Jurnal Transformasi Humaniora

JTH, 9 (10), Oktober 2026
ISSN: 21155640

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE IN CONSTRUCTING DIGITAL IDENTITY: A PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVE

Chelsea Viyola[1], Fanny Dzihni Aulia Simamora[2], Alda Aura[3], Dinda Arziqa Hamdani[4]
Email: chelseaviyola871@gmail.com[1], fanny.simamura@gmail.com[2], aurarara889@gmail.com[3], ndaarziqahamdani@gmail.com [4]
Universitas Negeri Medan

Abstract: *The development of social media has transformed the way individuals communicate while simultaneously shaping and presenting their identities in digital spaces. In this context, language is no longer merely a means of conveying information, but also a medium for self-expression, image construction, and identity negotiation amid diverse social contexts and audiences. This study aims to explore the power of language in constructing digital identity from the perspective of the Philosophy of Language, with an emphasis on the experiences and meanings attributed by university students as social media users. This study employs a phenomenological qualitative approach involving active university students as participants who were purposively selected based on their experiences in using language on social media. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and digital document analysis involving posts or written forms of communication voluntarily provided by the participants. The data were analyzed thematically by considering the concepts of meaning, intention, context, interpretation, and digital identity construction. The findings reveal three main patterns: language as a form of self-representation and self-expression, negotiation between authentic identity and digital image, and tension between users' intentions and audience interpretations. These findings demonstrate that digital identity is not fixed, but is continuously constructed through language use, social context, and the responses of others. Theoretically, this study extends the application of the Philosophy of Language to the understanding of digital identity phenomena, while practically, it emphasizes the importance of digital literacy that is oriented not only toward technological use but also toward critical awareness of the meaning and social impact of language use*

Keywords: *Philosophy Of Language, Language, Digital Identity, Social Media, Phenomenology, Digital Literacy.*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary digital society, social media no longer functions merely as a means of communication. Social media has developed into a space in which individuals construct, express, negotiate, and even redefine their identities through language. Every post, caption, comment, username, hashtag, and online interaction can represent how individuals want to be seen and understood by others. For younger generations, particularly university students and

Generation Z, social media has become an inseparable part of everyday social life. They use language not only to convey information, but also to demonstrate their personalities, values, emotions, social relationships, and cultural identities.

In this context, language possesses considerable power in shaping how individuals understand themselves and how they are understood by others in digital spaces. This phenomenon can be observed through various forms of interaction on social media. Young people frequently choose particular words, expressions, emojis, slang, or languages to construct their self-image before digital audiences. For example, an individual may use formal English on LinkedIn to construct a professional identity,

while using informal Indonesian or slang on Instagram and TikTok to appear more relaxed, approachable, and relevant to their social environment. Many social media users also combine Indonesian and English in a single post as a form of self-expression. These linguistic choices demonstrate that digital identity is not something fixed. Instead, identity is continuously formed and constructed through language use and interaction with others.

From an individual perspective, the construction of digital identity may involve language choices made either consciously or unconsciously. A person may consider certain words before uploading a piece of writing because they are aware that language can influence how others perceive them. A simple caption, for example, can create an impression that someone is confident, humorous, intellectual, sad, or occupies a particular social position. However, the meaning of an expression is not always completely under the control of its author. Audiences may provide different interpretations of the language being used. This condition demonstrates that meaning is not only related to the words themselves, but also to the speaker's intention, context, and the interpretation of the message by its recipient.

This issue is strongly connected to the study of the Philosophy of Language. The Philosophy of Language examines fundamental issues concerning language, including meaning, reference, interpretation, speaker intention, and the relationship between language and reality. In digital communication, these issues become increasingly complex because interactions do not always occur directly. Language conveyed through a post may be read by audiences with different backgrounds, experiences, and social contexts. Consequently, the identity that an individual intends to construct through language may be understood differently by others. Therefore, digital identity construction cannot be separated from the processes of creating, negotiating, and interpreting meaning.

This topic has become increasingly important to study in the current digital era. From the perspective of the Philosophy of Language, several fundamental questions arise, such as whether language is capable of authentically representing an individual's identity, to what extent the meaning of a digital expression depends on the author's intention, and how context and audience interpretation influence the identity constructed through digital communication.

Based on this discussion, this study aims to explore the power of language in constructing digital identity through the perspective of the Philosophy of Language. The study focuses on how language choices in digital communication contribute to the processes of constructing, representing, and interpreting individual identity.

Theoritically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of research connecting the Philosophy of Language with contemporary phenomena concerning digital identity. Practically, the findings are expected to increase social media users' awareness, particularly among university students and younger generations, of the influence of language on self-image construction and social perception in digital spaces. Ultimately, this study seeks to demonstrate that in the digital era, language does not merely function to describe identity, but also actively contributes to shaping, negotiating, and changing how individuals understand themselves and how they are understood by others.

RESEARCH METHODS

1. Research Approach and Type

This study employs a qualitative approach using phenomenological research. The phenomenological approach was selected because this study focuses on individuals' subjective experiences in using language to construct and present their identities in digital spaces. Phenomenology enables researchers to understand how individuals interpret their experiences, particularly in selecting, using, and presenting language through social media.

The selection of this approach is also based on the objective of the study, which does not seek to statistically measure the extent to which language influences digital identity, but rather to understand the processes, experiences, and meanings that emerge from language use in digital spaces. Through a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to explore participants' perspectives regarding the relationship between language choices, meaning, self-expression, and the identities they present to digital audiences.

The study uses the Philosophy of Language perspective as the foundation for understanding the data obtained. Concepts such as meaning, speaker intention, interpretation, context, and representation are used to analyze how language contributes to the process of constructing individual digital identity.

2. Participants and Participant Selection Strategy

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling. This technique was employed because the researchers required participants who possessed experiences and characteristics relevant to the focus of the study. Participants were deliberately selected based on their active involvement in social media use and their experiences of using language as a form of self-expression. The study involved approximately 5–10 active university students who use social media. The number of participants in qualitative research may develop according to data requirements and the level of information saturation obtained during the research process.

The inclusion criteria for participants were:

1) being an active university student;
2) being at least 18 years old;
3) actively using at least one social media platform, such as Instagram, TikTok, X, or WhatsApp;
4) regularly creating or sharing content in the form of written texts, captions, comments, or digital posts; and

Participants were selected from the university student community at Universitas Negeri Medan. The student community was chosen as the research context because university students are among the groups that actively use social media in their daily lives. In addition to serving as a means of communication, social media provides students with a space to express opinions, build social relationships, demonstrate interests, and construct and present their identities.

3. Research Location and Context

This study was conducted within the context of the digital lives of university students at Universitas Negeri Medan. The study does not focus on a particular physical location because the phenomenon under investigation occurs in digital spaces. However, data collection was conducted through both direct and online interactions with participants.

The social spaces examined in the study were the social media platforms used by participants in their everyday lives. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, X, and

WhatsApp may form part of the research context because each platform has different communication characteristics and patterns of language use. The study does not aim to compare social media platforms, but rather to understand individuals' experiences of using language across different digital spaces.

4. Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews and digital document analysis. Both techniques were employed to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and the forms of language use involved in constructing digital identity.

5. In-Depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. The researcher prepared several main questions as guidelines while still allowing participants to freely explain their experiences and perspectives.Topics discussed during the interviews included participants' experiences of using social media, considerations in selecting particular languages or words, the use of Indonesian, English, slang, or mixed languages, as well as their views regarding how other people understood their identities through digital posts and interactions.The interviews were conducted either directly or through online communication media according to the participants' availability and comfort. Each interview was expected to last approximately 30–60 minutes. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded using an audio recorder to facilitate transcription and data analysis.

6. Digital Document Analysis

In addition to interviews, this study employed digital document analysis as supporting data. The digital documents analyzed could include captions, comments, posts, statuses, or other forms of written communication voluntarily provided by participants. The analysis was conducted to examine how language use described by participants during interviews appeared in their actual digital communication practices. The documents were not randomly taken from participants' personal accounts. All digital data analyzed were obtained with participants' permission and were used solely for research purposes. The researcher used interview guidelines, an audio recorder, field notes, and documentation sheets as supporting instruments during the data collection process.

7. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify, categorize, and interpret the main themes emerging from participants' experiences. The analysis process consisted of several stages. First, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews. Second, the researcher repeatedly read all the data to gain an overall understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives. Third, the researcher conducted an open-coding process by assigning codes to important statements or information related to language use and digital identity.

The next stage involved grouping codes with similar characteristics into particular categories. From these categories, the researcher then identified the main themes. The emerging themes could include language choice as self-expression, language use for constructing a particular image, audience influence on language choices, differences in identity across platforms, and differences between user intention and audience interpretation.

After the themes were identified, the researcher interpreted the data by connecting them with the Philosophy of Language perspective. The analysis

considered the concepts of meaning, speaker intention, context, interpretation, and representation. Thus, the findings not only describe participants' experiences but also provide a philosophical understanding of the relationship between language and digital identity construction. The analysis was conducted manually with the assistance of digital documents and data categorization tables. Analytical software such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti was not used because the number of participants and the amount of data remained within the scope of a small-scale study.

8. Data Validity

To ensure data validity, this study applied several criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through technique triangulation. The researcher compared information obtained from interviews with supporting data in the form of digital documents provided by participants. In addition, the researcher could conduct member checking by providing participants with an opportunity to reconfirm the interpretations or information they had provided. Transferability was established by providing clear and detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and data collection and analysis processes. These descriptions enable readers to understand the research context and consider the possibility of applying the findings to other contexts with similar characteristics. Dependability was maintained by systematically documenting the entire research process, beginning with participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and conclusion drawing. These records were used to demonstrate that the research process was conducted consistently and could be traced. Confirmability was ensured by maintaining that the findings were based on the data and experiences of participants rather than solely on the researcher's assumptions or personal views. Participant quotations or statements were used to support the interpretation process, and the data analysis process was documented transparently.

9. Research Ethics

This study considered research ethics principles to protect participants' rights and privacy. Before the research was conducted, each participant received an explanation of the research objectives, data collection procedures, benefits, and their rights as participants. Participation was voluntary. Each participant provided informed consent before interviews and digital document collection were conducted. Participants had the right to refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were not included in the research report. Their real names were replaced with codes or pseudonyms. Personal information, social media account names, and digital data that could identify participants were not published without permission. All data obtained were used solely for academic and research purposes. The researcher also ensured that the use of posts, captions, comments, or digital documents was conducted with the consent of the data owners. By applying these principles, the research was expected to be conducted responsibly, respect participants' privacy, and maintain academic integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores university students' experiences in using language to construct and present their identities in digital spaces. Based on in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the participants' experiences show that language use on social

media is not merely related to conveying messages. Language becomes part of the process through which individuals choose how they want to be known, understood, and positioned within digital social environments.The analysis identified three main themes: (1) language as self-representation and self-expression, (2) negotiation between authentic identity and digital image, and (3) changing language meaning through context and audience interpretation. These three themes are interconnected and demonstrate that digital identity construction is a dynamic process.

Table 1. Themes Emerging from Participants' Experiences

Main Theme	Subtheme	Meaning of the Experience
Language as self-representation	Choice of words and language	Language is used to demonstrate personality and a particular image
Digital identity negotiation	Authentic identity and desired image	Participants consider how they want themselves to be presented
Meaning and audience interpretation	Differences between intention and understanding	The meaning of language is not always received according to the user's intention

1. Language as Self-Representation and Self-Expression

The first theme demonstrates that participants viewed language as an important part of how they present themselves on social media. Their language choices were not entirely random. In certain situations, participants considered their choice of words, language style, and type of language because they realized that these choices could create particular impressions in other people.One situation that frequently emerged was when participants created captions or personal posts. Social media became a space where they could express thoughts and feelings that might not always be communicated directly in everyday life. Nevertheless, such expressions still involved a process of language selection.

One participant described the experience as follows:"On social media, I think more about what words I want to use. Sometimes I actually just want to post something ordinary, but I still think about how people will see me based on the caption." (P1)This statement demonstrates an awareness that language does not merely convey a message but also carries self-representation. The participant did not only consider what they wanted to communicate, but also the possible identity that could be constructed through that language.A similar experience emerged in the use of English. One participant explained that using English allowed them to present a different side of themselves:

"When I use English, sometimes I feel freer to express something. I don't know why, but it feels more suitable for personal or aesthetic things. But maybe other people see it as me trying too hard to look cool." (P2)This statement demonstrates a complex relationship between language and identity. For the participant, English carried a particular personal and emotional meaning. At the same time, the participant was aware that other people might evaluate the choice differently.

Here, a tension emerges between the identity an individual intends to construct and the identity perceived by the audience. Language that users perceive as a form of self-expression may be understood differently by others. Therefore, digital identity is not entirely under an individual's control.

Several participants also demonstrated changes in their language styles according to the platform they used. The language used on Instagram differed from the language used in WhatsApp communication or professional platforms. One participant explained:

"On WhatsApp, I'm more natural because the people there are close to me. But on Instagram, I choose my words more carefully. It feels like there's a different version of myself, even though it's still me." (P3)

This statement demonstrates that changes in language do not necessarily indicate a complete change in identity. Instead, individuals may present different aspects of themselves according to the social space they encounter.Thus, in the participants' experiences, language functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium of self-representation. The choice of words, language, and communication style becomes part of the process through which individuals communicate who they are to the digital world.

However, this representational process does not always occur freely. Behind the freedom to express themselves, participants also consider how their identities will be received by others. This condition leads to the second theme.

2. Negotiation Between Authentic Identity and Digital Image

The second theme demonstrates a process of negotiation between participants' desire to be themselves and their desire to construct a particular image before a digital audience.

Social media provides individuals with the freedom to express their identities, but at the same time it creates an environment in which individuals may feel continuously observed and evaluated.

Several participants admitted that they did not always upload content that completely represented their actual circumstances. They selected certain parts of their life experiences to share while keeping other parts private.

One participant stated:

"Sometimes what I post really is me, but it's not everything about me. I choose which parts I'm comfortable with people seeing. So it's not fake, but I'm not completely open either." (P4)This experience demonstrates a paradox within digital identity. Individuals can still feel authentic even when they do not present their entire selves. In this context, authenticity does not necessarily mean openly displaying every aspect of one's life. Instead, the participant understood authenticity as having the ability to choose which parts of themselves they wanted to share.

Language plays an important role in this selection process. Several participants changed the way they spoke or wrote when communicating with a broader audience.

One participant explained:"When I'm actually sad, I rarely say directly that I'm sad. Usually, I use somewhat ambiguous words or post something that only certain people might understand." (P1)

The use of ambiguous language represents a form of negotiation between the desire to express emotions and the desire to maintain privacy. The participant did not completely hide their feelings, but neither did they communicate them directly.This demonstrates that digital language can function as a space between openness and secrecy. Individuals can speak without completely explaining themselves, express feelings without explicitly stating them, or establish closeness with particular groups through expressions that are understood only by those groups.

Another experience emerged when participants felt the need to adjust their language according to particular trends or communities:"Sometimes I use terms that are currently popular, not because that's really how I speak every day. But if I don't follow them, it feels like I'm falling behind or not connecting with the people around me." (P5)

This statement demonstrates that digital identity is not shaped solely by individual desires. Communities, trends, and social expectations also influence the process. Individuals find themselves in a situation where they want to maintain their uniqueness while simultaneously seeking acceptance within their digital environment.

This creates an interesting conflict. Social media is often understood as a space for freedom of expression, yet participants' experiences demonstrate that this freedom always exists in relation to social evaluation. Individuals are free to choose their language, but every choice has consequences for how they may be perceived.

Language therefore becomes a space of negotiation. Through language, participants attempt to maintain a balance between being themselves and being someone who can be accepted by their social environment.

This negotiation is subsequently connected to a more fundamental issue: the identity that an individual seeks to construct is not necessarily understood in the same way by the audience.

3. Between Intention and Interpretation: When Language Is No Longer Entirely Controlled by the User

The third theme demonstrates that one of the important experiences of participants in digital spaces is the difference between the intention they wish to communicate and the interpretation provided by the audience. Once language is published on social media, users no longer have complete control over the meanings that emerge.

Several participants had experienced situations in which their posts were understood differently from their original intentions.One participant explained:"Once I made a caption that was actually meant as a joke, but someone thought I was indirectly criticizing someone. I had absolutely no intention of doing that. After that, I became more careful." (P2)

This experience demonstrates that meaning in digital communication is not determined solely by the writer's intention. Audiences bring their own experiences, knowledge, social relationships, and contexts when interpreting a message.

Another participant had a similar experience:"Sometimes we already feel that the words are clear, but it turns out other people can understand them differently. Eventually, I realized that what I mean is not necessarily the same as what other people understand." (P3)

This statement demonstrates participants' awareness of the limitations of language in conveying identity completely. Individuals may use language to construct a particular image, but that image remains open to interpretation.In some cases, differences in interpretation created anxiety. Participants became more careful when selecting words because they were afraid of being misunderstood.

One participant stated:"Now, before posting, I sometimes read it over and over again. Not because the writing is extremely important, but because I'm afraid people will understand it differently from what I mean." (P4)This situation demonstrates that digital life creates a new awareness of language. A simple word can have broader social consequences because it can be read by many people and interpreted in different ways.However, not all participants viewed differences in interpretation negatively. Some believed that every individual has the right to understand language from their own perspective.

One participant stated:"I think that once we post something, we can't control

everyone into understanding it the way we want. We can explain what we mean, but we can't control people's thoughts." (P5)This perspective demonstrates an acceptance of the openness of language to multiple possible meanings. In the context of digital identity, this condition produces a paradox: individuals use language to show who they are, but that identity is subsequently reconstructed through other people's interpretations.In other words, digital identity is not something created solely by the individual. Identity is also the result of the relationship between what someone intends to communicate and what other people understand.

4. Interconnection Between the Themes

The three themes demonstrate that the experience of using language in digital spaces is a complex process. Language is first used as a means of self-representation. Through their choice of words and communication styles, individuals attempt to demonstrate certain aspects of their identities.

However, this process does not occur simply. Individuals must subsequently negotiate between their desire to present themselves authentically and the social demands emerging from the digital environment. Language becomes a tool for regulating how much of themselves they wish to display and how they want themselves to be perceived.

Ultimately, identities constructed through language remain not entirely under individual control. Audiences play a role in assigning meaning to the language being used. Differences between user intention and audience interpretation create an ongoing space of negotiation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that language occupies a more complex position than merely functioning as a communication tool in digital life. Language becomes a space where individuals express themselves, construct images, conceal vulnerability, seek social acceptance, and face the possibility of being understood differently. Digital identity, therefore, does not emerge as something completed and fixed, but as a process that continually develops alongside language use, social context, and the interpretations of others.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates that language plays a more complex role than merely serving as a communication tool in digital life. Based on the three main themes identified—language as self-representation and self-expression, negotiation between authentic identity and digital image, and differences between user intention and audience interpretation—it can be understood that digital identity is an ongoing process of meaning-making.

Individuals do not only use language to communicate who they are. They also actively select, adapt, and negotiate language according to social contexts and possible audience responses.

These findings reinforce the central position of this study that language does not merely represent an identity that already exists. In many participants' experiences, language actually contributes to shaping identity itself. The way individuals select words, use particular languages, follow popular terms, or even choose to communicate something ambiguously becomes part of the process through which they understand and present themselves in digital spaces.

1. Language as a Process of Meaning-Making and Self-Representation

The first theme demonstrates that language choices are closely related to how participants represent themselves. Participants did not view captions, posts, or

language choices as completely spontaneous. Instead, they were aware that the language they used could create particular impressions in other people.

This finding can be understood through the Philosophy of Language perspective, which places the issue of meaning as one of the central elements of communication. Language does not consist merely of symbols or word structures; it also carries intention, context, and possibilities for interpretation.

In digital contexts, this process becomes more complex because individuals communicate with broad audiences who do not necessarily share the same backgrounds.The use of English, informal Indonesian, slang, and mixed languages found in participants' experiences demonstrates that linguistic choices can form part of identity representation. Individuals do not choose a language solely according to their linguistic abilities, but also according to the social and personal meanings attached to that language.

This finding is consistent with Li and Huang's research on translanguaging practices on WeChat, which demonstrates that social media users actively select and utilize various linguistic resources to construct heterogeneous and dynamic identities. Identity does not emerge passively but is formed through creative and strategic language choices in interaction with others.

In the Indonesian context, research on university students' identity construction on social media also demonstrates that social media serves as a space where students present self-images and construct particular representations through digital activities. The identities presented are related not only to personal life but also to how individuals want to be known by their social environments.

However, this study places a slightly different emphasis. While research on digital identity generally focuses on how individuals construct self-images, this study argues that the process needs to be examined more deeply through the issue of meaning.

Language is not only an instrument for displaying identity but also a space in which individuals assign meaning to themselves.

Thus, when a university student uses English in a particular post, the meaning of that action cannot immediately be reduced to an attempt to appear modern or follow a trend. For one individual, English may provide a more comfortable space for emotional expression. For another, it may represent an academic identity or connection to global culture.

These differences demonstrate that one form of language can have different meanings for different individuals. Therefore, this study expands the understanding of digital identity by positioning users' subjective experiences as an important part of interpretation.

Recent research concerning changes in meaning within digital culture also supports this perspective. Lumban Gaol and Zaharani demonstrate that digital spaces encourage users to adapt words, create mixed-language forms, and use emojis to generate more complex and contextual meanings.

These findings demonstrate that technological development has not only changed where people communicate but has also changed how meaning is produced. In this context, digital identity can be understood as the result of a meaning-making process that occurs through language.

2. Negotiation Between Authenticity and Digital Social Demands

The second theme demonstrates that digital identity construction does not

always occur as a process of free self-expression. Participants experience a negotiation between their desire to be themselves and their awareness that the identities they present will be seen, evaluated, and interpreted by others.

One interesting finding is the participants' view that not displaying every part of their lives does not mean that they are being false. For them, there is a distinction between hiding one's identity and choosing personal privacy boundaries.

This finding demonstrates that authenticity in digital life cannot be understood simply. Authenticity is often associated with an individual's ability to present themselves as they truly are. However, participants' experiences demonstrate that individuals can still feel authentic even when they selectively choose which parts of their lives they want to share.

In this context, digital identity is more appropriately understood as a selective process. Individuals choose certain aspects of themselves to display while keeping other aspects within their private sphere. Such choices are not necessarily motivated by a desire to create a false identity; rather, they may function as strategies for maintaining privacy, emotional security, and personal boundaries.

This finding is consistent with Jakaza's research, which demonstrates that identities on social media are not always constructed completely or consistently. Users can simultaneously construct and conceal certain aspects of their identities through linguistic choices and communication strategies. Digital identity can therefore be fragmented and change according to situations and social contexts.Research on students' digital identities also demonstrates negotiation between different dimensions of identity. Students may find themselves between local values, cultural identity, English-language ability, and global influences when presenting themselves in digital spaces. This process produces complex identities that cannot always be separated into a single category.

From this study's perspective, such negotiation can be understood through Wittgenstein's concept of language games. Wittgenstein argues that the meaning of language is related to its use within particular forms of social life. In other words, individuals do not use language in an empty space.

Every language choice exists within the rules, habits, and expectations of a particular community.On social media, each platform can be understood as having its own "language game." Language considered natural in conversations with close friends may differ from the language used in academic or professional environments. Similarly, terms popular within TikTok communities may not serve the same function when used in formal contexts.

Abraham's study of language games on social media demonstrates that digital communication can be understood as a social practice with its own rules, conventions, and contexts of use. Language does not merely transfer information; it also contributes to the formation of identity and social relationships.The findings of this study reinforce that perspective through participants' subjective experiences. When participants feel the need to follow certain terms in order to "connect" with their digital environment, this demonstrates that language use is connected to the need to belong to a community.

A paradox emerges here. Social media provides individuals with opportunities to express their uniqueness, but at the same time they face pressure to follow particular languages, trends, and group norms. Freedom of expression does not necessarily mean unlimited freedom. Individuals remain within social structures that influence how

language is used and how identity is constructed.Thus, digital identity can be understood as a meeting point between individual agency and social influence. Individuals have the freedom to choose language, but those choices always exist within a broader social context.

3. Between Intention and Interpretation: Identity as a Relational Process

The third theme concerns one of the most fundamental issues within the Philosophy of Language: the relationship between speaker intention and recipient interpretation.

Participants' experiences demonstrate that language used to construct identity is not always received according to the user's original intention.

This finding is important because it demonstrates that digital identity is not completely possessed or controlled by the individual. Someone may have a particular intention when writing a caption, using an expression, or sharing a personal experience. However, once that language enters the public digital space, its meaning becomes open to interpretation.Within the Philosophy of Language, this issue relates to the complex relationship between intention, meaning, and interpretation. Participants in this study recognize that what they intend to communicate may not be identical to what audiences understand.

This condition becomes more complex in digital communication because interaction often takes place without facial expressions, intonation, or direct contextual information. A sentence intended as a joke may be interpreted as sarcasm or criticism. An ambiguous post intended as emotional expression may be associated by an audience with a particular event.

Research on pragmatic communication in social media demonstrates that users employ various contextual strategies to communicate intentions in short and fast-paced communication environments. However, limitations in digital context continue to create possibilities for differences between user intention and recipient understanding.

The findings of this study demonstrate that interpretive differences are not merely related to communication success or failure. Differences in interpretation also influence identity construction. When audiences interpret someone's language in a particular way, that interpretation can shape the individual's social image.

In other words, digital identity is relational. Identity is constructed not only through an individual's actions in selecting language, but also through the responses and interpretations of others.This perspective is consistent with Georgalou's research on identity construction in social media, which demonstrates that users' identification and disidentification occur through discursive practices and social relationships. Identity is formed through interaction and cannot be completely separated from the social environment that assigns meaning to an individual's expressions.

An important paradox therefore emerges. Individuals use language to control how they want to be known, but language itself creates the possibility for others to construct different understandings. The more individuals attempt to construct identity through language, the more they also depend on processes of social interpretation.This finding enriches the understanding of digital identity by demonstrating that identity is not merely the result of self-presentation. Identity is the outcome of a reciprocal relationship between self-expression and social interpretation.

4. Language as a Space for Negotiating Digital Identity

When the three themes are considered together, language emerges as a space of negotiation connecting individuals with themselves and with their social environments. Language enables individuals to say something about themselves, but at the same time it places them within a broader system of meaning.

The findings demonstrate that digital identity construction can be understood through three interconnected conceptual stages.First, individuals choose language to express or represent themselves. At this stage, language has a personal function because it is related to experiences, emotions, and the way individuals understand themselves.

Second, those choices are negotiated within a social context. Individuals consider the platform, community, trends, and possible judgments from others. Language therefore becomes a social practice that cannot be separated from its environment of use.

Third, once language has been published, it enters a process of interpretation. Audiences assign meaning based on their own experiences and contexts. At this stage, the identity an individual intends to construct may be reinforced, changed, or even understood differently.

This framework demonstrates that language possesses performative power in digital life. Language does not merely describe reality about an individual; it also participates in creating the social reality of who that individual is.This finding is also relevant to studies of language use in multilingual digital spaces. Mohr's research on English use and multilingual repertoires on Instagram demonstrates that language choices in digital spaces are related to identity construction and users' positioning within social and transnational environments.A similar phenomenon can be observed in research on translanguaging and code-switching among Generation Z on Instagram. Language switching and mixing cannot only be understood as bilingual habits, but also as communication strategies for constructing social representation and identity in digital spaces.Therefore, language cannot be separated from the dynamics of digital identity. Every linguistic choice carries the possibility of a particular social meaning, even though that meaning is not always fixed.

5. Contextual Reflection and the Researcher's Position

This study was conducted in the context of university students as a generation that has grown alongside the development of social media. This social background is important because participants' experiences cannot be separated from the digital cultural conditions they encounter.Indonesian university students live within a multilingual communication environment. They may use Indonesian as their primary language, regional languages as markers of cultural identity, English as part of education and global communication, and digital slang as part of interaction with peers. These conditions give students' digital identities a layered character.

The researcher recognizes that interpretations of participants' experiences are not completely neutral. As a researcher situated within a social environment and generation closely connected to social media phenomena, the researcher may understand participants' experiences through personal experiences and assumptions.Therefore, a reflective approach is important in this study. The researcher attempts to distinguish between experiences actually communicated by participants and the conceptual interpretations applied to those experiences.The researcher's position is not to determine whether participants' digital identities are authentic or inauthentic, but to understand how participants themselves interpret the

process.

This reflection is important because identity is a highly personal experience. One form of language use that may be considered image-building by one person may be interpreted as self-expression by another. Therefore, this study does not attempt to produce a single definition of digital identity.

6. Contribution of the Study

Conceptually, this study proposes that digital identity can be understood as a philosophical process concerning meaning. Previous studies of digital identity have often focused on visual aspects, user behavior, impression management, or self-representation. This study adds the perspective that these processes are also concerned with how human beings use language to assign meaning to themselves.

The primary contribution of this study lies in combining the Philosophy of Language with the study of digital identity. Perspectives concerning meaning, intention, context, and interpretation provide a deeper understanding of social media users' experiences.This study also demonstrates that digital identity should not be understood in binary terms as either "authentic" or "false." Participants' experiences reveal a space between these two positions. Individuals may choose particular aspects of themselves to display without losing their sense of authenticity. They may change their language style according to context without necessarily possessing an inconsistent identity.

Thus, digital identity is more appropriately understood as a fluid, relational, and continuously negotiated process.Language becomes the primary medium of this process because through language individuals construct meanings about themselves, adapt to social communities, and encounter interpretations from others.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the position that the power of language in digital spaces lies not only in its ability to convey messages. Its power lies in its ability to establish relationships between individuals, meaning, and identity.In increasingly open and connected digital life, every word has the potential not only to communicate what someone thinks but also to shape how that person becomes known, understood, and positioned within the social world.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that language plays a fundamental role in the process of digital identity construction. Based on the analysis of participants' experiences, language functions not merely as a means of communication but as a medium for self-representation, self-expression, negotiation, and interpretation.Three main patterns were identified. First, language functions as a means of representation and self-expression. Individuals use particular linguistic choices to demonstrate aspects of their personalities, experiences, values, and the images they wish to present to others.

Second, digital identity is formed through a process of negotiation between the desire to be oneself and social demands emerging within the digital environment. Individuals do not necessarily display every aspect of their lives; instead, they select aspects of their identities that they consider appropriate to share.

Third, identities constructed through language are not completely under individual control because the meaning of language remains open to audience interpretation. From these three patterns, the study concludes that digital identity is not something that has already been completed and is subsequently displayed

through social media. Rather, identity continues to be formed through the processes of language use, meaning-making, and interpretation. Thus, language does not merely represent who someone is; it also actively participates in shaping who that person becomes in digital spaces.

This perspective provides a conceptual contribution to the Philosophy of Language by placing issues of meaning, intention, context, and interpretation within the contemporary phenomenon of digital identity. The study demonstrates that philosophical questions concerning language remain relevant not only in traditional communication but are becoming increasingly important in digital life.

When individuals use language to construct identity, they are actually involved in a process of meaning creation involving relationships between the self, language, social context, and other people's interpretations. This study also offers an alternative perspective on the issue of digital authenticity. Digital identity cannot simply be understood through an opposition between authentic and false identities. Participants' experiences demonstrate that individuals can continue to feel authentic even when they choose not to display their entire lives.

Selection, concealment, and language adjustment may form part of an individual's efforts to maintain privacy, emotional security, and personal boundaries. Therefore, digital identity is more appropriately understood as a fluid, contextual, and relational process. Practically, the findings are relevant to the development of digital literacy, particularly among university students and younger generations. Digital literacy should not focus solely on technological skills or the ability to distinguish between true and false information.

Digital literacy should also include awareness of the power of language to shape self-image, social relationships, and public perception. Social media users need to understand that every digital expression may be interpreted differently by audiences. For educational institutions, these findings may be considered when developing learning programs concerning digital literacy and communication. Language education should not be directed only toward grammar and communication skills but should also develop the ability to understand meaning, context, interpretation, and the social consequences of language use in digital spaces.

Students need to be equipped with the ability to use language critically and reflectively, particularly when facing increasingly open and complex communication environments. For policymakers and digital-platform managers, this study demonstrates the importance of creating communication spaces that support responsible language use and respect diverse forms of expression. Digital-literacy policies should pay greater attention to communication, interpretation, and social relationships rather than focusing solely on technological security. Awareness of the possibility of misunderstanding in digital communication can also contribute to more empathetic and reflective online interactions.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations.

- First, the study focuses on students' experiences within a relatively limited social context; therefore, the findings are not intended to represent all groups of social media users.
- Second, the relatively homogeneous composition of participants means that experiences of digital identity from other age groups, cultural backgrounds, professions, or communities may not have been revealed.

- Third, limitations in research time prevented an in-depth exploration of changes in digital identity over a longer period.

The study also focuses primarily on text-based communication, meaning that visual, audio, and other forms of digital representation were not the central focus of the analysis. These limitations create opportunities for future research. Future studies may broaden the participant pool by involving more diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds, and digital communities.

Research may also employ a digital ethnography approach to observe language practices directly within online communities or a narrative approach to explore how individuals' digital identities change over particular periods.

Furthermore, future research may explore the relationship between language, digital identity, artificial intelligence, social-media algorithms, and emerging forms of communication that increasingly influence human life.Ultimately, this study emphasizes that the power of language in the digital world lies not only in its ability to connect people but also in its ability to shape human understanding of the self and others.Digital identity emerges from an ongoing process involving what individuals intend to communicate, how language is used, the context in which language appears, and how other people assign meaning to it.Therefore, understanding language also means understanding one of the most fundamental processes involved in the formation of human identity in the digital era.

REFFERANCE

Aisyah, A. B., Rosalia, C. E., Ayustina, F. D., & Fawwaz, M. I. (2022). Konstruksi identitas mahasiswa dalam bermedia sosial: Studi kasus 4 mahasiswa FIS UNJ pengguna media sosial Instagram. SASKARA: Indonesian Journal of Society Studies, 1(2), 37–64. https://doi.org/10.21009/Saskara.012.03

Arrahman, M., & Santoso, G. (2024). Qualitative descriptive study of adolescent virtual identity through Instagram social media at SMAN 1 Depok. Indonesian Journal of Advanced Research, 3(9), 1411–1428. https://doi.org/10.55927/ijar.v3i9.10743

Ayomi, P. N. (2021). Managing interpersonal meaning in social media: A case study of Indonesian language use. Academic Journal Perspective: Education, Language, and Literature, 9(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.33603/perspective.v9i1.4544

Fadillah, A., & Gumilar, R. (2023). The impact of social media on the identity construction of multilingual students. Transformational Language, Literature, and Technology Overview in Learning, 2(3), 24–28. https://doi.org/10.55047/transtool.v2i3.1381

Georgalou, M. (2021). New Greek migrant (dis)identifications in social media: Evidence from a discourse-centred online ethnographic study. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 8, Article 155. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00831-9

Jakaza, E. (2022). Identity construction or obfuscation on social media: A case of Facebook and WhatsApp. African Identities, 20(1), 3–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2020.1804829

Li, L., & Huang, J. (2021). The construction of heterogeneous and fluid identities: Translanguaging on WeChat. Internet Pragmatics, 4(2), 219–246. https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00008.li

Mohr, S. (2021). Investigating English in multilingual contexts online: Identity construction in geotagged Instagram data. Frontiers in Communication, 6, Article 778050. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.778050

Purnama, D. H., Ernalida, & Arianti, Y. (2024). Construction and deconstruction of self-identity of Palembang adolescents on Instagram. Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental, 18(8), e05295. https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n8-114

Sukisno. (2023). Bahasa dalam era kecerdasan buatan: Implikasi filsafati terhadap

pemahaman makna dan komunikasi. Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics Review, 4(2). https://doi.org/10.21009/ijalr.42.01

Tay, D. Z. (2021). Modelability across time as a signature of identity construction on YouTube. Journal of Pragmatics, 182, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.06.004

Yanuar, I. D. (2025). Digital identity construction of Moeslem university students in English classroom. English Review: Journal of English Education, 13(1), 291–300. https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v13i1.11139