

*Research article*

## Representing the Muted Others on Social Media: Multimodal Analysis of @pelanginusantara\_org's Instagram Account

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**Abstract** This study examined the representation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and the likes (LGBTQ+) identity in @pelanginusantara\_org Instagram accounts in the midst of heteronormative dominance and marginalization of queer narratives by mainstream media in Indonesia. This study uses Muted Group Theory as the main theoretical framework to understand how queer communities construct counter-discourses against the symbolic structures that exclude them. The analysis was carried out through the multimodal analysis approach proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen, which was strengthened with the perspective of Butler's gender performativity theory, in order to interpret visual, linguistic, and symbolic strategies in building queer identity in the digital space. The results show that this account uses strategies of visual affirmation, cultural localization, and affective narratives to challenge heteronormative discourses and create a more inclusive counter-public space. These findings confirm that social media, especially Instagram, has transformational potential for the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia in negotiating identity and building a more equitable and humane alternative representation.

**Keywords** Digital Activism; Instagram; Multimodal Analysis; Muted Group Theory; LGBTQ+; Queer Representation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has undergone a significant transformation in the past decade. It no longer functions simply as a means of interpersonal communication, but has evolved into a complex social, political and cultural space where identity negotiation, meaning production and resistance articulation take place (Bruns et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2015). Instagram, as a visual-based platform that is highly popular, especially among the younger generation, provides a medium for users to strategically display their identities, form communities, and conduct symbolic activism (Abidin, 2020; Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Instagram's visual characteristics, which include the use of colours, symbols, typography, and image composition, make it very effective as a medium for conveying non-verbal messages that are layered with meaning. In the context of identity representation, this visual approach allows users to convey political messages implicitly, especially in a society that limits the explicit expression of identity diversity (Nurfadila, 2024; Van Vliet et al., 2020).

One community that actively uses social media to voice identity and resistance is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and the likes (LGBTQ+) community. In various parts of the world, social media has been used by this community to form solidarity, build alternative narratives, and create safe spaces based on affection and self-expression (Cho, 2018; Gieseeking, 2021; Gray, 2009). A study by Fox & Ralston (2016) shows that LGBTQ+ communities utilize digital platforms to deconstruct traditional gender norms through the production of multimodal and transgressive content. However, local context has a significant influence on how social media is used. In Indonesia, the expression of LGBTQ+ identities remains under great social and political pressure.

While there is no national law that explicitly prohibits homosexuality, social pressure, moral policing, and discriminatory local regulations create a repressive climate for queer expression. Mainstream media discourse in Indonesia is still dominated by stereotypical representations, such as labelling LGBTQ+ people as moral deviants or threats to religious norms (Pawestri & Pustaka, 2022; Kurnia & Novi, 2022). A label also follows after discussions proposed by both activists and academics pioneering on the topic, such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Monique Wittig (1980), Gayle Rubin (1984), and Dede Oetomo (2010), that categorize the community as *the other (liyan)* for their deviance or their stance beyond the norm.

The dominance of this discourse is in line with Kramarae's Muted Group theory, which explains that subordinate groups in society do not have equal access to

dominant symbolic systems (Kramarae, 2005). In the media context, queer people are "silenced" both literally and symbolically due to limited language, space, and legitimacy to express their lived experiences (McConnell-Ginet, 2020; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2016). This condition encourages the emergence of alternative representation strategies in digital spaces, where visibility plays an important role in articulating an existence that is not represented in the mainstream symbolic system. Instagram is one of the important channels in this representational struggle. In a study by Duguay, Instagram is seen as a platform that allows for layered "queer visibility" both as a form of self-expression and as a form of political resistance to dominant narratives (Duguay, 2016). In Indonesia, despite high pressure on the LGBTQ+ community, some Instagram accounts still exist and act as symbolic spaces that fight for fairer and more affective representations, such as the @pelanginusantara\_org account. This account uses illustrations, local colours, traditional symbols, and inclusive language to insert counter-narratives to heteronormative dominance in Indonesian culture.

The representational approach taken by this account is in accordance with the concept of cultural digital activism, where aesthetics becomes a medium of symbolic struggle in digital space (Treré, 2018). The queer aesthetics presented not just about visual style, but a form of symbolic politics that targets the meaning structure of society. In this context, queer representational practices can be read as a form of micro-politics that tries to intervene in the established boundaries of social representation. Unfortunately, despite developments in queer media studies globally, in Indonesia studies that integrate multimodal approaches with queer representation studies are still very limited. Most studies still focus on legal aspects, human rights, or macro social movement dynamics. Research conducted by Hedianana & Winduwati (2019) revealed that queer individuals see new media as a space for expression, such as opening up (*self disclosure*). Although research on queer representation on social media has grown at a global level (Cho, 2018; Duguay, 2016), similar studies in Indonesia are still limited and tend to focus on legal or human rights discourse (Syaiful Yahya et al., 2024).

According to Wijaya, queer studies in Indonesia do not have an established institutional form like in the United States or some East Asian countries. Its academic discourse and practice grow through individual initiatives, cross-community collaborations, and non-formal learning spaces that break the boundaries between academics and activists (Wijaya, 2025). The label "LGBT" is increasingly politicized as an identity that is considered "foreign", "incompatible with the national culture", and

even a "moral threat" (Rodríguez & Murtagh, 2022). This condition makes it difficult for queer studies to develop in formal institutions and encourages researchers and activists to look for alternative spaces in the production of knowledge.

The aim of this study is to examine how this account uses multimodal strategies—combining text, visuals, typography, and cultural references—to challenge dominant social norms and create space for alternative, inclusive queer identities. The central research question guiding this study is: How does the Instagram account @pelanginusantara\_org construct queer counter-narratives and negotiate LGBTQ+ identities through multimodal visual strategies in the Indonesian socio-cultural context?

Interestingly, this study challenges the assumption that social media in conservative societies like Indonesia serves merely as a space for entertainment or lifestyle. On the contrary, digital platforms such as Instagram can function as powerful tools for political articulation and the negotiation of identity. Through visual practices and affective narratives, @pelanginusantara\_org creates not just a space for self-expression, but also an arena for resistance to normative hegemony. In doing so, it provides an example of how queer visibility in Indonesia is not only an aesthetic expression but a potent form of political activism aimed at resisting the symbolic repression of LGBTQ+ identities (Duguay, 2016).

The findings of this research contribute to the growing field of queer media studies by offering a nuanced understanding of how digital platforms, particularly Instagram, serve as a site for queer expression in Indonesia. It extends existing theoretical frameworks by integrating the concept of local cultural resistance within global queer visibility discourse, illustrating how digital activism can adapt to unique cultural and political landscapes. This study also explores how digital spaces such as Instagram are reshaping the concept of public space in countries with restrictive social norms, allowing marginalized groups to navigate, resist, and redefine their identity in an increasingly globalized world (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Gieseeking, 2021).

## **2. METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a multimodal analysis method (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The analysis was conducted to interpret the relationship between text, visuals, typography, and cultural symbols in 20 randomly selected but thematically relevant Instagram account @pelanginusantara\_org posts.

The multimodal analysis approach is grounded in the theory proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020), which emphasizes the interpretation of meaning through visual, linguistic, and compositional elements. This method is particularly suitable for examining social media content, where text, images, and symbols interact to convey messages. Instead of viewing these modes as separate, they are analysed as interrelated, offering a holistic understanding of how meaning is constructed and communicated in a digital context.

Data was collected from 20 selected posts using a purposive random sampling technique. The term "random" in this study refers to the random selection of posts within a predetermined time frame, namely in the period from January 2024 to April 2025. This period was chosen because it shows the consistency of content production with the theme of queer representation and coincides with the increase in public discourse about LGBTQ+ in Indonesia. From a total of about 120 posts in that period, researchers made a numerical list, then used a *random number generator* application to determine the 20 posts analyzed. Thus, the random process is carried out within a clear and limited sample framework.

The research procedure began with initial observations to identify common patterns of visual and narrative representations of the accounts. After that, posts were selected based on criteria such as intensity of symbolic meaning, visual variety, and strength of advocacy messages. Data was collected in the form of digital documentation through screenshots of the selected posts, and analyzed through descriptive recording of each multimodal element that appeared. This research does not use hypotheses because it is explorative and hermeneutic. The researcher does not depart from assumptions to be proven, but rather allows meaning to develop during the process of interaction with the data.

The main instrument used was a multimodal observation sheet that was developed based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) theory of multimodal analysis. The instrument consists of three categories of analysis: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. Each category is used to identify and interpret visual elements such as symbols, colors, facial expressions, body gestures, image composition, and supplementary text in quotations. The instrument was validated through readability and relevance tests by two visual communication experts, as well as a limited pilot test on five initial uploads to test the sensitivity and acuity of the analysis.

Data storage was done online using the documentation method. Each upload was analysed based on multimodal elements that included text (caption), image visualization, symbols, dominant colours, typography, facial expressions, body gestures, cultural attributes, and visual background. This data was then recorded, categorized based on the dimensions of multimodal analysis, and arranged in a matrix form to facilitate interpretation. The data analysis technique used was multimodal analysis with a hermeneutic approach and inductive strategy. The initial stage was carried out by identifying all multimodal elements, then grouping them based on representational, interactive, and compositional dimensions. Next, a critical interpretation of the classified data was carried out by considering the Indonesian socio-cultural context which is still dominated by heteronormative values. In this stage, the researcher's subjective reflection is recorded as part of methodological awareness.

To maintain the validity of the results, triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of the interpretation with the views of other observers who have similar academic backgrounds. An audit trail was conducted by systematically recording the entire analysis process, so that it could be traced and replicated. Discussions between researchers and peer reviewers were held regularly to minimize interpretative bias and strengthen the validity of the findings. Within the framework of feminist theory inspired by queer perspectives, the success of this research lies in its ability to produce a deep and comprehensive understanding of how LGBTQ+ identities are represented on social media, as well as how online spaces are utilized as a means of identity articulation and a form of symbolic resistance to the dominance of heteronormative discourse.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The discussion of the results of this research integrates several complementary theoretical frameworks. Kramarae's muted group theory is used to explain how the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia negotiates its symbolic position under heteronormative domination. Multimodal analysis helps to decipher the visual, linguistic, and symbolic forms of such negotiations. Meanwhile, Butler's concept of gender performativity is used to understand how body expression and identity are staged socially through images and text on Instagram. In the broader digital context, this process can also be read as the formation of counter-publics (Fraser, 1990), i.e. alternative discourse spaces where marginalized communities express themselves outside the dominance of mainstream discourse.

### 3.1. Representation of LGBTQ+ on @Pelanginusantara\_org

The @pelanginusantara\_org Instagram account represents the distinctive character of digital queer activism that is organized and conscious of its communication strategies. Each post is designed with a strong, affective and inclusive visual aesthetic, and is filled with identity symbols that serve as markers of the presence of the LGBTQ+ community. The accompanying narrative is not only informative, but also builds collective awareness through the presentation of social issues that have been marginalized. Through these accounts, queer people not only represent themselves, but also create and maintain their own language, narratives and publics.

The representation built through this account does not stop at personal expression, it develops into a collective practice that seizes the space of meaning from the hegemony of heteronormative discourse. Through carefully curated posts, this account shows a systematic effort to build an alternative narrative that reflects the lives, experiences, and aspirations of the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia.

#### A. Silenced and Reclaimed Representations of Identity



**Figure 1.** Instagram post on January 26, 2025

A post on Figure 1 featuring terms such as 'benchong' in a reclamatory manner demonstrates the LGBTQ+ community's efforts to transform pejorative meanings into symbols of pride. Brightly colored typography with confident facial expressions is a form of resistance to the dominant language that has been repressing queer identity. This reclamation affirms their existence and creates a new symbolic language that only the community understands, similar to that found by Craig et al. (2021) in the study of the American trans youth community.

Featuring a brown-skinned male figure with facial makeup, striking eyeshadow colors, and the presence of butterflies adorning his face and hair. The butterfly is a symbol of transformation and freedom, hinting at the metamorphosis

of identity, the courage to be oneself, and freedom from heteronormative norms. The choice of pastel colors and the bright composition of the image give a warm, hopeful and accepting impression. From a linguistic aspect, the large text "Mental Health Ben-Chong is Also Valid" is a strong declaration against stigmatization. The word "Ben-Chong", which is often used pejoratively in Indonesian society, is reclaimed and empowered, demonstrating the process of identity reclamation as a form of cultural resistance and affirmative strategy. The use of the phrase "also valid" emphasizes the position of resistance to the notion that mental health is only important for normative groups.

Captions reinforce the narrative of inclusion with phrases like "Yey that's valid 🌟," and "It's okay to take a turn." This is a familiar and communicative form of language representation among queer urban Indonesians, mixing casual, expressive language styles and full of community symbols (emojis, local terms).



**Figure 2.** Instagram post on April 7, 2025

This post on figure 2 shows a young woman lying casually on a sofa, wearing a black T-shirt and light jeans. The composition of the image is dominated by natural lighting that enters through the window and casts soft shadows on the wall. The atmosphere created is intimate and reflective, signifying a safe and contemplative personal space. The large text reading "ASEXUALITY IS REAL AND VALID" is displayed in a white handwritten font with capital letters. This style creates a personal feel, while reinforcing the affirmative message. The sentence is a declaration that rejects the invisibility of asexual identities, which are often marginalized even within the LGBTQ+ community itself.

From the linguistic aspect, the caption expands the main message of the picture through the narration of the experience *"You might pretend to have crushes just to fit in... You realize you're not broken. You're just different, and that difference is valid."* This sentence contains empathy and strong emotional resonance. The narrative uses an invitational rhetoric strategy; it does not force the audience to accept, but invites



them to understand and feel. In addition, the sentence *"So today, we celebrate every asexual person and their journey towards self-discovery."* shows a shift from individual to collective statements, forming community solidarity. This is an attempt to form a communal identity, which is very important in the context of minority groups who often feel isolated.

The use of black, grey, white, and purple heart emojis (🖤💜💙💜) as color representations of the asexual flag, it is a form of queer semiotics that is both affiliational and a symbolic non-verbal way to convey *"this is ours."*

## B. Queer Family Narratives and Solidarity



**Figure 3.** Instagram posts on February 28, 2025

A post on figure 3 refers to the community as a 'safe family', complete with visuals of hugs, home settings, and household symbols. This creates an emotional sense that the LGBTQ+ community is building an alternative form of family in response to rejection from biological families. Interactive meaning in multimodality shows that the relationship between the visual subject and the audience is intimate and affective. This finding corroborates Hammack, et al. (2019) that queer solidarity is built through digital networks of affection.

This post features two male figures in a brightly-lit home space, interacting intimately and warmly. One of them helps the other choose or put on clothes, evoking associations with the couple's daily domestic routine. The natural lighting from the window creates a clean, calm and harmonious atmosphere symbolic of a stable and equal relationship, while humanizing same-sex couples in the eyes of a wider audience.

The main text on the image, "Why Same-Sex Couples Need to Be Able to Get Married", is written in bold white font and placed on a pastel gradation background. The Indonesian translation, "Here are the reasons why same-sex

couples also need to be able to get married," emphasizes the inclusiveness of the message towards local readers. The use of soft colors creates a peaceful and non-confrontational visual strategy that aims to build empathy and open a space for dialogue. The framing of the image invites the audience into the couple's daily moments. There are no explicit sexual elements; instead, intimacy is built through expressions of affection in small acts. This is part of the queer desensualization strategy of presenting same-sex relationships in a relatable and non-threatening context, to reduce stigma and social resistance.



Figure 4. Instagram post on April 7, 2025

A post on figure 4 shows two grown men and a young child together forming a heart symbol with their hands. The visual is emotionally powerful: it displays happiness, intimacy and harmony in a non-traditional family format. The image is a direct representation of the argument in the text: that **family does not have to be limited to heterosexual couples who can have biological children**. The composition of the image is symmetrical with the little boy as the center of attention, suggesting that he is the center of the two adults' love and care. The three are smiling and touching each other in a formation that suggests familiarity and affection. The heart symbol they form conveys a universal message: **"it's about love."**

*"A lot of people think marriage should only be between a man and a woman because they can reproduce. But let's be honest, family isn't just about having biological kids. It's about love, trust, and support."* This sentence **challenges the dominant narrative** in conservative societies that often associate marriage only with reproduction. The linguistic strategy used is **persuasive rhetoric based on logic and feelings (logos and pathos)** by acknowledging the classic reason (reproduction), but then deconstructing it with the logic that love and emotional support are the essence of family. The background color is a pastel gradation with shades of twilight creating a soft, warm and calming impression. This reinforces

the emotional effect of the message: that even queer families are capable of providing a safe and loving environment.

### C. Expressing Affection and Emotion in Digital Spaces



**Figure 5.** Instagram post on February 14, 2025

Post on figure 5 showing kisses, hugs, and happy expressions, which is colored by soft colors and warm lighting. These representations dispel the negative stereotypes often attached to queer relationships. According to Kress & van Leeuwen, the combination of color and lighting is part of the compositional meaning that creates psychological closeness with the audience. The consistent placement of the rainbow symbol also emphasizes the presence of a collective identity. It goes beyond visual discourse as expression, into a kind of symbolic collective healing practice.

The object of analysis is an image featuring two individuals who can be associated as a queer couple kissing while covered by a rainbow flag. The typographic text "LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDS" appears prominently in the center of the image, with a soft yet firm font style. The caption accompanying the upload emphasizes the meaning of the visual with an affirming narrative.

*"Today, we celebrate love in all its beautiful, boundless forms. Love that is seen, love that is felt, and love that exists unapologetically."* The visuals and text not only convey a message of love, but also build an open and transformative LGBTQ+ social and political identity. The visual elements reflect an intimate and honest expression of affection. Both individuals in the image appear in poses that reflect comfort, safety, and acceptance of each other's emotional attributes that are crucial in the context of the LGBTQ+ community, who often experience social rejection in openly expressing their love.

The rainbow flag that wraps around them serves as a visual marker of the queer community's collective identity. This symbol operates as a kind of 'symbolic shield', where the love displayed is not only personal, but also political. It becomes a form of claiming space for existence in a digital world that sometimes still holds traces of discrimination and heteronormative. In terms of linguistic text, the captions are written in an empathetic and inclusive narrative language style. The use of words like *"resilient," "unapologetically,"* and *"worthy of celebration"* show awareness of the marginalization experiences faced by the LGBTQ+ community, while affirming the validity of their love. In addition, hashtags such as #lgbtqia, #equalrights, and #standupforloveID place this post within a wider discursive network that connects one local expression with a global movement.

#### D. Visualization of Resistance to Heteronormativity



Figure 6. Instagram posts on March 12, 2024

Post on figure 6 contain visuals such as transgender flags, rainbows, or masculine bodily expressions on feminine figures, show the deconstruction of gender norms. This is a form of performative gender representation as proposed by Judith Butler. Visual compositions that do not follow stereotypical binaries become a symbolic strategy to break the dominant norm. (Stalgaitis et al., 2018) refers to this as 'tactics of visibility', which is the way queer communities perform not just to be seen, but to intervene in norms through symbols that cannot be ignored. This post presents a male figure with a confident expression, wearing a slim-fit t-shirt, while holding two flags: one transgender flag and one progressive rainbow flag. The visual background of a plain orange wall gives a warm impression and contrasts with the striking LGBTQ+ symbols. The presence of the transgender flag in a clear and dominant position in the visual frame marks identity as something that is consciously *performed* following Judith Butler's

thought that gender is not naturally inherent, but is constructed and repeated through expressions, bodies, and symbols.

The masculine bodily expressions displayed by the subjects in this post but accompanied by queer visual attributes (such as rainbow and transgender flags), create a symbolic tension that deconstructs traditional gender boundaries. This composition is a form of resistance to the dominant understanding of masculinity and femininity. This is in line with Butler's concept of *gender performativity*, in which gender identity does not originate from within, but rather results from repeated social and symbolic actions. In addition, the text in this post emphasizes positive narratives about queer contributions to the nation. Statements such as "we are not corrupt", "we pay taxes", and "we make Indonesia more inclusive" represent queers as active, productive, and ethical citizens. This strategy symbolically refutes the social stigma that has been attached to LGBTQ+ people and replaces it with an image of the ideal citizen.

## E. Local Cultural Appropriation in Queer Representation



**Figure 7.** Instagram post on November 19, 2024

Some visuals feature elements of local culture such as kebaya, batik, or traditional house settings. This shows that LGBTQ identities are not outside of culture, but intertwined within it. This strategy shows local adaptation and translation of global queer identities. This confirms Stuart Hall's theory of identity as something that is continuously produced within a cultural context. This integration also answers research which states that Asian queers do not always imitate Western queers, but form distinctive expressions based on local values (Berger et al., 2022).

The visual representation in the post on figure 7 features two feminine-looking individuals wearing traditional kebaya against the backdrop of a stone wall that

resembles a traditional house. Kebaya as a symbol of traditional women's clothing in Indonesia not only represents cultural values, but also becomes a semiotic device that contains narratives of locality, femininity, and honor. When worn by queer figures, kebaya undergoes resignification, which is a new meaning that emerges from the use of traditional symbols by subjects who have been marginalized in the dominant socio-cultural structure.

Overall, the five categories of findings above show that the @pelanginusantara\_org Instagram account plays an important role in building a complex, symbolic and meaningful space for LGBTQ+ representation. The visual representations in these posts are not only aesthetic, but also political, forming narratives of resistance, solidarity, and identity that are no longer subject to the dominant discourse. Thus, this research successfully answers the research question of how LGBTQ+ identities are constructed through multimodal practices in social media.

### ***3.2 Multimodality Analysis on @Pelanginusantara\_org***

The findings in this study, as excerpted in Table 1, show that the Instagram account @pelanginusantara\_org is not only a space for visual expression for the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia, but also plays a role as a cultural and political agent that actively shapes the discourse of queer representation. Through a combination of multimodal strategies that include visuals, colors, text, symbols, and narrative style, this account represents LGBTQ+ identities in a framework that is complex, inclusive, and reflective of the Indonesian social context.

Theoretically, this representation can be read within the framework of Kramarae's *Muted Group Theory*, which states that minority groups often do not have access to dominant communication systems. In this context, social media becomes an alternative space that allows the LGBTQ+ community to create its own communication system both through visual language and narratives that are not subject to heteronormative structures.

Posts such as "Mental Health Ben-Chong is Valid Too" show how this community consciously reclaims pejorative terms and turns them into symbols of identity affirmation. This practice is in line with the concept of *reclaiming* in queer discourse studies, where language is not only used to name, but also to resist and reclaim power over identity.

**Table 1.** Multimodal analysis of Instagram posts @pelanginusantara\_org

<i>Post Title</i>	<i>Visual Elements</i>	<i>Text Content</i>	<i>Represented Theme</i>	<i>Meaning of Representation</i>
<b>Ben-Chong Valid</b>	Heavy makeup, butterflies, pastel colors	<i>Mental Health Ben-Chong Valid</i>	Identity reclamation	Increase the courage to come out as queer.
<b>Asexual is real</b>	Woman lying relaxed on the sofa, sunlight entering the room, dominant bright color	<i>Asexuality is real and valid</i>	Identity reclamation	Validation of marginalized identities
<b>Compleme nt each other</b>	Two men sorting clothes, bright background	<i>Why some-sex couples need to be able to get married</i>	Queer Family	Challenging heteronormative family norms
<b>Warm family</b>	Two men and a child form Love using their hands	<i>A lot of people think marriage should only be between a man and a woman because they can reproduce. But let's be honest, family isn't just about having biological kids. It's about love, trust, and support.</i>	Queer Family	Challenging heteronormative family norms
<b>Expression of Affection and Emotion</b>	Two women kiss while holding an LGBT flag	<i>Love knows no bound</i>	Expression of affection	Celebrating queer love that is equal and humane
<b>Queer is also great</b>	Flag Transgender, offender, a man with a masculine body	<i>Queer people make Indonesia great.</i>	Articulating the meaning of queer.	's Resistance to Heteronormality
<b>Queer Adaptation</b>	Two people wearing traditional yellow shirts, stone wall in the background	<i>Some recommended queer short films for you to watch</i>	Adaptation of queer identity	Fighting for the legitimization of queer identity and the cultural sphere

Furthermore, in the representation of asexual identity, the use of visual elements that are soft, reflective, and full of private space shows sensitivity to queer experiences that are often invisible. Affirmative captions, such as "You're not broken. You're just different," indicate a *healing-centered representation* approach, where visual practices function not only as aesthetic expressions, but as a form of collective healing from the social wounds of stigmatization. The findings also show how @pelanginusantara\_org displays queer family narratives through visualizations of affection, emotional closeness, and solidarity narratives. This can be seen in the uploads of same-sex couples who form a household life, as well as interactions with children. This visual



strategy deconstructs heteronormative assumptions about family, as stated by Hammack et al. , that queer families are formed through networks of affection and emotional support, not solely by biological structures (Hammack, Frost, & Hughes, 2019). In the Indonesian context, this strategy becomes a form of *soft advocacy* that prioritizes affective approaches to foster public empathy.

The affection dimension is also explicitly present in the representation of expressions of love and affection. In posts featuring hugs or kisses of queer couples wrapped in rainbow flags, there is an attempt to present affection as valid, human, and worth celebrating. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) warm lighting and intimate compositions create strong *interpersonal meaning*, establishing a psychological connection with the audience. These elements are used strategically to form *intimate publics*, communities of emotion based on common experiences and solidarity. In posts featuring visuals of transgender flags and masculine bodily expressions by feminine figures, there is an attempt to break the binary gender boundaries. This strategy is in line with Judith Butler's concept of *gender performativity*, which views gender as something socially produced and performative, not as a biological essence. By combining masculine symbols with queer attributes, this upload raises *tactics of visibility*, which is a strategy of appearing to intervene in norms, not just to be seen (Geismar & Knox, 2021).

The queer representation in this account is inseparable from the local cultural context. Some visuals show queer individuals wearing kebaya or in a traditional house setting, showing that LGBTQ+ identities in Indonesia are not against cultural values, but are part of its diversity. This corroborates Stuart Hall's theory of identity as something that is discursively constructed in a socio-cultural context. This finding also supports research conducted by Anh et al. (2022) which states that Asian queers do not always imitate Western forms of representation, but create distinctive and locality-based identity narratives. The analysis also shows that the accounts @pelanginusantara\_org and @sejuk form a complementary narrative network in voicing resistance to state hegemonic power. If @pelanginusantara\_org focuses on affirmation and identity formation through symbolic and affective representations, then @sejuk appears as an advocative voice criticizing structural violence against the LGBTQ+ community. In a post highlighting the National Resilience Council targeting LGBTQ+ people as a threat to the state, a multimodal strategy is seen that combines political texts with symbols of solidarity (peace rallies, rainbow flags). Both operate as *counter-publics*, discursive spaces that allow oppressed groups to voice their experiences and challenge dominant power structures (Fraser, 1990).



## 4. CONCLUSION

This study explored how the Instagram account @pelanginusantara\_org constructs counter-narratives to heteronormative domination and negotiates LGBTQ+ identities through multimodal visual strategies in the Indonesian socio-cultural context. The findings show that the account effectively blends local cultural symbols with global queer activism, creating a platform for LGBTQ+ expression and resistance. By using cultural localization, symbolic resistance, and affective narratives, the account challenges mainstream heteronormative discourses and fosters inclusive digital spaces for LGBTQ+ communities in Indonesia. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single Instagram account, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The platform-specific dynamics, such as Instagram's algorithm and audience engagement, were not fully explored and could influence how LGBTQ+ content reaches and impacts its audience. Additionally, the researcher's subjectivity in interpreting visual content may have shaped the analysis, and future studies could address this through diverse research teams or peer reviews.

For future research, specific avenues to explore include studying the role of audience engagement in the effectiveness of queer digital activism, particularly how interactions with posts (likes, shares, comments) influence the reach and impact of LGBTQ+ narratives. Examining platform algorithms would also provide valuable insights into how Instagram's visibility mechanisms affect the dissemination of queer content, especially in conservative contexts. Furthermore, research could explore cross-platform strategies, investigating how LGBTQ+ activists adapt their messages across various social media platforms like TikTok and Twitter, each with its unique challenges. By addressing these areas, future studies can build a more comprehensive understanding of how digital platforms support or hinder marginalized communities in their quest for self-expression and political resistance. Overall, this study contributes to the discourse on digital activism and queer media studies by demonstrating how Instagram can serve as a tool for both personal identity expression and political resistance in the Indonesian context.

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