social action, or creative initiatives are designed not only to inform but also to affirm one's presence and contribution.

Several informants emphasized that posting on Instagram makes them feel productive and useful. Through curated captions and visuals, they construct a narrative of themselves as youth who are active, inspirational, and socially aware. This aligns with Maslow's concept of self-actualization, where individuals seek to achieve their potential and find meaning through contribution. On Instagram, such aspirations are made public and visual.

#### **2. Social and Cultural Representation**

Beyond individual performance, GPL members actively represent shared values and cultural narratives. Many posts display symbols of togetherness, community engagement, local traditions, and educational campaigns. For instance,

wearing batik in group photos, conducting educational seminars, or engaging in environmental actions become powerful symbols of their collective identity.

This reflects Hall's representation theory, which views identity not as fixed but as constructed through cultural symbols and shared meanings. GPL members are aware that their posts contribute to how their community is perceived. By representing themselves as educated, collaborative, and culturally grounded youth, they project a positive cultural image that both aligns with local values and challenges stereotypes about Gen Z being apathetic or individualistic.

### **3. Social Connection and Digital Networking**

Instagram also functions as a connective infrastructure that supports relational identity. Members frequently tag each other, comment positively, and use Instagram's features to maintain constant communication. The social interaction doesn't end at posting it extends into daily conversations, story responses, and even planning of offline events.

Several members reported that Instagram became a bridge to find like-minded individuals or to reconnect with friends who share similar interests in activism or education. Through hashtags and shared reposts, they form an imagined digital community that transcends geographic boundaries. This confirms that identity is not only personal but relational shaped through interaction with others.

### **4. Personal Branding and Visual Aesthetics**

Members of GPL consciously engage in visual self-presentation. Their Instagram feeds are arranged aesthetically, with consistent color schemes, motivational captions, and structured storytelling. The way they appear in photos whether smiling in action, leading events, or posing with a book reflects their intentional effort to craft a personal brand.

Some members choose to highlight their leadership roles or volunteering experiences; others promote their involvement in public speaking, competitions, or collaborations with external communities. This reflects the performative nature of identity, as theorized by Goffman, where individuals tailor their image to align with expectations of their audience while also reinforcing internal values.

The GPL community even encourages its members to create visual templates for events or use standardized hashtags and branding tools, indicating a collective strategy in building both individual and community image.

### **5. Digital Identity Motives**

The motivation behind the use of Instagram for identity expression varies across individuals, but several core themes emerged: (a) the search for belonging and community recognition; (b) the desire to stand out and appear unique; and (c) the drive to build a future-oriented public image.

Some use Instagram to escape from daily stress and find comfort in digital validation. Others consider it a space to prepare for future career opportunities, where their feed acts as a portfolio of social engagement and personality branding.

Many view Instagram as a hybrid space personal, social, cultural, and professional, where their offline and online identities converge.

These motives indicate that digital identity is not accidental but strategic. It is shaped by internal aspirations, community values, and platform-specific dynamics. Instagram, in this case, becomes a modern cultural stage.

## 6. Theoretical Integration

From the perspective of Cultural Identity Theory, the construction of identity is a dynamic process where individuals continuously negotiate meaning through communication and cultural practice. The GPL community, through their Instagram activities, actively participates in this construction by embedding cultural, educational, and ethical values into their digital representation.

Using Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, we understand that identity is not merely shown but produced constructed through visual codes, symbols, language, and media. The content shared by GPL members represents not just who they are, but also how they want to be understood. Identity becomes performative, dialogical, and mediated.

Instagram functions as both a mirror and a stage a place where youth construct narratives that blend modernity, locality, and digital fluency. Thus, the GPL case illustrates that cultural identity in Gen Z is fluid, hybrid, and deeply shaped by both communal values and digital infrastructures.

## Discussion

The results of this study show that the formation of cultural identity among Generation Z in the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung community is not a passive process, but one that is constructed actively through the use of digital media, particularly Instagram. This platform allows young people to express themselves visually, engage with their peers, and present values that are meaningful both personally and socially.

Instagram is used not only to share moments but also to build narratives. The GPL community members use features such as posts, stories, captions, and hashtags to convey their identities as active, socially aware, and culturally connected youth. The blending of personal content with community-related values highlights the dual function of Instagram as both a personal and collective space.

One of the significant aspects is how identity is no longer fixed or rooted solely in traditional categories like ethnicity or family, but also in digital performance. Members can shift between roles such as student, volunteer, or organizer depending on the context. This flexibility allows for multiple expressions of self to coexist within a single profile.

The visual consistency seen in their accounts shows how image, layout, and content are curated with intention. Personal branding is not accidental; it reflects how young people today shape how they want to be seen. At the same time, the sense of belonging to a community is maintained through shared themes, group documentation, and support shown through interaction.

However, it is also important to note that not all members express themselves equally. Some may be more confident or skilled in using digital tools, while others may remain passive or feel less visible. These differences reflect how digital identity is influenced by access, confidence, and participation.

Overall, the Instagram practices of GPL members demonstrate that Generation Z is capable of building cultural identity in dynamic, creative, and collaborative ways. Their digital identity is not separate from real life it is an extension of their values, actions, and social roles, shaped by the media environment they live in.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that Instagram serves as a dynamic and influential digital space for the representation and construction of cultural identity among Generation Z, with a particular focus on members of the Gebyar Pelajar Lampung community. As digital natives, these young individuals have integrated social media into their daily lives not only for communication and entertainment but also as a platform to express who they are, what they value, and how they connect with their cultural roots and community. Through the deliberate use of Instagram's visual and interactive features such as curated photo posts, reels, stories, captions, and hashtags community members consciously craft digital personas that reflect both individual uniqueness and shared collective identity. These expressions often integrate elements of local culture, social engagement, and youth empowerment, demonstrating how digital platforms can act as tools for cultural preservation and narrative-building in the modern era. Instagram, in this context, functions not merely as a social networking site but as a performative and symbolic space where identity is continually negotiated, shaped, and displayed in response to both local and global influences. The findings of this research underscore the growing importance of digital spaces in shaping how young people perceive themselves and their cultural affiliations in a hyper-connected world. As such, it is recommended that youth organizations, educators, and cultural institutions develop programs and initiatives that encourage critical and creative use of social media as a means of promoting cultural awareness, identity affirmation, and civic participation. Future research should explore how different digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, or even emerging virtual and immersive technologies play a role in identity representation among youth across diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Additionally, cross-regional or international comparative studies could offer deeper insight into how geographical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts influence the ways in which young people construct and express their identities in digital spaces. By expanding the scope of inquiry, future studies can contribute to a more holistic understanding of digital culture and its impact on youth identity formation in the 21st century.

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