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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Female Teenagers and Young Adults: Self-Presentation Trends on Instagram

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ABSTRACT

The widespread use of the Internet has played a significant role in the popularity of social media platforms. Among these, the global phenomenon of Instagram stands out, serving as one of the vital means of communication across the world. Particularly among teenagers and young adults, social media has become an integral part of daily life, facilitating interactions and self-expression. Teens and young adults, who often prioritize peer approval, physical appearance, and self-representation, are drawn to social networking sites (SNS) due to the opportunities they offer for connecting with peers and exploring their identity within a social context. As the use of social networking sites among youths has surged, researchers have taken an interest in how visual images can be employed to portray oneself on these platforms. Hence, this current study aims to delve into the self-presentation of female teens and young adults through their photos, specifically focusing on Instagram. A total of 40 participants fitting the criteria of being female, aged between 12 to 17 (teenagers) and aged 18 to 25 (young adults), residing in urban areas, and active users of Instagram, were selected. Analysing 200 images from these participants, the study employed Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996, 2006) semiotic analysis framework to decode the visual aspects. The study's outcomes revealed some comparisons of online trends in self-presentation on Instagram between the two age groups; teenagers and young adults. Age emerged as a key factor influencing the

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self-presentation patterns within these groups.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on how female teenagers and young adults in Malaysia present themselves on Instagram. It specifically examines the differences in self-presentation and use of social networking sites between these two groups and investigates whether age is a factor.

1. Introduction

Teenagers and young adults are considered the most active users of social network sites (SNS). They heavily rely on social networking sites (SNS) as a fundamental aspect of their social interactions (Marwick & Boyd, 2014; Yang & Brown, 2013) and typically utilize SNS platforms to establish new social connections, manage existing relationships, and stay updated on social events within their circle. Recent research indicates that adolescents dedicate a significant portion of their daily routines to engaging with social media (Yang & Brown, 2016; Neira & Barber, 2014). Teenagers are attracted to social networking platforms because they provide opportunities to connect with peers without adult supervision, allowing them to shape and explore their identities within a social context. This attraction is driven by their desire for peer acceptance, concern for physical appearance, and the desire to create certain impressions (Livingstone, 2008). As the participants in this study fall within the teenage and emerging adult age groups, it is essential to define these terms clearly. Various definitions have been proposed, with Lenhart et al. (2011) identifying teenagers as individuals aged between 12 and 17 years old, while Higley (2019) defines young adults as those aged between 18 and 25 years old.

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become vehicles for people to express their identities and present themselves the way they want to be perceived by peers and followers. Among all SNSs, self-presentation on the image-sharing site “Instagram” has started to garner scholarly attention. Instagram has become a worldwide phenomenon and especially in Malaysia, it is one of the vital means of sharing photos and videos with their followers or with a group of selected friends. They can also like and comment on the photos or videos posted. Instagram is a special mobile application that lets users choose whether to make their personal profile public so that everyone can read it, or make it private so that they can manage who follows them and can view their profile and posts. Instagram functions like a virtual photo book, which may be appealing to some people but may also have negatives including increased social comparison, increased self-presentation that isn't real, and increased need for popularity. In January 2024, Instagram emerged as one of the most popular social media platforms in Malaysia, based on the number of active users, with a total of 15.70 million users (Kemp, 2024).

The Instagram demographic primarily consists of female users aged 13 to 25, encompassing both teenagers and young adults. Prensky (2001) coined the term "digital natives" to describe this cohort of social networking site (SNS) users who grew up in the era of computers and online interaction. Among all demographic groups, teenagers and young adults exhibit a higher tendency to share user-generated content, express their viewpoints, and connect to external content online (Lenhart et al., 2011).

The aspect of self-presentation on social networking sites (SNS) has garnered attention within the realm of psychological phenomena. The substantial increase in young

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individuals' usage of SNS has spurred investigations into whether visual images serve as a mode of self-expression on these platforms. The act of sharing personal photos on social media is a deliberate choice made by users, typically aimed at enhancing their positive self-representation (Walther et al., 2001). Fellow SNS users often assess the attractiveness and personality traits of profile owners based on how they portray themselves through photographs (Walther et al., 2008). Visual images, such as photographs, directly contribute to self-presentation, serving as foundational elements of an individual's identity and reflecting the image they wish to convey (Mascheroni et al., 2015). Given that posting photos is a significant mode of communication for young women (Van Dijck, 2009), it becomes a pertinent area of focus. Visual communication entails conveying information and ideas through visual means (Bell & Davison, 2013). Exploring and understanding how visual communication conveys information is pertinent.

1.1. Research Objectives

Two research objectives were developed for the current study:

i. Examine the visual representations of female teenagers and young adults on Instagram;
ii. Identify disparities and similarities in the visual representations of female teenagers and young adults on Instagram.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Presentation of Females in Social Networking Sites

Social networking site users can add their photos to their profiles to serve a very specific role in the online self-presentation context. This makes the selection of photos to be posted trivial as other users may judge the attractiveness and the personality characteristics of profile owners based on how they present themselves through photographs posted (Walther et al., 2008). This leads to female teens and young adults paying special attention to the photographs they select for their profiles (Salimkhan et al., 2010). According to Fox and Vendemia (2016), women exhibit a higher level of attention to their looks than men. They express higher self-presentational concerns about their SNS posts as they experience pressure to share attractive photos and adhere to gender and beauty stereotypes. As a result, women are reported to share more photos of themselves and edit them more frequently than men.

Besides that, age in relation to photographic self-presentation online has received little attention to date. A study by Manago et al (2008) revealed that young women in their study of MySpace users felt pressured to present themselves in a sexualized way; suggesting clothing and flirtatious gaze adhering to the gender stereotype of physically attractive women in the society. The findings of the studies are consistent with another study on content analysis of profile pictures posted in teenage chat rooms, Kapidzic and Herring (2015) found that most girls' pictures showed them looking up or sideways in suggestive clothing such as showing their cleavage. In contrast, female youth who are mostly going through the transitional college period, use social networking sites to communicate by displaying photos of themselves as more independent women, showcasing friends' comments, or writing explicit self-descriptions (Manago et al., 2008). In addition to that, Butkowski et al. (2019) found that young adult women in their study commonly employ a variety of stereotypical gender displays in their

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Instagram selfies. Their poses were more frequently observed in the sexualized self-presentation of young adult women such as canting (e.g., bending of the head/body as a sign of appeasement) and loss of control (e.g., as an emotional expression of psychological disengagement). These self-sexualized images were more likely to receive likes and additional followers.

There is a limited number of studies that have compared self-presentation practices across different age groups on social networking sites (SNS). Most of the existing research has focused on adolescents or college students (Manago et al., 2008; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). However, Livingstone (2008) conducted interviews with 16 teenagers aged 13 to 16 in the Greater London area and observed that younger participants tended to create visually intricate and personalized profiles, whereas older adolescents preferred simpler profile aesthetics that emphasized social connections through links to others' profiles and photos of offline social activities (Livingstone, 2008, p. 402).

In another study, Manago et al. (2008) found that female young adults, primarily in the transitional college phase, utilized SNS to express their independence through photos, friends' comments, and self-descriptive texts. This discovery raises questions about how older Instagram users, such as young adults, may curate their self-presentation through photos differently from younger users, possibly emphasizing group images over solo photos. Hence, this study aims to explore the similarities and differences in photo-posting behavior between female teenagers and young adults on social networking sites.

2.2. Kress and van Leeuwen's metafunctional framework

Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) metafunctional framework is a highly relevant theory for analyzing the photos shared on Instagram. This framework encompasses three key dimensions: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. According to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006), the visual medium, like all semiotic modes, must fulfill various communicational and representational requirements to function effectively as a complete communication system. The selection of photos by users on Instagram may be influenced by both conscious and unconscious factors related to online visual representations. Elements such as distance and attitude can be systematically analyzed using visual content analysis techniques. By applying this framework, we can gain insights into how teenagers and young adults express themselves through visual images on Instagram.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Respondents

The study utilizes Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) metafunctional framework for analyzing visual images, which includes three main categories and corresponding sub-categories (refer to Table 1). This framework along with its respective categories and subcategories is utilized to scrutinize the visual content of images posted by teenagers and young adults on Instagram.

The study includes 40 female participants selected based on specific criteria determined by the researcher, including gender, age, geographical location, and Internet access. Due to the nature of Instagram access being controlled by the account owner, the researchers sought consent from each participant to become friends on Instagram, thereby gaining

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access to the participants' Instagram pages. The participants were selected based on their gender, notably targeting young females, as previous research has shown that they tend to upload a greater number of photographs compared to their male counterpart (Pempek et al., 2009). Moreover, a report by Kemp (2024) from Datareportal also showed that 56% of active Instagram users are female, which is higher than the male users. Adding to that, 56.5% of Instagram users in Malaysia are comprised of eligible users aged 13 and above and this represents the largest user group in Malaysia. Hence, for this current study, in terms of age categorisation, the study follows Lenhart et al.'s (2011) definition of teenagers (ages 12 to 17) and adopts Higley's (2019) definition of young adults (ages 18 to 25).

In terms of geographical location, the study has included participants residing in urban areas. This selection criterion is based on the study's reliance on Internet access, as well as the focus on active Instagram users who are presumed to post photos regularly. The data collection process involved analyzing visual images posted on the participants' Instagram pages for five months. Five photos were chosen from each participant, resulting in a total of 200 photos for qualitative analysis. These photos were then subjected to visual analysis using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) metafunctional framework as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Metafunctional Framework

Function of Meaning	Visual resources
Representational meaning – discuss how images represent reality.	Narrative: images that involves actions Conceptual: images with classificatory or analytical relationship between elements
Interactive meaning – discusses the relationship between the participants within the images and relationship between the image and the audience of the image.	Social distance: influenced by the different sizes of the frame; Personal (close-up) Social (medium shot) Impersonal (long shot) Image Act: related to the gaze direction of the represented participants which can be directed to the viewer or not; Offer (absence of gaze at viewer) Demand (direct gaze) Subjectivity: implies the possibility of expressing attitudes towards the viewers, depicted from various angles; Low-angle shot Eye-level shot High-angle shot
Compositional meaning – discusses the arrangement of images; the way the representations cohere into the kind of meaningful whole referred to a "text".	Information value: The placement of elements gives specific informational values attached to various 'zones' of the image: the left and right (representing existing and novel information), the top and bottom (symbolizing ideal and factual information), and the center and margins (indicating the core and secondary information). Salience: Certain elements are depicted as having greater significance or appeal than others. The visual indicators of prominence include elements such as size, the degree of focus, variations in tone, differences in color, positioning within the visual space, perspective,

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	and particular cultural considerations. Framing: the presence or absence of framing devices may connect or disconnects elements of the image.

Source: Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006)

3.2. Procedures

The snowball sampling method was utilized to facilitate the identification of potential subjects who might be challenging to locate through other means. This sampling approach was selected for two main reasons: first, the researchers were constrained by time limitations, as the study needed to be completed within a specific timeframe; and second, it expedited the process of recruiting respondents, as each initial respondent assisted in identifying subsequent respondents. This method enabled the researchers to gather a sufficient number of participants within the allotted time for data collection.

Participants were provided with a consent form in accordance with privacy restrictions policies. This policy mandated that researchers could only view and analyze photos on the participants' Instagram pages after receiving approval from the participants to follow them as followers, particularly if their pages were set to private mode. The issue of whether social media data should be classified as public or private information is a significant concern for researchers. The focus of this discussion is on the premise that users who use social media platforms have consented to certain terms and conditions that are linked to each platform. These terms and conditions include information about how their data can be accessed by third parties, including researchers or academics (Boyd & Crawford, 2012).

The researchers outlined the elements and characteristics present on the participants' Instagram pages that would be collected as data, along with details about the research and the consent letter. Subsequently, upon gaining access to the participants' Instagram accounts, the researchers examined selected photos from the profile pages for analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

The process of visual analysis involved a comprehensive examination of representational, interactional, and compositional meanings, comprising four distinct analytical stages. Initially, images were collected based on specific sample criteria, including gender, age, geographical location, and active Instagram usage. Subsequently, the evaluation of photos commenced, focusing on how participants were portrayed and whether they were depicted or engaged in actions (narrative/conceptualized representation), along with identifying any instances of digital manipulation (visual modality). The analysis then extended to the interactive meaning of the images, considering factors such as gaze, shot types, and angles. Moving on to the third stage, the analysis delved into exploring the compositional representation and interactive implications projected within the images. This stage is built upon the outcomes derived from the earlier representational and interactive analyses. Finally, the fourth stage centered on contrasting and comparing the disparities in self-presentation evident within the images shared by female teenagers and young adults. This phase aimed to address the second research objective utilizing the metafunctional framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006).

4. Results

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To address the first research objective, which is to analyse visual representations of female teenagers and young adults on Instagram based on representational and interactional meanings, the results section starts with a visual analysis of teenagers and young adults based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996; 2006) metafunctional framework. Table 2 displays the meanings for teenagers, while Table 3 displays the representational and interactional meanings for young adults. Following the acquisition of the data for each group, a comparison is done.

Table 2: Representational and Interactional Meanings for Teenagers

Function of Meaning	Visual Resources	%
Representational meaning	Decontextualised	8
	Contextualised	92
	Edited	84
	Unedited	16
	Conceptual	10
	Narrative	90
Interactional meaning	Close-up	62
	Medium	28
	Long	10
	Direct gaze	69
	No gaze	31
	Low angle shot	12
	Eye-level shot	82
	High angle shot	6

4.1. Representational and interactional meanings for teenagers

According to the data presented in Table 2, most of the photographs are given contextualised (92%), edited (84%), and narrated (90%). A substantial proportion of conceptualised images (92%) which indicates that the majority of photos contain a background image. The photographs in the photo gave contextual information to viewers on the location, time of day (day or night), and whether they were taken indoors or outside. Regarding photo editing, the percentage of images that undergo modification is rather substantial, at 84%. This indicates that the photographs underwent modifications in terms of contrast, brightness, sharpness, and even colour saturation. Filters are additionally employed to augment the visual appeal of the photographs. Filters are tools that enable people to enhance their images without the requirement of using expert software. Photo filters typically alter colours, saturation, and light exposure, or imitate a shift in focus. Photo editing software like Picsart offers digital photo stickers such as floral crowns, adorable bunny ears, dog ears, and face tattoos. Typically, iPhone users utilize image editing applications like VSCO to modify the appearance of their images before sharing them on Instagram, to enhance their visual appeal. The narrative process has a high percentage (90%), indicating that teenagers have a preference for capturing images that depict them as active individuals.

Regarding the interactional meaning process, the findings indicate that teenagers have a preference for photographs that depict them as being physically close to the viewers (close up, 62%) and taken from an eye-level viewpoint (82%). A direct stare, which occurs 69% of the time, indicates that teenagers are assertive and typically elicits a strong sense of connection with the observers.

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Table 3: Results for Representational and Interactional Meanings for Young Adults

Function of Meaning	Visual Resources	%
Representational meaning	Decontextualised	4
	Contextualised	96
	Edited	74
	Unedited	26
	Conceptual	15
	Narrative	85
Interactional meaning	Close-up	23
	Medium	55
	Long	22
	Direct gaze	42
	No gaze	58
	Low angle shot	11
	Eye-level shot	77
	High angle shot	12

4.2. Representational and interactional meanings for young adults

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that a large proportion of the images analysed for representational meaning were contextualized (96%), edited (74%), and narrated (85%). Young adults have a preference for contextualized images that offer viewers information about the place, setting (indoors or outdoors), and the time the photos were captured (daytime or nighttime). The editing percentage is relatively high at 74%, indicating that the photos underwent some form of editing, such as the use of photo filters or camera settings. For example, in certain photos, the participants were more prominent than the background, suggesting the use of portrait mode during photography. Additionally, there was a slight adjustment in color saturation in the photos. Filters can modify the appearance of a photo by adding an aged effect, intensifying the brightness and vividness of the colors, or adjusting the color temperature to a cooler tone. The results indicate that the narrative process achieved a high score of 85%. This suggests that young adults commonly captured images that depicted them as active individuals engaged in various activities.

The findings on interactional meaning indicate that a majority of young adults (55%) exhibit a preference for medium shots, which depict the upper body of the participants from the head to the chest area in the photos. This indicates that the participants have a preference for maintaining a certain level of distance from the spectators, avoiding a personal or close interaction. A majority of young adults (58%) prefer images in which they do not make direct eye contact with the viewers. In this particular image, the individuals were directing their gaze either beyond the boundaries of the picture or toward a person or object depicted within the image. In this scenario, the participant serves as an object of contemplation for the viewer, resulting in reduced engagement compared to more demanding images. Young adults also have a preference for eye-level angle shots that establish an equal relationship with the viewers.

4.3. Comparison of representational and intereractional meanings for teenagers and young adults

Representational meaning examines the connection between participants and the

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structures, contexts, and level of visual modality. The findings from Table 2 indicate that when it comes to representational meanings for teenagers, a majority of the images are contextualized (92%), edited (84%), and narrated (90%). Conversely, the findings for young adults in Table 3 were quite similar to those of the teenagers. Among young adults, contextualised photos make up the majority (96%), which is only 4% higher than the percentage for teens. The proportion of edited photographs is 74%, which is 10% lower than that of teenagers. Similarly, the percentage of narrated images is 85%, showing the same difference compared to teenagers. The findings indicate that both young adults and teenagers exhibited thoughtful consideration when selecting the images they posted on the internet.

The findings shown in Table 2 on the interactional meanings among teens indicate that a significant proportion of the photographs consisted of close-up shots (62%), eye-level angle shots (82%), and direct gaze at the viewers (69%). The findings for young adults in Table 3 displayed minimal disparity compared to the findings for teenagers. The data presented in Table 3 indicates that 55% of the photographs are captured from a medium shot angle, while for teenagers, the majority of the images (62%) are taken from a close-up angle. The results also indicate that a majority of young adults (58%) prefer not making direct eye contact with viewers, whilst a majority of teenagers (69%) prefer to make direct eye contact with viewers. The findings on interactional meanings indicate that young adults exhibit a preference for eye-level shot angles at a rate of 77%, which is slightly lower than the preference observed among teenagers, which stands at 82%.

4.4. Compositional meanings for teenagers and young adults

Compositional meanings encompass three key elements: information value, salience, and framing. Based on the findings from Table 2 and Table 3, it can be observed that both sets of images were depicted in an active position, with the participants actively engaged in some form of action. Young adults are expected to exhibit greater maturity compared to teenagers. Therefore, it is assumed that photographs or depictions of them engaging in activities or being portrayed in narratives would serve as evidence of this maturity. Nevertheless, the proportion of narrative images for young adults was 5% lower compared to teenagers. During the critical phase of identity formation, Arnett (2000) observes that teens actively strive to establish their sense of self by exploring many possibilities. This explains the reason why narrative images exhibit a greater proportion among teenagers.

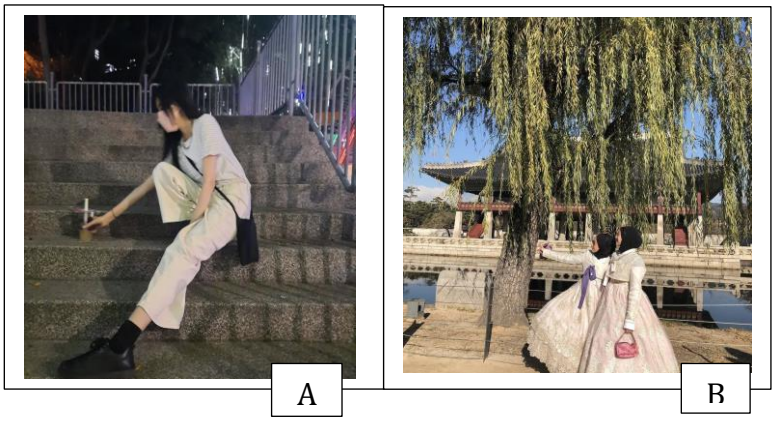
For instance, the photographs in Figure 1(A and B) depicted the participants engaging in active actions. The teenager in Figure 1 A is seated on the staircase, carefully resting her beverage on the step. Conversely, young adults in B are capturing pictures together to express their admiration for the environment. Both of the images captured actors engaged in an action with a specific objective. The photos portrayed several symbolic processes.

The analysis of compositional meanings is based on information value, salience, and framing. Given that the teenagers and young adults were placed in the center of the photographs, the resulting information indicates that the participants' images were oriented horizontally. The additional information was presented as the context. The teenager in Image A was more prominent due to her distinctiveness against the background and the clarity of her image, which captured the viewers' attention. Before focusing on the background, the viewers were directed to focus their attention on the

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individuals. The young adult in B, although placed in the center of the photograph, was overshadowed by the background due to the photo being taken from a distant angle. Regarding framing, there was a lack of distinction between the various lines of frame in the images. This suggests that the combination of the background and participants successfully expressed the participants' intention to share their activities with the viewers.

Figure 1: Narrative Image of Teenager (A) and Emerging Adult (B)



Teenagers typically prioritise their physical attractiveness (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011; Livingstone, 2008; Manago et al., 2008; Wegenstein, 2012), leading them to share photographs on Instagram to cultivate a favorable self-image (Miranti, 2017). As seen in Figure 2, both subjects (A and B) were gazing straight at the camera, suggesting that close-up photos were captured. The adolescent depicted in A appeared to be indoors, as she was positioned against a wall. In contrast, the photograph of the young adult was captured outdoors, during nighttime. The young adult was photographed with tents and people in the the background, visible at a small distance. Despite the presence of background information in the photo, the main subject is still the young adult. The analysis of the compositional meaning of the images indicated that the image stood out more prominently due to its clearer appearance in contrast to the background. However, the shot of the teenager in A was more prominent than the young adult in B due to the teenager occupying nearly the entire frame. Nevertheless, the lines of the frame in the photographs varied due to the participants' desire to make their images distinct from the background.

Figure 2: Conceptual Image of Teenager (A) and Emerging Adult (B)



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5. Discussion

The visual analysis of photographs in both groups revealed that teenagers and young adults utilised social networking sites (SNS) as a means to enhance their positive self-presentation to others. Both groups posted photographs that seemed to have been edited to enhance their visual appeal and attractiveness. The results align with those of Manago et al. (2008), who found that participants in their study manipulated the photos using image-editing software and tools to create the most visually appealing images. Many photographs analysed in this study were edited through the use of photo editing software, such as the PicsArt application, by incorporating images of flowers and other things. Additionally, the tones and presets of the posted images were adjusted using VSCO. This finding aligns with Siibak's (2009) research, which demonstrated that females placed significant emphasis on the act of retouching images. In addition, Santarossa et al. (2016) found that "appearance" was among the most widely favored content categories on social networking sites (SNS), providing more evidence that photos are associated with positive emotions and physical attractiveness. In a study conducted by Huang (2014), it was found that adolescents use social media platforms to publish aesthetically pleasing photographs in order to earn favorable compliments from their peers. In their study, Chua and Chang (2016) found that teenage females were able to gain insight into social standards of beauty by analysing images of other users and taking note of the comments, both positive and negative, that those users got. Participants acquired knowledge of the basic concepts of high-quality editing and gained an understanding of the concept of beauty through observing the errors that were made by others.

According to Meier and Gray (2014), social networking sites (SNS) provide a platform for people to communicate and where peer influences and self-presentation work together to create beauty standards. The data obtained also reveals several disparities in the self-presentation of teenagers and young adult participants. The teenage participants own a greater number of selfies compared to the emerging adult participants, resulting in a significant proportion of close-up photographs. They exhibit a greater sense of intimacy and proximity to the observer as opposed to being perceived as young adults. This aligns with a study conducted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) which revealed that teenagers primarily participate in online self-presentation activities, such as sharing photos or selfies of themselves showcasing their daily outfits, to observe and compare themselves with their friends and peers. The number of likes they receive for their photos directly influences their desire to maintain their attractiveness and popularity among their peers.

The findings of the present study indicate that a large proportion of teenage participants displayed demanding images in which the individual maintained direct eye contact with the observer. These results align with a study conducted by Kapidzic and Herring (2015) on the analysis of profile pictures in teenage chat rooms. The study indicated that female teenagers tend to post a greater number of images at shorter distances in order to express their level of closeness to their intended audience. In their study, the researchers also found that the majority of teenage girls presented themselves in photographs with their gaze directed upwards or to the side while wearing provocative clothing. This was done to create an intimate impression and convey a desire to establish a certain role, either as a friend or as someone seeking a potential love partner. In contrast, the young adults in the current study exhibited a greater proportion of offering images due to their increased posting of photos in which the participants

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deliberately looked away. Individuals in this demographic often share a higher number of photographs where their gaze is directed towards the outside of the frame or onto a subject or object within the shot, rather than straight at the viewer. In the study conducted by Kapidzic and Herring (2015), it was seen that participants often chose photographs where they were not making direct eye contact with the camera. This was done to convey either a sense of dominance or friendliness towards the intended audience. However, this behavior was not observed among younger female participants. The findings indicate that teenagers are in a developmental stage where they highly prioritise the approval and recognition of others. This aligns with a study conducted by Maryani et al. (2020), which revealed that female teenage participants relied on Instagram as a means of expressing their emotions and establishing a sense of identity within their social circle. Teenage girls, in particular, use Instagram to share photographs and material to gain favorable comments from their peers, which serves as a source of motivation for them to become more famous and enhance their attractiveness (Meeus et al., 2019). The self-presentation and peer comparison behaviors of teenage girls are motivated by the aspiration to attract attention, obtain validation, and receive recognition from others (Chua & Chang, 2016). However, young adults are in a stage of life where they are seeking a steadier social connection and contact, while also desiring more privacy in revealing their personal aspects. They value privacy to a greater extent than teenagers.

The findings from the visual analysis of the study indicate that the majority of the photographs shared by both teenagers and young adults are taken from a perspective that is at eye level. This suggests that the participants are conveying a sense of equality in their relationship with the viewers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006). These results corroborate the findings of Nor and Fuat's (2021) research on teenagers and emerging adults using Facebook, which revealed that the participants in their study predominantly exhibited stances captured at eye level. This particular posture not only signifies equal relations but also conveys the individual's affability and receptiveness towards others. According to Subrahmanyam et al. (2004), this characteristic is seen as a significant factor in acquiring new acquaintances. Young adults are particularly motivated to establish an extensive social network to project a positive image to others (Yau & Reich, 2018).

The visual analysis of the representational meaning of the images in the current study showed that both age groups of participants desire to be perceived as people who are active by engaging in activities or posing as if they are performing specific actions. However, there are a greater number of photographs depicting teenagers engaging in both indoor and outdoor activities as compared to young adults. The visual representations in the narrative correspond to the desire of teenage females to share photos on social networking sites (SNS) to present themselves positively and appear appealing to their peers and followers, to receive approval or acceptance (Yau & Reich, 2019). This, in turn, leads to their engagement in various indoor or outdoor activities. They have the belief that to be perceived as pleasant and attractive, they must post photographs of themselves participating in interesting events or engaging in interesting activities.

The findings of this study highlight the significance of understanding the way teenagers and young adults present themselves on social networking sites (SNS) like Instagram. Gaining insight into how teenagers and young adults present themselves online would enhance our comprehension of how these demographic age groups perceive themselves

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on social media platforms, particularly Instagram. The features on social networking sites (SNS) like Instagram provide users with greater autonomy in terms of selecting how they choose to share their images and present themselves to their intended audience or peers. Social media usage has been found to correlate with positive developments in terms of self-presentation and identity exploration. However, it can also lead to the development of several problems, including reduced self-esteem, depression, social anxiety, bullying, aggressive behaviour, and eating disorders. This narrative resonates with the anxieties of many teenagers and young adults who prioritise establishing a positive self-image and engaging in competitive comparisons with their peers (Chua & Chang, 2016; Zillich & Riesmeyer, 2021). In addition, as this study focuses on the online self-presentation of teenage and young adult females, it is crucial for us to teach them about the significance of understanding the potential negative outcomes that their online images may have, such as attracting unwelcome attention from viewers. Teenage girls who presented themselves in a sexualized manner on Instagram were viewed in a bad light and faced the repercussions of being subjected to sexual harassment and bullying, also known as "slut-shaming" (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020). It is imperative to provide education on social media literacy to teenage girls, specifically, so they are aware of the repercussions of their social media activities.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the existing literature on how female teenagers and young adults in Malaysia present themselves on Instagram. It specifically examines the differences in self-presentation and use of social networking sites between these two groups and investigates whether age is a factor. The study contributes to the already existing body of research on how female teenagers and young adults present themselves on Instagram. Age is a factor that affects how people exhibit themselves on social networking sites (SNS). This is supported by the similarities and differences in how people of different age groups visually display themselves, as observed in the current study. This suggests that individuals belonging to different age groups are exposed to messages that promote unique identities, and these age groups project diverse identities to the audience they are targeting. Teenagers frequently share several close-up photographs and deliberately point their gazes toward the viewers, indicating their desire for attention and stronger connections with their followers and peers. In addition, they strive for validation from their peers and project themselves as captivating and appealing individuals. Therefore, the current study proposes that social media literacy should be provided to adolescent females, specifically to enhance their understanding of the repercussions of their online self-presentation.

The present study has contributed to a rather unexplored topic within the Malaysian setting. While both groups display self-presentation traits that can be universally recognized through visual analysis of the photos, it would be valuable for future research to explore the influence of gender as a variable in studies on self-presentation on social networking sites in the local context. It is crucial to examine the influence of gender on the selection of images and positions that individuals choose to display on their social media platforms, such as Instagram. The current investigation exclusively targeted Malay female teenagers and young adults who adhere to the Islamic faith. Future research should incorporate male teens and young adults from diverse backgrounds, as they are expected to exhibit distinct interpersonal behaviours while sharing images on social networking sites (SNS) compared to their female counterparts.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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