



## Perpetuating Beauty Myth through Selfie-Editing in Instagram

Mayda P. Setyastuti<sup>1\*</sup> and Manik Sunuantari<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Selfie is a phenomenon that best represents the popular culture in today's digital era. The trend in the use of smartphones with front cameras and social media has contributed to the creation of 93 million selfies per day from Android-based phones alone. In fact, selfies are not something completely spontaneous and authentic. The awareness that selfies are shared, seen, and commented on on social media, make individuals take a number of ways to enhance their visual virtually. This makes selfie-editing has been practiced and widely accepted. This article attempts to explain the selfie-editing phenomenon on Instagram. Selfie-editing is perceived as an effort to manage impressions as other users watch their photos. The research was conducted qualitatively, namely by conducting in-depth interviews with informants who are influencers on Instagram, as well as observing and analyzing selfies and photos published in each of the influencers' accounts. The findings show that selfies undergo some specific and organized process which can be classified into 3 phases: Pre-production, Production, and Post-Production. These processes indicate that a selfie needs to meet some criteria prior to its uploads to Instagram. Editing is certain, but such modification processes should deliver a natural and effortless look, the least fabricated it could be. This indicates that selfie-editing is not only a form of managing one's presence on social media but also a form of user self-discipline according to the nature of Instagram as a visual-based social media which perpetuates the discourse of beauty myth. This is somehow debatable as the internet and social media are often perceived as free and democratic mediums.

### Keywords

selfie, selfie-editing, looking-glass self, self-discipline, beauty myth

---

### To cite this article (7<sup>th</sup> APA style):

Setyastuti, M. P., & Sunuantari, M. (2021). Perpetuating beauty myth through selfie-editing in Instagram. *Journal Communication Spectrum: Capturing New Perspectives in Communication*, 11(1), 26-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v11i1.2128>

### INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the rise of digital technology and the use of social media, there is a trend called self-photography or popularly called selfie. The hashtag "#selfie" first appeared on the Flickr website, a photography social networking website in early 2004. The selfie boom in cyberspace has increasingly been felt since the front camera feature was added to smartphones (Hasan, 2016). Selfies penetrated all circles, ranging from students, workers, celebrities, politicians, to state leaders. The widespread practice of selfies globally, making selfies crowned the "word of the year" or the most popular word in 2013 by the Oxford Dictionary of Scientific Institutions (Aziliya, 2014).

---

<sup>1</sup> Magister Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Al-Azhar Indonesia, Jakarta

\* Corresponding author: Universitas Diponegoro Jl. Erlangga Barat 7 No. 33, Pleburan, Semarang 50241, Indonesia, e-mail: maydaputri@students.undip.ac.id

Indeed, in recent years, the frequency of selfies has increased dramatically and has become a form of daily visual communication (Lobinger and Brantner, 2015, p. 1849). Lev Manovich's research (The City University of New York) revealed there were more than 79 million photos on Instagram with the #selfie hashtag as of February 2014 (Manovich, 2014, as cited in Hasan, 2016). This number increased to 288 million photos in 2016 (Websta, 2016, as cited in Jiyoun, 2017, p. 370). Google even affirmed the selfie boom by stating that, positive growth trends in the use of smartphones with front camera and social media trends have contributed to the creation of 93 million selfies per day from Android-based phones alone (Brandt, 2014). Therefore, it is no exaggeration if a selfie is called the phenomenon that best represents the popular culture in the digital era today.

Technology does play an important role in the global phenomenon of selfies, but from the perspective of communication science, selfies are seen as a 'cultural product' (object) and 'social practice'. It is a way of speaking, as well as an object that is responded to by individuals and the public (Senft and Baym, 2015, p. 1589). Public response is an important element in selfies. The awareness that selfies are shared through social media will be seen, even commented on by others, making individuals do several ways to 'perfect' their appearance to look better in the selfies they upload.

Instagram is currently one of the most powerful social media. According to *Statista* (2020), the social media platform is reported to have one billion active users as of June 2018. The number of users grew to be more than 1.1 Billion in the mid of 2020. With this large number of users, Instagram is the 6<sup>th</sup> most popular social media platform in the world behind Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and WeChat. As a visual platform, Instagram is the most popular platform for users to share selfies and other photographic content, such as travel and culinary pictures, as well as to keep up with their friends, relatives, or even favorite celebrities (Clement, 2020). Indonesia is one of the countries with the most numbers of Instagram users in the world. It is reported that Indonesia has 78 Million active Instagram users as of October 2020. This puts Indonesia to be the 4th largest country based on Instagram audience size Instagram users in the world after the United States, Brazil, and India (Clement, 2020).

Numbers of data and research results show that selfies undergo planning and modification before they are uploaded and shared via social media. The Renfrew Center Foundation, an institution whose activities focus on empowering women in Philadelphia, United States, surveyed 1710 male and female respondents aged 18 years and over in America. The survey results show that half (50%) of the total respondents claimed to 'improve' their selfie results (photo-editing) before being uploaded to social media. Editing is done by respondents, among others by cropping, removing pimples, and improving skin color. The findings also showed that 1 in 8 respondents admitted editing because they were not satisfied with their appearance in general, and some others did the editing to make them look thinner or slimmer (The Renfrew Center Foundation, 2014).

A quantitative study of *selfie-editing* behavior in 2016 performed on 1846 women aged 20-39 years in South Korea shows that the higher: the frequency of selfies; level of self-awareness in the middle of the public (public self-consciousness), and; the frequency of use of social media, the higher the level of one's social comparison, where the social comparison increases the selfie-editing behavior of the respondents (Jiyoun, 2017, p. 373). Social comparison theory is used to understand selfie-editing as a result of self-evaluation, where individuals have the desire to look ideal on social media. The ideal appearance is needed because the individual needs an 'audience' to give a positive reaction to his appearance (Jiyoun, 2017, p. 375).

Another study conducted on 173 social media influencers in Singapore also showed that selfie for influencers was something that was created with full consideration and curation, to obtain profits, both in the form of money and self-actualization (Abidin, 2016, p. 10). Abidin mentioned the concept of tacit labor, which is a collective work practice that is not visible, even underestimated, because it continues to be trained carefully so that it is not realized and looks natural.

Tacit labor refers to the production process and curation of selfies before they are uploaded to social media. Tacit labor conducted by influencers involves at least 3 instruments, namely; 1) Makeup and Dressing; 2) Lighting and Posturing; 3) Apps and Artifice (Abidin, 2016, p. 11). The third instrument, Apps and Artifice, refers to the use of photo-editing applications on smartphones or computers that are used to refine and improve selfie results before uploading.

The results from the studies above show that selfies are not entirely spontaneous and authentic. Selfies experience a series of production and curation processes in various ways to bring out the 'best version' of a person. Some of these studies together mentioned how the use of image enhancement and photo editing applications is involved in one's efforts to shape and maintain self-image through selfies uploaded on social media. In short, selfie-editing is a legitimate practice to do and is widely accepted when someone wants to 'perfect' their appearance before selfies are uploaded and shared through social media. This article seeks to explain the phenomenon of selfie-editing as an individual effort in 'impression management' through the looking-glass self-concept of Charles Horton Cooley (1902). Furthermore, this article seeks to see the relationship between selfie-editing behavior and beauty myths that have long been circulating in society.

### **Selfie-Editing on Public Selfie**

Selfie-editing is related to one's efforts to form and maintain an image, as well as efforts to channel individual personal egos to be able to see a better version of themselves. Laura Mulvey (1999) explains edited self is the practice of 'looking at' (gazing), where individuals form their ego, related to the self-image being watched by the audience (Mulvey, 1999, as cited in Abidin, 2015, p. 12). The relation between selfie and audience can at least be seen from the definition of selfie according to the Oxford Dictionary (2013) and Katrin Tiidenberg (2018b). The official definition of selfie can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED, 2013):

*"A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media".*

Selfie means a self-portrait taken by an individual, usually taken with a smartphone or webcam to be uploaded and shared via social media. Based on these definitions, Tiidenberg (2018a) states that there are at least three elements that must be fulfilled so that a photo can be said to be a selfie, namely; 1) A photographic object ('a photograph'), 2) The object of self-representation ('taken by oneself'), and 3) Digital network objects ('taken with a smartphone and uploaded to social media') (p. 19). All three elements must be present simultaneously (photography, visual representation of themselves, and networking).

Selfies are not only photographic objects, such as family photos or landscape photos, but objects that represent themselves, and digitally networked objects, which can be technically shared and easily accessed through communication networks (Tiidenberg, 2018a, pp. 21-22). The relation between selfie and audience can be explained through the third element, where a selfie is a digitally networked object. This characteristic explains that selfies are produced not to be enjoyed alone, but to be shown to the public. Individual selfie performers need an audience, especially those who give a positive assessment of their appearance (Jiyoung, 2017, p. 373).

Albury (2015) interviewed a group of 16-17 years-old males and females in Sydney, Australia found that selfies are distinguished into two types: Private selfies, and Public selfies. Private selfies were defined as an ordinary, unremarkable practice, though somewhat risky, with concern that friends or family members might find private selfies then non-consensually share these photos as a joke or prank. The main risks were embarrassment and overreaction regarding the sharing of photos.

On the other hand, public selfies were suggested to be more communicative and could be understood as an expression of self that communicated to others about one's location and interests at a certain point in time. The creation and sharing of public selfies performed a range of social media practices, including 'showing and being shown' and 'presencing' or 'managing presence to others across space' (Albury, 2015. p. 1736). In this context, public selfies are more strategic than private selfies as they post selfies on social media in pursuit of likes and reactions.

Celeste Brusati, an art history professor from the University of Michigan defines self-portrait as self-image focusing on the representation of the face and body of the person depicted, where clothes, facial expressions, movements, and behavior show their 'social identity'. 'Social identity' refers to 'identification of someone' in the group or community. Personal identity refers to aspects of self-perception, 'identification', and self-categorization that places individuals in unique positions or characters (Tiidenberg, 2018a, p. 22).

## Looking-Glass Self

In symbolic interaction, 'identification' involves a process called "minding", which is the process of interpretation of the symbol system that is captured through interaction. George Herbert Mead called 'minding' as an internal conversation that helped shape the concept of self and identity in symbolic interaction. 'Minding' explained that humans are uniquely able to reflect on their activities. Therefore, humans are characterized by consciousness (consciousness) and self-awareness (self-consciousness), namely the ability to make oneself an object of reflection. That is, humans are required to come out and 'as if' observing themselves from the outside.

Charles Horton Cooley (1902) called it the 'looking-glass self'. This concept explains how the 'minding' process works as an inner debate or 'reflecting' to determine the appearance, behavior, and actions of a person (Crable in Littlejohn and Foss, 2010, p. 948). 'Reflecting' in this sense can mean: 1) Imagine how someone appears to others; 2) Imagine the public's assessment of the appearance; and 3) Imagine feelings of self that will arise, such as pride, or torture as a result of other people's judgment.

Looking-glass self explains, when interacting, individuals want to present certain views that give rise to feelings of acceptance by other actors/people. The 'mirrored' process allows the individual to plan and modify the symbols to be communicated because he has weighed all possible actions, assessed the strengths and weaknesses, then chose certain symbols or actions. Thus, the looking-glass self is the basis of someone doing 'impression management'.

Assumptions in looking-glass self can be used to explain the practice of self-editing as a way for someone to modify symbols to be communicated through social media, in this context selfies, to get a positive reaction from the audience. Modifications are made based on certain considerations obtained through the 'mirrored' process, including the imagination of public judgment, as well as the imagination of the feelings of self that might arise. These considerations underlie decisions about how a person presents himself, including doing selfie-editing to get the desired self-appearance.

Jiyoung (2017), through one of her research findings on virtual makeovers, shows that people with beautiful faces (or handsome) still do self-editing to make them look more 'perfect' virtually. They believe that they look fine, but still want to look better on social media (Jiyoung, p. 374). This can explain the act of adding filters to the results of a selfie made by a social media user, in this case, an Instagram user.

Perfecting selfies are also aligned with a study conducted by Albury (2015) when she found that public selfies are strategic content that aims to be communicative to others. Therefore, people ought to manage their presence with others on social media. It is mentioned that Adrienne Ressler, VP of The Renfrew Center Foundation's Professional Development, said that the urge to improve selfies is more about wanting to show the best selves than the real selves (The Renfrew Center, 2014). The behavior to display best selves rather than real selves through the selfie-editing process is the result of the 'mirroring' process in the concept of looking-glass self.

## The Beauty Myth

The myth of beauty states that the quality called "beautiful" really exists, objectively and universally. This "beautiful" quality puts pressure on women to follow standards that are (unfortunately) determined by men's perspectives. The capitalist system and the media play a role in reproducing the image of beauty which tends to be fixed from time to time. Beauty is a stronghold of women who are often attacked by producers of beauty products and mass production of beautiful images that are increasingly refined (Wolf, 2004, p. 122).

The message conveyed by the media about beauty myths is determined by advertisers. However, the relationship between the reader and the media does not occur in the context of encouraging the reader to analyze how media messages are influenced by advertiser needs. Relations that arise are emotional relationships, foster trust, and unbalance (Wolf, 2004, pp. 143-144). That is, advertisers (through the media) determine 'which ones are beautiful, which are not beautiful', as well as 'which are ideal, and which are not ideal', and the audience tends not to sue these criteria. As long as the public still consumes the media, the public will continue to be exposed to 'beautiful' standards and ideals that become beauty myths, including beautiful light-skinned, slim body, long hair, and young-looking skin without wrinkles.

## METHOD

This qualitative research was conducted through in-depth interviews with 3 Instagram users that have more than 5,000 followers each. Besides the in-depth interviews, the data for this research also collected through digital observation of the selfies, self-portraits, and photos that have been published in each account. The three Instagram users, as well as social influencers, who became the object of this research, are @cindaranii with 53,000 followers as of October 2020; @indripurwandari with 10,600 followers as of October 2020, and; @ipekhkhalifah with 6,531 followers as of October 2020. The three users regularly published edited selfies and self-portraits in their Instagram account, which significantly draw reactions and comments from their followers and visitors.

The objective of this research is to see how and why the three ladies attempted to perfect their image on Instagram through selfie-editing, and how the looking-glass-self contributed to the action of selfie-editing to idealize their self-presentations. In this case, the data gathered from the research were analyzed through Cultural studies in the realm of the critical perspective. Cultural studies (Hall, 1986, as cited in Morrison, Warhani, & Hamid, 2013) is an essential study to expose the ideology that is manifested in cultural products which are shown in our daily practices, what we consume and practice in everyday life.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Selfies are often perceived as spontaneous acts, but this research showed that most selfies are not spontaneous as they would be published on Instagram. According to the in-depth interviews and observations of the informants' selfies and self-portraits posted in each Instagram account, informants mostly prepared and took some actions prior to the selfie uploads. The production of selfies and self-portraits can be divided into three main phases: 1) Pre-production; 2) Production, and; 3) Post-production.

**Pre-production** refers to the conception and preparation phase before a selfie or a photo is taken. It includes *outfit and make-up, time and place setting, lighting, and gear*. Informants have a concern to produce a clear and sharp photo, so the pre-production phase is crucial. As mentioned by informant @indripurwandari below:

*"I set some standards. Photos need to be taken outside, have to be outdoors, whether in the morning or during the day as long as there is sunlight. I never want to take photos at night, daylight is very helpful to make camera captures clearer. "*

*"I consider the theme and consistency of my Instagram feed to the point that if I went to a cafe, what kind of light would I get, I would definitely know what kind of outfit to wear. Make-up too. For me, I prefer natural makeup to bold ones, so my face looked fresh. That is for the photos to be posted, for (Instagram) feeds needs. But at night, it's a mess, messy style. Just go as it is. I would not post the photos to my feeds, just share it to WhatsApp groups or stories."*

The statement shows that the informant takes serious consideration to the consistency of her Instagram feeds as she set some serious standards for her photos, even for selfies, to be posted. Therefore, some preparations need to be done, such as photos that need to be taken outdoors to get the sunlight to get a clear capture of the camera. Another factor is the outfit and make-up suitability with the place and time where the selfies are taken. In the case of photos taken at night, with a lack of proper sunlight, she tends not to consider much about what to wear, as it would not be posted to her feeds.

Informant @ipekhkhalifah made a point about the pre-production phase, where she would like to show her easy-going personality through her daily activities, but on the other side, she would like people to recognize her works as a make-up artist and culinary entrepreneur.

*"It is sometimes random, but not that random. It is arranged too but pretty laid out. For example, today I posted my selfies, the next day I would post my dog or food. However, I am not a person that posted 3 photos in one line like others might do, you know..."*

Gears also play an important role in the pre-production phase. Informants believed that to get the selfies well-taken, they must be equipped with a high-quality smartphone camera. With this

consideration, a high-end type of smartphone is necessary, as mentioned by @ipekhalifah in the interviews below:

*“I am using iPhone 8 Plus now. Gear does make a difference in image quality. I don't have a mirrorless camera, so the phone's camera has to be good. You can't use a low-end camera phone like that. Everything (gears) is now sophisticated and so good. Plus, everyone is using Instagram now.”*

Informant @cindaranii also share the same concern:

*“My photos are taken using a Sony mirrorless camera and a smartphone Samsung Galaxy S9. I mostly use smartphones for selfies and self-video. Mirrorless cameras allow me to do more sophisticated camera settings, such as brightness and contrast. It is very useful for self-portrait and product photos as I take endorsements and ads.”*

While not focus on taking endorsements and ads, informant @indripurwandari has also pointed out the urgency of having high-end gears for her Instagram feeds:

*“Yes, gears are important. I use an iPhone X and a Fujifilm mirrorless camera. But now I tend to use the iPhone. To be honest, I prefer the iPhone's camera other than the Android-based ones. I've tried using S10 (Samsung), the photos are clear and sharp, but somehow after I applied the filter the results are so different. It looks less real. Mirrorless is for sure, but now that I have a baby, it's a hassle. So, I just go to my iPhone. A smartphone is okay like that; you don't know I million cell phones anyway (speaking of a low-end phone)”*

All informants are in the same voice speaking about the importance of gear specifications when it comes to their feeds. Two informants use both mirrorless cameras and high-end smartphones, while one informant only uses one device, a high-end phone. However, for selfies, smartphone cameras are used more often, as all the digital editing is performed through smartphones. High-specifications gears are perceived to produce a better image quality rather than the low-end ones. Therefore, they tend to invest in expensive smartphones rather than risking the quality of their photos. It is also influenced by the consciousness that people on Instagram are also aware and concerned about the image quality.

In phase 2, namely **Production**, one crucial aspect in which all informants mind a lot is the *angle*. The angle refers to the degree to which the camera points towards the subject (Suzuki, 2017). In photography, the angle intentionally used, defines voice, presence, and visual purpose (Keefe, 2016). Each informant has their reason for choosing angle as one aspect that could not be forgotten when producing a selfie. Informant @cindaranii even mentioned as follows:

*“Angle is the main aspect. Other than camera settings, an angle is very important as I must think about how I would look in the camera. It became more important when I needed to bring along the product I promoted.”*

As informant @ipekhalifah stated that, “Angle is certain”, informant @indripurwandari spoke the same voice:

*“In the case of selfies and self-portraits, what is certain is to not look fat, because I gained some weight after giving birth. It is still hard to lose some.”*

The statement above shows that angle helps the informants to get the look they desired. In the case of @indripurwandari, it helps her to conceal some weights she gained. The right angle helps them to have a positive impression of her face and body.

The last phase is the **Post-production** phase which includes the digital editing and filters using photo-editing applications. This research showed all three informants agreed that photo-editing, including selfie-editing and self-portrait editing, is an important step to be accomplished before they post their selfies and photos on their Instagram account. The editing process was performed mainly on their smartphone using more than one photo-editing application.

The most photo-editing application that the informants use is *Adobe Lightroom*. This application is mainly to adjust the color tone of selfies and photos they have taken. All informants mentioned that *Adobe Lightroom* helped them to get the right tone they wanted. The other most-utilized app is

Google Snapseed. This app is very useful to revise the details of the photos, such as removing the table's stain, adjusting brightness and contrast in a very detailed spot such as shirts and leaves. Other than Adobe Lightroom and Google Snapseed, informants sometimes use existing filters in Instagram or process it once more in other applications, such as VSCO and Tezza.

Informant @indripurwandari said that she normally uses three or four photo-editing applications to edit one photo before uploads it:

*"Since 2013, oh well, they have those on the camera, like iPhones, they have their editing tools and filters. At first, I used the iPhone filter, then I started using VSCO. Now I like using Lightroom, Snapseed, and Tezza."*

The statement shows that there are some changes in processing the photos digitally as the numbers of photo-editing applications are growing over time. In addition to that, @indripurwandari said that having multiple apps are necessary as each app caters to different functions and purposes.

*"Yes, first in Lightroom. It is for editing the overall image, such as adjusting the contrast, reducing the white, adding the dark (brightness). Later I go to Snapseed. It is for improving the details. If we look at Instagram, there is a darker leaf, it is darkened using Snapseed. Finally, I went to Tezza to add filters. It is still the original image until Snapseed. It can adjust the contrast and brightness too, but Lightroom is better. Like now if you wanted to make an image look yellow, or warmer, use Lightroom."*

Not too different from @indripurwandari, other informants also agreed regarding multiple apps used for photo-editing. Informant @cindarani and informant @ipekhalifah also talked about using Lightroom and Snapseed.

*"Angle and camera setting are essentials, but you cannot go like that with raw photos. I do digital editing through Lightroom and Snapseed. I prefer Snapseed as it can improve the details, but Lightroom is best to get the tone right."*

*"I use Adobe Lightroom. It gives me the warm tone I desired. Besides Lightroom, I use VSCO and Snapseed, but I use Snapseed more often than VSCO. It is because Snapseed has more features, it can heal. For example, there is dirt on the table, so you can clean it, right away. It is called healing."*

According to the above interview cuts, each informant has preferences towards photo-editing apps they are using. However, though they have preferences, the apps they choose, and the reason why they choose those apps are quite similar. They are keen to do such efforts of editing rather than risking their image. Editing and filters are inevitable as they could not let their selfies be uploaded like that to maintain the tone and mood of their feeds.

The selfies must look good. The consistency of colors, tones, and themes in the Instagram feeds are also essentials. Editing and filters are somehow inevitable but there is a criterion that all informants are all again in one same voice, that the selfies must look natural, even though it has gone through some digital processing. Informant @ipekhalifah mentioned such reasons when it comes to her editing style and filter preferences.

*"It is more about the skin tone, so it would look more authentic, more natural-looking. I go with a warm yellowish tone (photo filter) because my tanned skin tone goes into the warmer filter tone. If I use a blue, cooler one, it would look too white, too pale. "*

Filters also help to boost the face features and makeup so it could make her feel prettier and more confident.

*"For example, in this photo, my skin color doesn't come out, it looks pale if I just posted it like that. The filter makes my hair color more visible, eyebrows clearer, and lipstick color more popped out. Automatically, when I use a filter, I feel prettier, more confident."*

Speaking about how filters made one photo looks natural, informant @indripurwandari shared her thoughts:

*"I must get the color tone first. Sometimes I don't like the face looking too white. I prefer to have shadows, so it gives me a natural look. I don't want my face to look too white. That is why dark filtered function makes it natural."*

Informant @cindaranii also shared her opinion regarding a specific vintage tone as her filter choice that she applies in her Instagram feeds.

*"Vintage tone helps to create the mood and feeds consistency. It has to look natural and more importantly makes me look pretty"*

Filters, or sometimes named as preset, are the last item to be added before a photo being uploaded on Instagram. Filters are applied to enhance a photo, to reduce what users feel as flaws and imperfections in photos. This is the last but not least step, as informants determine their filter choices as well as the editing steps with much consideration. While photo-editing and filters-adding might be taken as fabricating processes, informants expect to get the least fabricated results. A natural, effortless look is the main goal.

Informant @ipekhkhalifah shared her thought about how an edited selfie still needs to look natural.

*"People surely want to look perfect, but filters are a matter of compatibility. For example, if one filter made my face look too bright then I would just drop it. It would turn out weird if I insisted on applying such filters. Sometimes the original photo after being filtered turns white, being like that can be deceiving. Instead, it would become the target of malicious comments. Viewers would recognize, like 'how come it is so different in person'. It happens quite often."*

A natural look needs to be achieved, otherwise, the user can be the object of malicious comments from other users or viewers. Informant @indripurwandari thought that less editing and more concern for the pre-production aspect can help the photos look more effortless.

*"Filters and editing are indeed inevitable, as my feeds have been well-arranged. Even if I get a picture that's already good, at least it's not too much editing. Using Lightroom, I usually set the maximum brightness to 5, not much. I deliberately look for photos which already fulfill my standards."*

Other than to get a flawless yet effortless look, one of the reasons why filters are inevitable is to maintain the consistency of each informant's Instagram feeds. This consistency gives an impact on the increase of follower numbers which leads to receiving product endorsements or being hired to promote particular brands. Each informant experienced the rise of follower numbers since being consistent with the tone and theme in their Instagram feeds.

*"Yes, of course, quality of photos and tone consistency brings me more and more followers. Clients (endorsers) mostly look at the follower numbers."*

*"It's not bad (increase the number of followers),*

*They said they got more interested. They somehow asked, what did I use to edit my photos because it looks good-looking, it looks better. Now people prefer visuals, right... If you see good visuals, you will follow them."*

*"There is, indeed. But I don't think I'm too concerned with follower numbers, because now you can buy the numbers. I am more concerned about whether my posts are useful or not. I am glad that people saved or reposted my content. At first, I just liked it when my photos or selfies looked good, looked better with editing. Then I began to receive some endorsements. It made me realize that what I do is worth it, and has some value so I would improve it again."*

Informants agreed that filters and edited photos made other users get more interested to visit and follow their Instagram accounts. This means that good visuals in Instagram draw positive responses from viewers, enforce them to get more followers and allow them to get recognized by brands and business owners.

This study shows that informants performed multiple actions to organize their image and look on Instagram as an effort of impression management. These actions are interpreted as a process to



idealize oneself to get personal satisfaction in terms of quality of the image and feed consistency, as well as expected responses from viewers. In short, the takeaways from this study are as follow:

Selfies posted on Instagram are results of a series production process consist of Pre-production, Production, and Post Production;

1. In the **pre-production** phase, several aspects have to be considered by users, which are: outfit and make-up, time and place setting, lighting, and gears.  
This phase is important to create clear and high-quality selfies and photos, as low-quality photos would be more difficult to edit to improve the quality.
2. In the **production** phase, one important aspect is the angle. This study shows that angle is certain as it helps to get the look they desired, such as concealing some gained weight, or outstand some parts of face and body as they are concerned about how they look in the camera. Managing the angle has a purpose to get positive impressions of their selves.
3. The **post-production** phase is mainly talked about editing. This study found that selfie-editing is inevitable for informants. Informants even use multiple photo-editing applications as each app caters to different purposes and functions. Among other released photo-editing apps, *Adobe Lightroom* and *Google Snapseed* are the most popular apps. Informants commonly use *Lightroom* to set the tone, contrast, and brightness, as for using *Snapseed* to reduce imperfections on photo details, such as vanishing stain and improve the details. As a finishing touch, users would use filters from other apps or simply use an existing filter on Instagram and then upload it.

Selfie-editing might be taken as a modification process. However, informants expect to get the least fabricated results. Informants aim to get a natural and effortless look through the editing process. Informants tend to use presets or filters that match their real skin tone. Instead of getting a super white-bright look, filters are added to achieve a flawless natural look. Therefore, informants are very selective in choosing a filter and editing style. A selfie that looked too fabricated would be potentially drawing malicious comments from viewers and followers.

Informants believed that selfie-editing would boost their confidence and make them feel prettier. This means that informants performed selfie-editing to gain self-satisfaction upon their look.

Informants are conscious that Instagram users are visual-concerned so that a good photo quality will attract people to comments, furthermore, to follow. Informants experienced growth of follower numbers since they figured out and implemented as numbers of followers are growing, informants started to receive endorsement from brand owners. Thus, they can monetize their Instagram feeds. And, as it is beneficial, informants tend to consistently do selfies and photo-editing to maintain their image in their feeds.

### Looking-Glass Self in the Creation of Public Selfies

In Symbolic interactionism, self-consciousness is one character of human beings. It is the ability to make oneself into an object of reflection. For this reason, symbolic interactionists identify two forms of human selfhood: self-as-process, and self-as-object. Self-as-object emerges only within and through social interaction and socialization into a particular language. Charles Horton Cooley referred to the self -as-object as the looking glass self, since it requires an actor to step outside of his/her activity and observe it as if from outside (Crabbe, 2010, pp. 946-947).

Cooley explained the looking-glass self as 'reflecting', a process that involved an inner-debate to determine the appearance, behavior, and actions of a person, that is humans are required to come out as if observing themselves from the outside. 'Reflecting' in this sense can mean:

1. Imagine how someone appears to others;
2. Imagine the public's assessment of the appearance;
3. Imagine feelings of self that will arise, such as pride, or torture as a result of other people's judgment. (Crabbe, 2010, as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2010, p. 947).

Public selfies are strategic content which intends to communicate one's interest at a certain point of time to others on social media hence it is relevant for users to manage their presence (Albury, 2015, p. 1736). In this context, the looking-glass self is the basis of managing one's presence and impression on Instagram. The way informants prepared and created their selfies and self-portraits indicates how important to manage their presence on social media.

The current study shows that the whole creation process of selfies and self-portraits, from pre-production, production, to post-production, indicates that informants are reflecting themselves towards many aspects to getting the desired results. Several statements from the informants such as: “*I consider the theme and consistency*”; “*You can't use a low-end camera phone*”; “*Angle is very important as I must think about how I would look in the camera*”; “*Filter makes my hair color more visible, eyebrows clearer, and the lipstick color more popped out,*” shows how informants strategically think and behave to get good visuals or at least produce a good photo. Looking-glass self as an inner debate explains this behavior.

Selfie-editing is not an exception in the whole process of making public selfies. ‘Reflecting’ resulted in modifications of symbols, which in this context is selfie-editing. As some comments made by informants: “*Angle and camera setting are essentials, but you cannot go like that with raw photos.*”; “*Filters and editing are indeed inevitable, as my feeds have been well-arranged.*”

Informants see editing as inevitable when selfies and self-portraits are planned to be posted on Instagram. There is a tiny chance to post raw photos, without editing. As applied in the pre-production and production phase, informants also set some requirements and standards in the editing part to get the desired result. Informants are especially attentive to the tones and filters they applied to the photos. They even use multiple photo-editing apps to get specific results. Looking-glass self is a continuous process in the context of making public selfies. It contributes to the strategic steps as people desire to present a specific side of themselves or ideas on social media.

### **The Power of Audience and Disciplining Self-actualization**

The findings of this study show that informants have some requirements for their photos to be posted on social media. “*I set some standards*”, indicates that the whole process is organized and standardized. Those standards and requirements are consciously created by informants. The current study also exposed one reason why people need to set some standards and strategies. That is the public assessments against selfies.

Instagram users are highly attentive against photos and visuals, some even have the audacity to comment on other users’ ‘visual’ flaws. This is a big consideration for informants when producing and sharing selfies and self-portraits on Instagram. Public selfies are meant to be communicated through social media, hence public assessment, as well as the feelings that will occur as a result of audience judgment need to be anticipated.

This study finds that the audience in Instagram has the power to reinforce users to perform certain actions regarding their public selfies and self-portraits. The power of the audience in Instagram, as Foucauldian said, works as panoptic. The panoptic is a design of prison developed by Jeremy Bentham (1971). In one of his works, *Surveiller et punir* (1975), Michel Foucault describes the panoptic model as a technology, a system for discipline enforcement. The effect of a panoptic system causes self-awareness to always be under surveillance. Discipline through panoptic becomes an effective technique that reaches into the most intimate aspects of life without being able to tell it comes from a particular subject (Haryatmoko, 2016, p. 22).

The audience works like the panoptic system in social media. As public selfies are intended to be communicated, the audience assessments are ones that the user imagines before taking and sharing a selfie. Users would feel under surveillance whenever they would post content. Foucault defined the practice of power as a set of actions against other actions which aim to control human action and subjectivity. Power is scattered everywhere and is perpetuated by the discourses that emerged. Discourse creates categorization, such as rules regarding good or bad behavior which controls people's behavior which in the end is considered the predetermined truth. Upon this, it is no longer the physical body that is controlled by power, but the soul, thoughts, consciousness, and individual will (Agustin, 2009, pp. 202-204).

How informants explained the way they construct their selfies, such as the make-ups, outfits, lightings, gears, filters, and editing styles indicate the form of discipline that is implemented in the selfie production. It comes from the awareness that they are under surveillance of the audience's eyes that perpetuated the emerged discourse. Foucault mentioned that discourse determined people's behavior, which controls consciousness and personal will (Agustin, 2009, p. 202). In this study, informants are conscious of their selection of make-ups, outfits, and filters. These comments below indicate that informants are conscious to select certain tones and filters.

*“Vintage tone helps to create the mood and feeds consistency. It has to look natural and more importantly makes me look pretty”*

*“I prefer to have shadows, so it gives me a natural look. I don't want my face to look too white.”*

*“... sometimes the original photo after being filtered turns white, being like that can be deceiving. Instead, it would become the target of malicious comments.”*

On Instagram, the audience has the power to determine the ideals based on certain discourse. One of the ideals found in the study is that the filtered or edited selfies must serve a natural look, the least fabricated it could be. Otherwise, viewers would recognize it and find it deceiving. They might even drop malicious comments against the users. This shows the audience's judgment and assessment against one's visual and photo quality discipline users on Instagram. They have the power to control what users should do and should not do.

For Duguay (2016), Instagram's affordances and content generation tools were said to encourage users to focus on aesthetic appearance (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019, p. 1148). What Foucault said about power is that power is not repressive, it as productive as it produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse (Dhona, 2020, p. 202). Focusing on aesthetic appearances, this study found that informants learn how to select lighting, make-ups, outfits, gears, and angles to obtain the desired results. In the case of editing, informants learned how to operate the photo editing apps, exploring its features to get the preset, filter, and tones that suit them the most. Informants also mentioned that aesthetic photos and visuals on Instagram would invite new followers and numbers of likes. When the numbers are high enough, they are likely to receive endorsements. In this context, it indicates that the power of the discourse that is brought up by Instagram's audience is productive, it generates new knowledge and value for users.

Selfie-taking and selfie-sharing on social media facilitating the need for self-exploration, communication, attention-seeking, and positive feedback from peers and strangers (Boursier, 2020, p. 2). A prior study from Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010) sees selfies as a step toward self-reflection and self-actualization (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019, p. 1145). Self-actualization is at the peak of Maslow's pyramid hierarchy of needs.

Self-actualization means realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and experience, the desire to achieve full potentials, to be all things that an individual capable of (Maslow, 1943, as cited in Miller, 2011, pp. 40-41). Growth motivation does not come from a lack of something, but rather from a human desire to grow as a person (McLeod, 2018).

Photo-sharing is central to Instagram. The networked audience that is invited to like or share the selfie also supports the motivation behind the selfie. The study found that the shared selfies allow the informants to actualize themselves, to communicate with other users through their contents, at last, to bring value and satisfaction. The expectation was active participation. When people share photos or selfies, they primarily see the communication people are engaging in. Seeing ourselves as a peer communicating with others was key to our identity online (Rettberg, 2014:17). It is the feedback, the conversation that is meaningful for the informants. Whether it is the growth of follower numbers, the likes, the positive comments, or the reposts and saves, those are self-fulfilling experiences for the informants and considered as successful self-actualization. However, the study also found that self-fulfilling experiences are gained through the well-visualized, well-prepared, right-edited photograph.

### **Perpetuating The Discourse of Beauty Myth**

The selfie is a version of self. The place, the pose, everything displayed in a selfie significantly speaks about the performance of self. This study shows that selfie-editing accommodates an individual's desire to present a 'better' version of himself on social media, where it relates to an individual's desire to receive recognition and positive responses from an audience who sees his selfie. Purwati (2015), through her research on the phenomenon of selfie in adolescent girls, revealed that the motivation to do and upload selfies that is most crucial for adolescent girls is the desire to show physical appearance in front of others to gain recognition and positive assessment of their physical beauty (p. 12). Meanwhile, positive response and audience recognition still refer to the discourse of beauty myths that have long been circulating in the community.

According to Naomi Wolf, the beauty myth underlying the actions of the media to censor the appearance of women. Two editors of women's magazines in the United States revealed that they used editing techniques to reduce the age of a woman's face. Magazines tend to avoid photos of women's faces that look old and do an 'artistic touch' so that women's faces look younger, so they look more beautiful. The artistic and editing touch in question is to use computer technology to manipulate the reality of photography that has long been applied in magazine editorial photos and beauty advertisements (Wolf, 2004, p. 160).

Now with social media, editing is no longer performed by magazine editors but is done individually by the user or account owner in the form of selfie-editing. Instagram encourages users to focus on body regions that they are anxious about, potentially due to the increased importance that Instagram users placed on physical appearance comparison, leading to body dissatisfaction (Bue, 2020, p. 10).

The finding of this research shows that selfie-editing and filters are executed to overcome the body dissatisfaction of the users. It is performed to achieve a perfect, flawless, desired look. Though they would still drive to achieve a natural and effortless look due to the risk of malicious comments, the main idea is still the same, which is to look prettier, to be more confident. Selfie-editing is a way to present an ideal self-image on social media to get recognition and appreciation from the audience, while the ideals still refer to the discourse of beauty myths.

## CONCLUSION

Selfies that are taken and posted on Instagram are not fully authentic and spontaneous products. People are mostly prepared to create a selfie that would be worth a post in their Instagram feeds. As this study shows, selfies undergo some organized processes such as pre-production, production, and post-production. In each phase, many aspects are fully being considered to achieve an ideal selfie that reflects the ideal self the user desired. Those specific and organized processes indicate what *Horton-Cooley* called a looking-glass self. A looking-glass self involves 'reflecting' actions, which results in impression management of oneself. In this context, this is also based on the idea that Instagram is the largest visual-based social media where its users are concerned with displays and visual appearances.

Social media was initially believed to be a new democratic media, a media that was able to free its users from old values and create new values, but in practice, the selfie phenomenon that develops along with the increasing use of social media actually puts pressure on its users, especially women, towards their appearance. Audiences, who worked as the panoptic system, discipline the users to perform themselves according to the powerful discourse of the beauty myth. This results in the strategic and organized process in the making and sharing of public selfies on Instagram.

All in all, social media is not completely free of censorship, especially social censorship, where public censorship still refers to myths and standards of beauty that were believed before the internet and social media boom. Therefore, selfie-editing is not only an instant way to create an ideal self-image on social media, but also a way to perpetuate a society that is driven by beauty-driven societies. This raises a greater concern for some people about negative self-esteem and body image.

## REFERENCES

- Abidin, C. (2016). "Aren't these just young, rich women doing vain things online?": Influencer selfies as subversive frivolity. *Social Media + Society*, 2(2), 13-29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342>
- Agustin, S. M. (2009). Foucault dan komunikasi (telaah konstruksi wacana dan kuasa foucault dalam lingkup komunikasi). *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 7(3), 199-211. <https://doi.org/10.31315/jik.v7i3.27>
- Albury, K. (2015). Selfies, sexts, and sneaky hats: Young people's understandings of gendered practices of self-representation. *International Journal of Communication*, 9(11), 1734-1745. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/3132/1396>
- Aziliya, D. (2014, December 31). Selfie dinobatkan sebagai kata terpopuler tahun ini. *KABAR24 - Bisnis Indonesia*. <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20141231/79/387067/selfie-dinobatkan-jadi-kata-terpopuler-tahun-ini>
- Barker, V., & Rodriguez, N. S. (2009). This is who I am: The selfie as a personal and social identity marker. *International Journal of Communication*, 13(24), 1143-1166. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/9723>

- Boursier, V., Gioia, F., & Griffiths, M. D. (2020). Do selfie-expectancies and social appearance anxiety predict adolescents' problematic social media use? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 110, 106395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106395>
- Bue, A. C. C. (2020). The looking glass selfie: Instagram use frequency predicts visual attention to high-anxiety body regions in young women. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 108, 106329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106329>
- Clement, J. (2020, October 29). *Leading countries based on Instagram audience size as of January 2020 (in millions)*. Statista. Retrieved December 2020, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/578364/countries-with-most-instagram-users/>
- Crable, B. (2009). Symbolic interactionism. In S. W. Littlejohn & K. A. Foss (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of communication theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 946-948). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412959384.n371>
- Dhona, H. R. (2019). Analisis wacana Foucault dalam studi komunikasi. *Journal Communication Spectrum: Capturing New Perspectives in Communication*, 9(1), 189-208. <https://doi.org/10.36782/jcs.v9i1.2026>
- Hasan, A. M. (2016, September 9). *Selfie boleh, mati jangan*. Tirto.ID. <https://tirto.id/selfie-boleh-mati-jangan-bH66>
- Haryatmoko, J. (2016). *Membongkar rezim kepastian: Pemikiran kritis post-strukturalis*. Kanisius.
- Jiyoung, C. (2017). Virtual makeover: Selfie-taking and social media use increase selfie-editing frequency through social comparison. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 370-376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.007>
- Lobinger, K., & Brantner, C. (2015). In the eye of the beholder: Subjective views on the authenticity of selfies. *International Journal of Communication*, 9(13), 1848-1860. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/3151/1404>
- McLeod, S. (2007, February 5). *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Simply Psychology. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>
- Miller, K. (2011). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes* (6th ed.). Cengage Learning.
- Purwati, P. (2015). *Fenomena Selfie Kalangan Remaja Perempuan di Instagram* [Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Diponegoro]. Neliti. <https://www.neliti.com/id/publications/188402/>
- Rettberg, J. W. (2014). *Seeing ourselves through technology: How we use selfies, blogs and wearable devices to see and shape ourselves*. Springer/Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137476661>
- Senft, T. M., & Baym, N. K. (2015). What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon. *International Journal of Communication*, 9(2), 1588-1606. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/4067>
- The Renfrew Center Foundation. (2014, February 20). *Afraid to be your Selfie? Survey reveals most people Photoshop their images*. <https://renfrewcenter.com/news/afraid-be-your-selfie-survey-reveals-most-people-photoshop-their-images>
- Tiidenberg, K. (2018a). What are selfies? In *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them (society now)* (pp. 17-46). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78754-357-720181010>
- Tiidenberg, K. (2018b). (Why) Do selfies matter? In *Selfies: Why we love (and hate) them (society now)* (pp. 75-100). Emerald Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78754-357-720181003>
- Wolf, N. (2004). *Mitos kecantikan: Kala kecantikan menindas perempuan* (A. Swastika, Trans.). Niagara. (Original work published 1990).