



The Phenomenon of Purchasing Instagram Blue Tick Among Students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University in Cirebon

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Abstract: *The presence of the Meta Verified feature on Instagram shifts the paradigm of digital authenticity from organic reputation to an economy-based symbol. This study aims to analyze the motivations of students at Gunung Jati University (UGJ), the social meaning, and the social validation obtained through the purchase of blue ticks. The research method used is descriptive qualitative. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with four informants, participant observation of account activities, and a study of documentation sourced from scientific journals and textbooks to strengthen the validity of the findings. The results of the study show that the informants' motivation was driven by the processing of impressions to build visual credibility. From a communication perspective, the active use of the blue tick plays a role in creating self-identity in the digital public sphere. In addition, possession of the verification symbol triggers an increase in digital literacy, whereby users become more careful and selective when managing content. Technical and social validation has been proven to improve students' self-concept as it brings social status recognition. The research conclusion confirms that the blue tick for students is a commodity of prestige that provides symbolic satisfaction and legitimizes their position in both digital and real social stratification.*

Keyword: *Blue_Tick; Identity; Digital_Literacy; Self_Concept; Instagram*

Introduction

Social media is currently an essential component of young people's daily lives, particularly college students, as it acts as a tool for communication, entertainment, and development of a social identity. Being among the most often used sites, Instagram gives users a chance to show their self-image using visual material including pictures, videos, and tools including stories and reels. The ease and accessibility this site provides have also fueled the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) syndrome, a worry that develops when one feels left behind by the direction of information or trends in the digital world ([Jannah & Alwi, 2023](#)). ([Widirahayu & Husna, 2024](#)) discovered that FoMO encourages students to stay active on social media. The study ([Nurfalalah et al., 2021](#)), claims that pupils construct their identities on social media by a process of digital portrayal that mirrors their desired perception by others. This identity is impacted by social interactions and the meanings created inside the digital sphere in addition to mirroring their inner character. As a result, social media has become a symbolic venue where students may create their presence and self-image depending on the societal ideals to which they aspire rather than only being a means of communication.

The phenomenon of students purchasing blue checkmarks indicates a shift in values and social orientation in the digital age. Digital emblems like the blue checkmark have become symbols of social prestige in contemporary culture, taking the place of authenticity (Bakti et al., 2019). As per (Suciptaningsih, 2017), Consumptive behavior on social media is part of a self-presentation strategy that people use to build an ideal image in the eyes of the public. Buying blue checkmarks among college students signals a change in ideas about communication methods and symbolic consumption in the digital world. Symbols such as the blue checkmark in social media culture of prestige, reputation, and visibility. (Bakti et al., 2019) explains that in modern consumer society, individuals are more driven to consume symbols based on their inherent social meaning, rather than solely on their utility. In line with this view, (Suciptaningsih, 2017) interpreting consumption on social media as part of a self-presentation strategy to build an ideal image in the eyes of the digital public. The urgency of this research lies in the need for a deeper understanding of the motivations, social meanings, and forms of validation that students gain through purchasing the blue checkmark.

Research on digital symbols and social validation has been widely conducted, but most of it still focuses on public accounts or influencers. (Kris Alfian, 2024) argues that the blue checkmark serves as a symbol of social recognition that creates a hierarchy of status in the digital realm. Meanwhile,, (Pratama, 2023) emphasizes the role of the blue checkmark as an indicator of information credibility in the post-truth era. However, these studies have not yet focused much on the context of college students as ordinary users who are also involved in the practice of purchasing this feature. On the other hand, research conducted by (Nurfalah et al., 2021) reveals that students use social media to construct and present their identities in accordance with the social roles they aspire to. However, the study did not address how the formation of digital identity can evolve into consumerist behavior, such as the purchase of validation symbols like the blue checkmark. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by exploring the motivations, meanings, and forms of social validation underlying students' decisions to purchase the blue checkmark on Instagram.

Based on the above description, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of purchasing the blue checkmark on Instagram among students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon, using a descriptive qualitative approach. The research objectives focus on exploring students' motivations for purchasing the blue checkmark feature as a form of self-representation in the digital space, identifying the social meanings that emerge after acquiring the feature, and analyzing the forms of social validation obtained after students possess this verification symbol. It is hoped that this research provide a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of motivation, the creation of social meaning, and the validation processes that take place in both real life and digital interactions. This will lay the groundwork for the development of more critical and reflective digital literacy in academic settings.

The change in social media sites' purpose toward the building of social identity has produced a new trend in consumer conduct, including the need to obtain recognition and validation from others. The debut of the blue checkmark (verified badge) on Instagram provides one of authenticity for public accounts, but after the introduction of the Meta Verified service, ordinary users can now access it by paying a subscription fee (Kris Alfian,

2024a). This occurrence shows how the meaning of authenticity has changed in the digital age, from something earned through reputation to something that may be “bought” via financial resources. Among learners, a fresh question has emerged: Is the purchase of the blue checkmark intended solely to secure an account, or does it also serve as a symbol of social recognition and digital presence? Based on initial observations, some students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon have shown interest in this feature as a means of self-expression and seeking social status in the virtual world. This study will focus on active UGJ students who regularly use Instagram and demonstrate engagement with the blue checkmark feature.

A study conducted by (Nurfalah, et al., 2021) A study on students’ self-identity models on social media indicates that Instagram is widely used by students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon. They present themselves through their profiles, profile statuses, Instagram Stories, frequently uploaded photos, posting objectives, photo captions, and the publication of social activities—all of which serve as expressions of their identity—and in turn, they receive support. The level of commitment and recognition from their environment ultimately results in their self-identity on Instagram being characterized as active students, with their presence recognized on Instagram and their self-confidence evident in their Instagram profiles, status updates, Stories, and posts about their community activities—all of which reinforce their existing self-identity as a manifestation of their self-concept. so that the outcome is that the model of self-identity in online social media is formed from self-presentation in the communication process. Consequently, a sense of self-confidence, character, and presence emerges on Instagram.

As a means of communication and social identity creation, social media has grown to be an essential part of students’ everyday life. Instagram is a well known website that allows users to use visual content to portray their self-image. The purchase of the blue checkmark, or the introduction of the Meta Verified service, signifies a change in the definition of authenticity in the digital realm from a reputation that is developed naturally to something that can be obtained by financial means. The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), a feeling of unease when one feels left behind by the flow of information of social changes in the digital world, has also emerged as a result of the accessibility and convenience provided by social media platforms. According to (Jannah & Alwi, 2023), FoMO is a type of social anxiety that causes people to continuously engage in online activities in order to avoid missing out on significant events. Additionally, (Widrahayu & Husna, 2024) discovered that college students’ increasing FoMO is associated with social comparison on Instagram, which drives them to be active in order to maintain their online presence. Theories of self-presentation and symbolic consumption in the creation of one’s online persona are connected to this phenomenon.

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The Meta Verified service, a monthly membership package that enables users to independently authenticate their account identities, officially facilitates the practice of buying the blue checkmark on Instagram. According to Meta's official policy, in order to verify that the account is an accurate portrayal of a real person, users must upload valid identification. Meta Verified provides a number of advantages in addition to authentication features, including enhanced account visibility in search results and comment areas, priority access to technical help, and account security against identity theft ([Zuckerberg, 2004](#)). This service shows that buying the blue checkmark has symbolic value as a sign of self-existence and credibility in addition to practical purposes. This is consistent with Baudrillard's theory of symbolic consumption, which holds that social identity and legitimacy in the digital public sphere are constructed through the usage of digital symbols. This situation has triggered symbolic consumption behavior among students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon in order to gain recognition and social status in the virtual world.

The theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon is based on one main theory and two supporting theories. First, the Social Media Theory from ([Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010](#)) yang mendefinisikan media sosial sebagai aplikasi berbasis internet yang memungkinkan penciptaan serta pertukaran konten buatan pengguna (user-generated content). Second, the Self-Presentation Theory from ([Leary & Kowalski, 1990](#)) explains that individuals consciously manage the image they project in order to gain social acceptance, with the blue checkmark serving as a tool to reinforce their digital persona. Third, the Theory of Symbolic Consumption from ([Jean Baudrillard, 1998](#)) emphasizes that modern consumption behavior is no longer oriented toward actual utility, but rather toward the symbolic meaning associated with it as a marker of status and self-identity.

Several previous studies have examined digital symbols and social validation, but the majority still focus primarily on public accounts or influencers. ([Kris Alfian, 2024](#)) highlights the role of the blue checkmark as a creator of status stratification, while ([Pratama, 2023](#)) view it as an indicator of the information's credibility. There is a research gap in that these studies have not yet focused much on the context of students as ordinary users who engage in the practice of purchasing verification features. Furthermore, the research ([Nurfalah et al., 2021](#)) Discussions regarding students' digital identities have not yet addressed how the formation of such identities evolves into symbolic consumer behavior through paid features. In line with the research's focus on the student context, ([Putri et al., 2023](#)) states that Instagram serves as a strategic space for students to shape their identities through symbolic interactions and visual representations. Social media is used to project an idealized self-image that reflects one's social position, status, and personality in the digital world. The findings support the notion that the formation of students' identities on

Instagram occurs consciously and continuously through the management of symbols and audience responses, rather than passively.

A study conducted by ([Nurfalah, et al., 2021](#)) A study on students' self-identity models on social media indicates that Instagram is widely used by students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon. Students present themselves through displays, agency, and reality via their profiles, profile statuses, Instagram Stories, uploaded photos, posting objectives, captions, and the publication of social activities as representations of themselves. Through these activities, students gain support, a sense of commitment, and recognition from their social circles. This, in turn, results in a self-identity on Instagram characterized by being an active student, having a recognizable presence, and demonstrating self-confidence. This identity can be seen in Instagram profiles, status updates, Instagram Stories, and posts about community activities that reinforce an existing self-concept. Thus, the model of self-identity in online social media is formed through self-presentation in the communication process, which ultimately fosters self-confidence, character, and the students' presence on Instagram.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the meanings and experiences of students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon regarding the phenomenon of purchasing blue checkmarks on Instagram. This approach focuses on an in-depth exploration of students' motivations, perceptions, and social behaviors in a digital context without involving statistical analysis. According to ([Moleong, 2019](#)) Qualitative research aims to understand individuals' behaviors and perspectives holistically in natural settings. In line with this, ([Naamy nazar, 2019](#)) emphasizes that descriptive qualitative research focuses on interpreting the meanings that emerge from the experiences of research participants.

The data sources for this study were students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon who had actively subscribed to the blue checkmark (Meta Verified) feature on Instagram for at least one month. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with a total of four primary informants chosen based on their direct experience in purchasing and using the blue checkmark feature. These informants were selected to ensure that the data obtained truly came from individuals who understood the purchase process, the use of the feature, and the symbolic meaning of the blue checkmark in social interactions on Instagram.

Data validity was assessed using source and method triangulation, member checks, and observational consistency ([Moleong, 2019; Naamy nazar, 2019](#)). Data analysis was performed using an interactive analysis model (Miles dan Huberman, 1994) which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. Data reduction was conducted by filtering important information from the interview and observation results that aligned with the research focus. The reduced data was then presented in narrative form and thematic tables to illustrate the relationships among categories such as purchase motivation, meaning of use, and forms of social validation. Conclusions were drawn simultaneously throughout the research process by referring to Social Media theory ([Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010](#)), Self-Presentation ([Leary & Kowalski, 1990](#)),

and Symbolic Consumption (Baudrillard, 1998) Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how students construct their self-image, seek social recognition, and negotiate their identity through digital symbols such as the blue checkmark on Instagram.

Result and Discussion

This study examines the phenomenon of purchasing the blue checkmark (Meta Verified) on Instagram among students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with four informants who had subscribed to the blue checkmark for at least one month. The research results are presented thematically based on three main research focuses, namely: (1) Motivation and impression management in the purchase of the blue checkmark, (2) Self-presentation strategies and digital interactions after obtaining the blue checkmark, and (3) The symbolic meaning of the blue checkmark, status, and social validation.

Student Motivation for Purchasing the Blue Checkmark Feature as a Form of Self-Representation

The motivation of students at Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati (UGJ) to use the Meta Verified feature serves as the starting point in the process of shaping their self-representation in the digital space. This stems from a desire to present a more distinctive visual identity so that they can control how others perceive their personal social media accounts. The active use of this blue checkmark helps students create a personal identity in the digital public sphere through the lens of communication.



Figure 1. Instagram Profile of a Verified Account @reizalzhara

Source :

<https://www.instagram.com/reizalzhara>,

31 December 2025

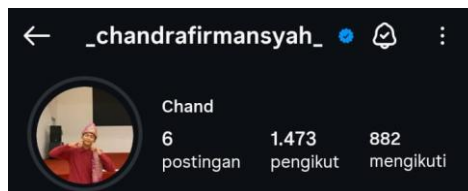


Figure 2. Instagram Profile of a Verified Account @_chandrafirmansyah_

Source :

https://www.instagram.com/_chandrafirmansyah_,

31 December 2025

This motivation often stems from a curiosity to compare one's personal account with those of public figures, noting that there is a visual difference in their accounts after adding that symbol to make them on par with influencers (Reizal Zahara, 2026). In addition to curiosity, credibility is a key factor; the presence of a blue checkmark significantly helps the account appear more official and trustworthy to other users (Tegar, 2026).

The results of the study indicate that students are motivated not just by the need for akun verification but also by the need to create a more credible online persona. According to (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) perspective on self-presentation theory, students uses impression management to create a positive perception in their social audience. In this way,

centang biru serves as a symbol of self-representation and social legitimacy in digital interactions.

The Social Implications of Instagram's Blue Checkmark Feature

With the blue checkmark, users see a new social reality. Researchers examined screenshots of the informant's activity and found that Instagram Story posts, which had previously been infrequent, increased.



Figure 3. Screenshot of the Informant's Instagram Story Activity @reizalzahara
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reizalzahara>, 19 Januari 2026

[Reizal Zahara](#) (2026) said he prefers to keep updating his personal posts and Instagram Stories after his account was verified. [Chandra](#) (2026) also feels a moral obligation to curate his content because he's receiving more public attention. This indicates that the verification symbol is not only used as a technical feature but also as a type of symbolic commodity that represents social standing in the digital world. According to (Baudrillard, 1998) symbolic consumption perspective, centang biru serves as a tanda prestise that encourages students to strengthen their own citra through increased activity and more disciplined content analysis. In this way, the use of verification symbols creates a performance technique that affects students digital communication. Forms of Social Validation Received by Students

The technical and social dimensions are the two primary ways that students get social approbation. From a communication standpoint, the positive acceptance that students receive from this affirmation might improve their self-concept.



Figure 4. Instagram Professional Dashboard/Insights @reizalzahara
Source : <https://www.instagram.com/reizalzahara>, 31 December 2025

From a technical standpoint, the use of the blue checkmark has proven effective in enhancing insights and expanding the account's reach through professional dashboard features. Reizal feels that this feature provides greater visibility and technical legitimacy, making him feel on par with public figures.

Socially, tangible validation comes from the overwhelming response from the audience and public figures. [Riffat](#) (2026) noticed a significant increase in engagement after receiving the blue checkmark. Initially, Riffat purchased the feature without a specific goal when it was first released. Later, she tried following the account of an influencer and comedian, Fico Fachriza, and to her surprise, she received an immediate response from Fico Fachriza, who even followed her personal account back. This indicates that the use of public figures is a kind of social legitimacy that strengthens the concept of self-students in the digital realm. According to the Looking Glass Self theory, which was developed by sociologist ([Charles Horton Cooley](#), 2022), an individual's understanding of themselves is based on other people's reactions and perceptions of their identities. Because of this, responses, which are follow-backs and direct interactions with public figures, are perceived as a type of response to the digital status of students.

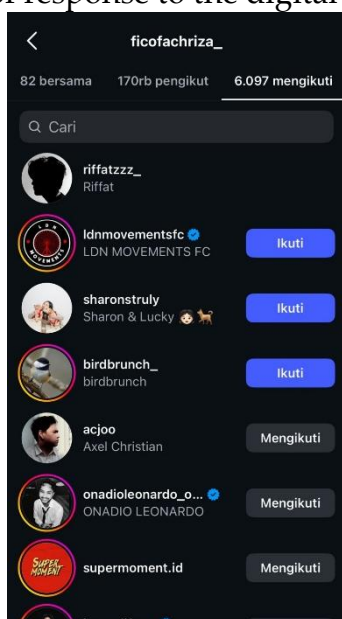


Figure 5. Proof of a follow-back from Fico Fachriza @riffatzzz_

Sumber :

https://www.instagram.com/riffatzzz_

31 December 2025



Figure 6. Evidence of interaction via DM @riffatzzz_

Sumber :

https://www.instagram.com/riffatzzz_

31 December 2025

[Riffat](#) (2026) added that this friends frequently made lighthearted remarks in response, such as referring to him as a "pretentious artist." This was taken as an acknowledgement that the audience had been successfully drawn in by the appearance of new accounts or followers who started paying attention to every post gave them a symbolic sense of fulfillment that strengthened their social status on campus and in the online community.

Discussion

Analysis of Motivation and Self-Representation from a Communication Perspective

According to research, deliberate attempts at impression control are strongly associated with the self-representations that students at Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati (UGJ) create. From a communication standpoint, students' active usage of the blue checkmark gives them a feeling of identity in the online public domain. This identification is a symbolic form that represents the user's social status rather than just a technical identifier. According to the Self-Presentation theory from (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) Students use the blue checkmark as a strategic tool to strengthen their digital persona so they stand out more than the average user.

The urge fit in with the profiles of influential people of public figures is what motivates this self-representation process. In order for their social media accounts to be comparable to those of prominent persons, they must have visual validity (Reizal Zahara, 2026). For students like Tegar (2026), the existence of this verification sign lends legitimacy, which is crucial since it makes their personal profiles seem more legitimate and reliable to other users. This drive, which stems from curiosity and the demand for legitimacy, shows how students use verification signals in nonverbal communication to affect other people's opinions. Therefore, using this feature is a calculated attempt to visibly confirm their identity in the eyes of their followers.

Digital Literacy and the Symbolic Meaning of Student Behavior

The informants' opinions on how to act and present themselves online were eventually influenced by the verification badges that were affixed to their Instagram profiles. Subscribing to this feature resulted in notable behavioural changes in the informants' everyday social media activities because of the social meaning associated with these symbols. From a communication standpoint, these behavioural shifts indicate a rise in digital literacy as the students started using the platform more carefully and selectively.

The blue checkmark is more than merely a status symbol or a security feature, according to the idea of symbolic consumption (Baudrillard, 1998). This is demonstrated by the idea of "performance Obligations," where students feel morally obligated to uphold the calibre of their work and improve the visual appeal of their accounts because they are conscious of the increased public attention. To ensure that the purchased sign is not wasted, increased activity is carried out, as demonstrated by Reizal Zahara's frequent revisions to posts and Instagram Stories (Reizal Zahara, 2026).

As a result, digital literacy in this context encompasses not just technological proficiency but also an understanding of the accountability that comes with sharing one's own picture. The blue checkmark is a status indicator for UGJ students, signifying a greater degree of prudence and digital discipline.

Social Validation and Self-Concept Enhancement Through Recognition Digital

The focus of the study changed to how the social environment and platform systems offer concrete recognition of the new identities that the informants receive from the response they get from

their audience, this acknowledgement of validation might improve pupils' self-concept from a communication standpoint. Is a powerful example of social validation. This exchange shows how the blue checkmark sign functions as a tool to validate pupils' social status and give them a sense of equality in the larger digital environment. Technically, this validation takes the form of more algorithmic visibility, and socially, it tke the form of direct user contact.

According to research, the process of creating technical validation through the Meta Verified feature is influenced by students' social presence in digital places. The concept that the blue checkmark is a way to achieve more exposure and technical credibility on par with public figures is communicated by the professional dashboard interface, which improves insights. The "Looking Glass Self," or symbolic interactionism theory, is especially pertinent in this context as it enables people to understand themselves in light of how other people react to them.

Although reactions from those around them sometimes take the form of satirical jokes such as the "pretentious" comment Riffat received this is actually interpreted as recognition that their verification badges have successfully captured the public's attention. As Reizal noted, the appearance of new accounts that started monitoring every post strengthened the informants' perception that they had achieved a greater degree of social validity. Students at UGJ gained "symbolic satisfaction" as a consewunce of this process, which greatly strengthened their sense of self and their place in the social hierarchy on campus and in the larger digital ecosystem.

Conclusion

According to resechr on students' reasons for buying the blue checkmark as self-representation tool, the informants' main goal is to mould their image so that it has visual credibility similiar to that of famous personalities. Students' self-identities in the digital public realm are formed in part by their active usage of the blue checkmark. This identity acts as a tactical tool to bolster their online reputation and offer visual credibility, giving other users the impression that their personal accounts are more reliable and legitimate.

An Informant's behaviour in the digital realm is altered when they have a verification bagde on their profile because of the social relvance of having this feature. From a communication standpoint, this behavioural shift suggests that students have a better grasp of digital literacy since they are handling their account activity with greater caution and selectivity. Due to a sense of moral obligation or performance accountability, students must maintain material quality and posting consistency in order to keep the paid prestige symbol relevant. Increased digital and communication obligations follow from this.

Students obtain both technical validation through platfrom algorithms and social recognition through interactions with their surroundings. Increased real world interactions mirror this, as students might receive responses including follow back from prominent personalities of influencers when they have a blue checkmark, which promotes equality in the digital sphere. From a communication standpoint, pupils' self-confidence has been shown to increase when they get positive feedback and recognition of their position. Public

reactions are still seen as a type of public attention that offers symbolic gratification, despite the fact that they can occasionally be caustic. In the end, this procedure gives the blue checkmark sign validity, securing pupils' places in both virtual and physical social hierarchies.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of digital communication research, particularly as it relates to students' self-image, symbolic consumption, and social recognition on social media platforms. This research also reinforces the understanding that digital verification symbols are not merely technical features, but rather elements of identity construction and social stratification in the virtual world. On the other hand, socially, the research findings demonstrate how crucial more reflective and critical digital literacy is among students, so that the use of digital symbols focuses not only on the pursuit of social recognition, but also on participation and responsibility in creating healthy digital communication.

This study has several limitations because it focused only on students at Swadaya Gunung Jati University (UGJ) in Cirebon and had a limited number of participants; therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized. Furthermore, this study only analyzes the experiences of Instagram users who have received the blue checkmark feature without comparing them to users of other social media platforms or different digital platforms. Therefore, it is hoped that future research can involve more informants and employ varied approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the verification badge phenomenon in the world of social media.

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