

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

# The Impact of Media Literacy on Instagram Self-Presentation Among University Students

## Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Instagram Benlik Sunumunda Medya Okuryazarlığının Rolü

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### Abstract

Instagram is a critical environment where individuals construct and express their identities. This study investigates the role of media literacy in shaping self-presentation behaviours on Instagram among university students. Data were collected using Media Literacy and Self-presentation scales (N=307). The findings revealed that students demonstrated moderate to high levels in both variables, suggesting a considerable degree of conscious media consumption and strategic self-presentation practices in digital contexts. There were no significant differences in media literacy or self-presentation regarding demographic factors such as gender, grade level, and Instagram usage duration. However, media literacy significantly predicts self-presentation behaviours on Instagram, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping online identity management. These results highlight the critical role of media literacy within the context of social media. The results of the current study also point to the necessity for educational initiatives aimed at enhancing digital competencies among young adults.

**Keywords:** Media Literacy, Self-Presentation, Instagram, University Students, Social Media.

### Öz

Instagram, bireylerin kimliklerini inşa ettikleri ve sergiledikleri önemli alanlar haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin Instagram üzerindeki benlik sunumu davranışlarında medya okuryazarlığının rolünü incelemektedir. Araştırmada, 307 üniversite öğrencisinden toplanan veriler doğrultusunda öğrencilerin medya okuryazarlığı ve Instagram benlik sunumu ölçekleriyle değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, öğrencilerin her iki değişken açısından orta ile yüksek düzeyde puanlar aldığını göstermektedir. Bu durum, öğrencilerin dijital ortamlarda kısmen bilinçli medya tüketimi becerilerine sahip olduklarını ve Instagram'da kendilerini belirli ölçüde stratejik bir şekilde sunma eğiliminde olduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Cinsiyet, sınıf düzeyi ve Instagram kullanım süresi gibi demografik değişkenler, medya okuryazarlığı ve benlik sunumu üzerinde anlamlı bir fark yaratmamıştır. Öte yandan, medya okuryazarlığı düzeyinin Instagram'daki benlik sunumu davranışlarını anlamlı bir şekilde yordadığı bulunmuştur. Bu sonuçlar, medya okuryazarlığının bireylerin çevrim içi kimlik inşasında önemli bir rol oynadığını ve sosyal medya kullanımında etkili olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, dijital medya okuryazarlığı eğitimlerinin önemine dikkat çekmekte ve gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalara katkı sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Medya Okuryazarlığı, Benlik Sunumu, Instagram, Üniversite Öğrencileri, Sosyal Medya.



## Introduction

Social media (SM) have become an essential part of daily life, greatly influencing the way individuals engage in informal interactions and professional practices (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013). Following its introduction, SM is establishing itself as the preferred platform across the globe (Dong-Hun, 2010). As of early October 2024, the global number of Internet users has reached 5.52 billion, accounting for 67.5% of global internet penetration (Kemp, 2024). SM has also expanded significantly with 5.22 billion active users, reflecting significant growth from over 250 million users last year (Kemp, 2024). This increasing online interaction highlights the expanding influence and pervasive role of SM platforms (SMP) such as SnapChat, Instagram, and TikTok in daily life around the world (Miller et al., 2016).

SM is not exclusively used by the working class; its usage has also significantly increased among students and the educational community (Raut & Prafulla, 2016). Children are growing up in a digital environment dominated by mobile devices and SMP, and this has made SM an indispensable part of their lives (Narasimha Vao et al., 2022). Today, they are learning how to interact with their parents and peers, and how they can engage with technology from social platforms (Narasimha Vao et al., 2022). Besides, social platforms have provided opportunities for young people to discover new lifestyles and change their behaviour in terms of communication, consumption and publishing (Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022). Numerous studies have revealed that university students are becoming a connected generation of users who use their preferred SMP intensively (Allahverdi, 2022; Stachowiak-Krzyżan, 2019; Xie & Gallo, 2024).

In Türkiye, 94.8% of young adults (ages of 15-21) who use the internet are on at least one SM network (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (RTÜK), 2022). In terms of sharing practices, the most popular content creation activities were photo sharing and engaging with SM sites through comments or posts (Radyo ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu (RTÜK), 2022). This highlights the significant role played by SMP in shaping social interactions and providing young people with a platform to express and define their identities (Carpenter et al., 2020; Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022). With its emphasis on visual content and user-generated narratives, Instagram provides an important space where students construct and present their identities to their social circles and a broader audience (Çat & Aydın, 2023; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018). However, the strategies they employ in this self-presentation are often influenced by their level of media literacy (Buck, 2012).

Media literacy can be defined as *“the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages across a variety of contexts”* (Livingstone, 2003, p.2). While young people often create their own media or share content online, this does not necessarily indicate that they possess the critical knowledge or perspective needed to analyse the content they consume (Bennett et al., 2008; Boyd, 2014; Hargittai & Micheli, 2019; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). They require opportunities to develop essential skills and knowledge, whether through formal education or informal experiences, to interact meaningfully and effectively with modern technologies (Boyd, 2014). This highlights an important fact: *“becoming literate in a networked age requires hard work, regardless of age”* (Boyd, 2014, p.177). Also, managing identity on SMP requires complex skills that combine technical proficiency with social awareness (Hargittai & Micheli, 2019).

By applying quantitative analysis, this study explores media literacy and digital identity management skills of university students on Instagram, one of the top SMP for self-

presentation (Yorisa et al., 2021). Digital platforms, especially visually oriented SMP like Instagram, significantly impact how individuals present themselves and construct their social identities (Ellison et al., 2007; Goffman, 1990). In this context, the study investigates how the digital identities that users create on SM are shaped by their media literacy levels and the accuracy, consistency, and impact of these presentations on social acceptance (Buck, 2012; Livingstone, 2003). Many studies have explored online self-presentation practices through examining platforms characteristics (Guha & Birnholtz, 2013; Lang & Barton, 2015; Schlosser, 2020) users' behaviours and motivations (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2016; DeVito et al., 2017; Seidman, 2013), or users' perceptions of social network platforms (Litt et al., 2014; Wohn & Spottswood, 2016). Other studies have examined media literacy and SMP to understand the concept of 'media literacy (Hobbs, 2022; Livingstone, 2004; Potter, 2018) or 'social media literacy' (Cho et al., 2024; Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022) through the examination of characteristics of these concepts. However, there is a noticeable gap in the existing literature regarding the association between media literacy and self-presentation behaviours on Instagram. While previous studies have explored these concepts individually, limited research has examined how media literacy predicts self-presentation, especially among university students. The current study aims to address this gap within the Turkish context, providing an understanding of how media literacy shapes digital identity presentation on visual platforms like Instagram.

### **Self-Presentation Practices**

Traditionally, the theory of self-presentation originates from Erving Goffman's seminal work, 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1990). Self-presentation relies on strategies used to shape the perceptions of others' perceptions by managing personal information to project a desired self-image (Goffman, 1990). Goffman argued that people act like performers, expressing their identities through both verbal and nonverbal messages with the intention of presenting the most authentic and credible image to their audience (others) (Goffman, 1990). Self-presentation is goal-oriented and aimed at achieving specific goals, performed in front of an audience, and its success is determined by the audience's acceptance of the performance (Schlenker, 1985). According to Baumeister and colleagues (1987), individuals engage in self-presentation as a means of conveying information to others and projecting certain images of themselves. Self-presentation allows individuals to shape their behaviour and actions to reflect their ideal self and reflect the desired image of the person they aspire to be (Chua & Chang, 2016). Also, individuals effort to bring into line their behaviour with the expectations and preferences of their audiences for gaining approval and satisfaction (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Early conceptualisations of self-presentation mainly centred on face-to-face interactions that the audience and context were more specific and limited (Goffman, 1990; Schlenker, 1985). With the increasing use of digital media within daily life, researchers have required to adapt traditional self-presentation perspectives to fit in mediated environments by using second-generation media theory (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Self-presentation theories (e.g. Goffman's (1990) dramaturgical perspective and Schlenker's (1985) self-description theory) have gained increased interest today. They have showed their value for understanding self-presentation practices in SM because it has now become a part of daily life, often serves as the primary channel for individuals to introduce themselves to others (DeVito et al., 2017). These platforms have changed the way people present

themselves by increasing opportunities for users to create content that influences how others present themselves (Hollenbaugh, 2021). Online platforms provide opportunities for young people to explore their identities. For example, by posting status updates on Facebook, sharing photos on Instagram, and creating and sharing videos on YouTube (Cortesi et al., 2020). As highlighted by Palfrey and Gasser (2016) highlighted that online environments facilitate identity exploration, which plays a crucial role in both developmental and therapeutic stages of overall identity formation. In contrast to traditional self-presentation methods, SMP introduce greater complexity by amplifying the influence of one's connections in the self-presentation process and blurring the boundaries of the audience that can access the content (DeVito et al., 2017).

While SM sites have similar features, Instagram is primarily designed to share images, photos, and videos along with text messages from smartphones, which are important practices in self-promotion process (Harris & Bardey, 2019; Indika & Jovita, 2017). The platform allows users to edit their posts with filters and digital touch-ups, giving them control over how they present themselves (Kemp, 2021; Narasimha Vao et al., 2022). This feature particularly appeals to young people aged 18 to 29 to present themselves more attractively (Harris & Bardey, 2019). Prioritising visual content not only encourages visual appreciation but also showcases diverse living styles through images and videos of daily life (Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022). By using the stories feature on Instagram, users can post content that visible on the creator's profile for only 24 hours (Fondevila-Gascón et al., 2020). This function encourages viewers to frequently engage to the platform to stay updated with the posts of the users they follow (Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022). It allows control who can view their content and makes this app an attractive platform especially for young people (Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022; Huang & Su, 2018). The sense of freedom of expression through posts has also made the platform valuable for the younger generation (Hernández-Serrano et al., 2022). Additionally, users can construct a positive and idealised digital identity by managing their presence through text, images, and audio (Yang et al., 2025). Instagram distinguishes itself from other social networking platforms by offering features that facilitate self-presentation and digital identity construction, while simultaneously reinforcing self-presentation behaviours even in contexts of anonymity (Harris & Bardey, 2019).

### **Media Literacy and Social Media**

Media literacy is an essential approach and practice that helps enlighten and empower people in a world filled with increasingly diverse media platforms and messages (Cho et al., 2024). Media literacy aims to create a conscious public opinion that is capable of accurately interpreting media messages, critically examining their content, and assessing them based on the insights gained from this analysis (Kurt & Kürüm, 2010). Knowledge structures are vital in gaining media literacy and it mean the sets of information possessed by a person and provide the necessary contexts for understanding media messages. Some of the skills include analysis, categorisation, evaluation, synthesis and abstraction (Potter, 2018). Media literacy should not be confined to a single characteristic or skill of the user; rather, it is best understood as the result of an interactive relationship co-created between the user and technology. Media literacy is also changing, and new approaches need to be added after the technological growths (Livingstone, 2003).

In the field of educational research, scholars emphasise the significance of enhancing SM skills among students, while also acknowledging the varied experiences and values linked to SM use (Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). Also, researchers often discussed the risks related

to SM, such as the spread of misinformation through SM sites, and the challenges to participatory practices and traditional self-presentation narratives, strongly advocate for SM literacy (Journell, 2019; McCosker, 2017). Young adults use SMP for communication, entertainment, learning, and other purposes (Cortesi et al., 2020). Studies showed that most young people spend a significant amount of time online each day (Gray, 2018; Ridout & Campbell, 2018). Hence, possessing knowledge of media and SM literacy are crucial for the effective and sustainable use of the Internet and SM over time (Polanco-Levicán & Salvo-Garrido, 2022). SM literacy encompasses a blend of technical and cognitive competencies that empower users to engage successfully and proficiently in social interactions and communications within digital environments (Vanwynsberghe et al., 2015).

Beyond its role in enhancing critical evaluation of media content, media literacy may directly influence self-presentation behaviours through multiple psychological and sociological mechanisms. Individuals with higher media literacy possess increased cognitive awareness of platform affordances, audience visibility, and impression management strategies (Masur et al., 2021). This awareness allows users to strategically curate their online identity, regulating self-disclosure to achieve desired social outcomes. Moreover, as digital platforms have become central spaces for identity negotiation and reflexive self-construction, media literacy supports users' ability to navigate the interactive and dynamic nature of these environments (Moekotte et al., 2015). In this context, self-presentation may serve not only as a form of social engagement but also as a means of exercising personal agency within broader cultural and social structures.

As it discussed above, SM is used by large numbers of young adults every day and can have a significant impact on the well-being of its users (Schreurs & Vandenbosch, 2021). Considering the use of SM for self-presentation and identity formation by young adults, it needs to be highlighted that learning SM skills in a networked society is significant (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017). By adapting the interfaces of SMP, young people can construct idealised self-presentations and digital identities online (Buck, 2012; Strimbu & O'Connell, 2019). The literature review on self-presentation and digital identity in SM (specifically Instagram), and media literacy resulted in the formulation of three specific research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the media literacy and Instagram self-presentation levels of the participants?

**RQ2:** Do gender, grade level and Instagram usage duration significantly influence participants' media literacy and Instagram self-presentation behaviours?

**RQ3:** Does media literacy significantly predict Instagram self-presentation behaviours?

## **Method**

### **Research Design and Participants**

The current study adopts a quantitative research design to systematically investigate the relationships between media literacy and Instagram self-presentation practices among university students in Türkiye. Quantitative methods are particularly effective for exploring patterns and drawing generalizable conclusions across a large population, especially in understanding behaviours (Gelo et al., 2008). Purposive sampling was employed for the current study because the primary objective of the study was to examine the influence of media literacy on self-presentation practices on Instagram among university students. Participants were selected from three universities, ensuring

that the sample represented a diverse spectrum of students' SM usage and literacy levels.

Students were contacted through academic departments, and the surveys were distributed by their advisors to ensure widespread participation. Data were collected using a Google Form, which facilitates the organisation and standardisation of responses. A total of 307 students contributed in the current study. Regarding gender distribution, 62.9% of the students were female ( $n = 193$ ), while 37.1% were male ( $n = 114$ ). Regarding academic standing, the majority of the respondents were in their later years of study, with 40.7% being 4th-year ( $n = 125$ ) and 36.5% in their 3rd year ( $n = 112$ ). In contrast, 12.7% were 1st-year ( $n = 39$ ) and 10.1% were 2nd-year ( $n = 31$ ). Concerning Instagram usage habits, the majority of the participants (53.7%,  $n = 165$ ) reported using Instagram for 1–3 hours daily, while 20.8% ( $n = 64$ ) used it for less than 1 hour. Additionally, 19.2% ( $n = 59$ ) indicated spending 3–5 hours on Instagram, and a smaller proportion, 6.2% ( $n = 19$ ), reported using the platform for more than 5 hours per day. This demographic profile provides insights into the diverse characteristics of the participants, reflecting a range of academic experiences and varying levels of engagement with SM.

### **Ethics Committee Permission**

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting Çankırı Karatekin University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee dated 23/08/2024 and numbered 44; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

### **Measures**

The current study adopted the Self-Presentation Scale (Michikyan et al., 2015) and the Media Literacy Self-Assessment Scale (MLSS) (Chang et al., 2011). The Self-Presentation Scale was originally developed for Facebook; however, it was adapted for Instagram usage in the current study. The Self-Presentation Scale involves 17 items that assess how adults present themselves in online contexts and the scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties (Michikyan et al., 2015). Their scale has been used for examining the relationships between identity coherence and online self-presentation (Michikyan et al., 2015). For instance, the item reflects the expression of authentic, intrinsic characteristics "*I like myself and am proud of what I stand for, and I show it on my Facebook profile*". High scores on the scale specify a greater tendency towards the self-presentation. The MLSS evaluates participants' media literacy level and contains 13 items. For example, the item "*I use media for my learning tasks*" assesses students' ability to incorporate media into their educational activities. High scores on this scale reveal a higher level of media literacy among students (Chang et al., 2011).

The adaptation process of the scales initiated with translation. Firstly, both scales were translated into Turkish using the back-translation method, which helps ensure accuracy and contextual relevance in cross-cultural research (Brislin, 1970). Second, the translated versions were evaluated for cultural relevance by a panel of three specialists in media studies and digital behaviour. Third, a pilot test was administered with 30 students to assess clarity and reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted for each scale using the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method. The CFA results for the Instagram Self-Presentation Scale (ISPS) revealed acceptable overall fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 3.51$ ; RMSEA = .090; CFI = .92; TLI = .90; SRMR = .066). Also, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value was estimated to be higher than 0.50 (AVE = .64), the model's validity was confirmed. Additionally, composite reliability ( $\omega = .979$ ) and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .744$ ) values were found to be high which indicates that the scale meets the necessary reliability

requirement. In addition, the CFA results for the MLSS showed acceptable overall fit indices ( $\chi^2/df = 3.41$ ; RMSEA = 0.09; CFI = .975; TLI = .967; SRMR = .019). The AVE value confirmed the validity of the model (AVE = .786). Additionally, the composite reliability ( $\omega = .978$ ) and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = .980$ ) values were calculated and both results met reliability requirement. As a result, both scales show strong psychometric properties. Both scales prove to be reliable and valid instruments for measuring, respectively, self-presentation behaviours and media literacy among Turkish students.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis was performed using SPSS version 29.0.2. Initially, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the key characteristics of the sample. Then, kurtosis and skewness results along with Q-Q plot graphs were examined for normality in both scales. The kurtosis and skewness values for both scales were within the  $\pm 2$  limits (George & Mallery, 2009), it is confirmed that no significant deviation from normality. Furthermore, the points on the Q-Q plots were close to the 45-degree reference line for both scales, further supporting the assumption of normal distribution. It was concluded that the data for both scales did not exhibit significant deviation from normality. Independent samples t-tests were carried out to explore gender differences in Instagram self-presentation and media literacy. One-way ANOVA tests were used to investigate how grade level and Instagram usage levels influenced responses on both scales. A regression analysis was performed to explore the association between media literacy and self-presentation on Instagram.

### Findings

In the descriptive statistics analysis, data (N = 307) were analysed to measure their media literacy and Instagram self-presentation behaviours. The mean score for the Media Literacy Self-Assessment (MLSA) scale was 3.54 (SD = 1.12) which indicates a moderate level of media literacy among the participants. The Instagram Self-Presentation (ISPS) scale showed a mean score of 3.57 (SD = 0.54) that suggests that participants reported a moderate level of self-presentation behaviour on Instagram. These results provide a general overview of the sample's responses, setting the foundation for further analysis.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Media Literacy and Instagram Self-Presentation Scales

	N	Mean	S.E.	S.D.
MLSA	307	3.54	.064	1.12
ISPS	307	3.57	.031	.54

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to find out gender differences on both scales. For the MLSA, the results showed a slightly significant difference between genders ( $t(305) = 1.64$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ). The male group (N = 193) had a higher mean score (M = 3.62, SD = 1.08) than the female group (N = 114, M = 3.40 (SD = 1.16)). A significant gender difference was found For ISPS ( $t(305) = 3.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Males (M = 3.64, SD = 0.54) exhibited higher self-presentation behaviours on Instagram than females (M = 3.45, SD = 0.52). Effect sizes were also computed for both scales. For MLSA, Cohen's d = 1.11, indicating a large effect size, while for ISPS, Cohen's d = 0.53, representing a medium effect size. These results are presented in Table 2, showcasing the significant gender differences in both scales.

**Table 2.** Independent Samples T-Test Results for MLSA and ISPS by Gender

	Gender	Mean	S.D.	S.E. Mean	t	p	d
MLSA	Male	3.62	1.09	0.08	1.64	0.05	0.19
	Female	3.4	1.16	0.11	1.64	0.05	0.19
ISPS	Male	3.64	0.54	0.04	3.13	<.001	0.37
	Female	3.45	0.52	0.05	3.13	<.001	0.37

A one-way ANOVA revealed whether students' grade levels play a role ISPS scores or MLSA scores. Based on the results, no significant differences were found in both ISPS scores [ $F(3, 303) = 1.46$ ;  $p = 0.23$ ] and Media Literacy (MLSA) scores [ $F(3,303) = 0.86$ ;  $p = 0.46$ ] based on grade level. Furthermore, post hoc Tukey HSD tests revealed no significant differences across grade levels for either scale. The effect sizes calculated for both scales were small. Specifically, for ISPS, the eta-squared was 0.01, suggesting a very small effect, and for MLSA, eta-squared was 0.002, indicating a negligible effect. These results suggest that grade level does not influence students' Instagram self-presentation or their media literacy levels.

**Table 3.** ANOVA Summary Table with Effect Sizes for MLSA and ISPS Scores by Grade Level

	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p (Sig.)	$\eta^2$
MLSA	BG*	3.233	3	1.08	0.86	0.46	0.01
MLSA	WG**	379.558	303	1.25			
MLSA	Total	382.791	306				
ISPS	BG	0.361	3	0.12	0.41	0.75	0.00
ISPS	WG	89.073	303	0.29			
ISPS	Total	89.434	306				

\*Between Groups \*\* Within Groups

The ANOVA results showed that there are no significant differences in MLSA scores across the four groups based on Instagram usage levels [ $F(3, 303) = 0.156$ ;  $p = 0.926$ ]. Similarly, there were no significant differences found in ISPS scores based on Instagram usage levels [ $F(3, 303) = 1.46$ ;  $p = 0.23$ ]. The effect sizes for both MLSA and ISPS were small, with Eta-squared values of 0.002 and 0.014, respectively. As a result, the duration of Instagram usage did not significantly influence students' media literacy or self-presentation on Instagram in this sample.

**Table 4.** ANOVA Summary Table with Effect Sizes for MLSA and ISPS Scores by Instagram Usage Levels

	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p (Sig.)	$\eta^2$
MLSA	BG	0.591	3	0.20	0.16	0.93	0.00
MLSA	WG	382.2	303	1.26			
MLSA	Total	382.791	306				
ISPS	BG	1.273	3	0.42	1.46	0.23	0.01
ISPS	WG	88.161	303	0.29			
ISPS	Total	89.434	306				

A regression analysis revealed the relationship between MLSA and ISPS. The model explained 21.9% of the variance in ISPS scores ( $R^2 = 0.219$ ), with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0.217, specifying a moderate model fit. The ANOVA results for the regression model presented

that the association between media literacy and Instagram self-presentation was statistically significant [ $F(1, 305) = 85.734; p < 0.001$ ] which indicate that the predictor variable (MLSA) significantly contributed to explaining variations in self-presentation behaviours on Instagram. The unstandardised coefficient for MLSA was 0.226 ( $B = 0.226, p < 0.001$ ), and the standardised coefficient (Beta) was 0.468 which indicate a moderate to strong positive relationship between media literacy and Instagram self-presentation. These results indicate that higher media literacy levels are associated with more pronounced self-presentation behaviours on Instagram. As a result, the analysis reveals that media literacy plays a vital role in shaping Instagram self-presentation practices.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to explore the relationship between media literacy and Instagram self-presentation behaviours among university students, alongside examining the potential influence of demographic factors such as gender, grade level, and Instagram usage duration. The findings shed light on how students engage with Instagram and the extent to which their media literacy competencies influence their self-presentation strategies.

Concerning the first research question, the findings suggested that students exhibited moderate to high levels of both media literacy and self-presentation behaviours. This finding is consistent with previous study which suggests that young adults (referred also as digital natives) hold high levels of media literacy due to their persistent interaction with technologies (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Also, the perceived levels of self-presentation behaviours are in line with the work of Michikyan and his colleagues (2015). They highlighted self-presentation as a central part of online identity construction in the current digital environments. Both constructs showed moderate to high levels which means that students are not only active consumers of digital content but also strategically manage their online personas. This result reflects the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping personal and social identities. In these platforms, individuals manage their self-presentation to align with perceived social expectations and personal goals (Boyd, 2014).

For the second research question, which examined whether demographic factors such as gender, grade level, and Instagram usage duration influence media literacy and Instagram self-presentation, the results revealed no significant differences across these variables. Contrary to expectations and some previous studies (Chua & Chang, 2016; Michikyan et al., 2015), gender did not emerge as a significant factor influencing self-presentation behaviours. This phenomenon can be linked to the evolving nature of digital spaces, where traditional gender norms tend to be less pronounced, and self-presentation has emerged as a universal behaviour exhibited by individuals irrespective of gender. The absence of significant differences based on grade level questions the assumption that academic progression promotes media literacy. This suggests that media literacy competencies may stop improving after reaching a certain level or that informal digital experiences outside the classroom have a more substantial influence (Buckingham, 2007). In addition, Instagram usage levels did not significantly affect media literacy or self-presentation behaviours among students. This finding is interesting as it denies earlier studies suggesting that increased duration of SM usage leads to higher engagement in impression management strategies (Yang & Bradford Brown, 2016). One possible explanation is that self-presentation is not solely dependent on the duration of Instagram usage but is influenced by deeper cognitive and psychological factors such as identity

exploration and social comparison tendency. These results indicate that demographic factors may be less influential than previously assumed, potentially due to the complex nature of online self-presentation.

In terms of the third research question, results indicated that media literacy significantly predicts self-presentation behaviours on Instagram. Specifically, students with higher levels of media literacy were more likely to engage in strategic and controlled self-presentation on Instagram. This finding supports existing literature highlighting the essential importance of media literacy in managing online identities (Buck, 2012; Hobbs, 2022). Media-literate individuals possess enhanced capabilities to manage the challenges of digital environments, enabling them to curate their self-presentation in ways that align with their personal and social goals. Furthermore, this result aligns with the study by Michikyan et al. (2015), which suggests that self-presentation in online contexts is influenced by individuals' abilities to critically evaluate and manage digital content.

The positive association observed between media literacy and self-presentation behaviours may reflect the combined influence of cognitive awareness and social identity processes activated within digital environments. Individuals with higher media literacy possess a more sophisticated understanding of platform affordances, audience visibility, and impression management strategies, enabling them to regulate self-disclosure and strategically curate their online personas (Masur et al., 2021). This elevated awareness allows users not only to navigate privacy concerns but also to align their self-presentation with perceived social norms and personal goals. In addition, as digital platforms increasingly function as arenas for identity negotiation and social participation, media literacy provides users with the reflective capacity to navigate complex cultural and social norms that shape online behaviour (Moekotte et al., 2015). Through these processes, individuals with greater media literacy are better equipped to engage in self-presentation behaviours aimed at enhancing social visibility, managing audience perceptions, and constructing coherent digital identities.

The significant predictive association between media literacy and self-presentation behaviours also underscores the significance of integrating media literacy education into academic curricula. As digital platforms continue to shape how individuals construct and express their identities, fostering critical media literacy skills becomes essential for promoting responsible and authentic self-presentation practices. Moreover, this finding highlights the need to expand the idea of media literacy beyond traditional forms to contain SM literacy, which encompasses capabilities regarding algorithmic awareness, digital footprint management, and online privacy.

In summary, the current study's findings enrich the expanding body of literature on digital self-presentation and media literacy, highlighting the critical role of digital competencies in shaping how young individuals interact with Instagram. The analysis revealed that demographic factors, including gender and grade level, do not have a significant impact on media literacy or self-presentation behaviours. However, media literacy emerged as a key determinant in how students manage their online identities. These results underscore the essential role of combining media literacy education into academic curricula to promote healthier, more authentic self-representation practices in digital environments. To build on these insights, future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to track the evolution of media literacy and self-presentation behaviours over time and assess the efficiency of targeted media literacy programs on students' digital engagement.

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# The Impact of Media Literacy on Instagram Self-Presentation Among University Students

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## Extended Abstract

This study investigates the effects of media literacy on university students' self-presentation behaviours on Instagram. The impact of the digital age has led to a shift in identity construction processes of individuals from traditional media to social media. Instagram is currently one of the most used social media applications among the youth, due to its focus on visuals. Goffman's (1990) self-presentation theory uses a stage metaphor to describe an individual's behaviour in social encounters, and it has also been used with social media. In online spaces, people have to form both a physical and a virtual identity to attract the different audiences that exist (Boyd, 2014). In this regard, media literacy is understood as the capability to qualitatively critique and engage in the presentation and reception of information, which more likely will affect self-presentation approaches (Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone, 2004). Media literacy motivates self-presentation not only as a consumer, but as a creator of content. Despite the growing scholarly attention to the consequences of media literacy on online behaviour, there still exists a paucity of studies focusing specifically on the effects of media literacy on visually-centred platforms, such as Instagram. This study seeks to fill this gap by assessing the influence of media literacy on self-presentation behaviours of users on Instagram.

As part of a quantitative approach, the current study focuses on a sample of 307 undergraduate students from different universities across Türkiye. Participants are diverse in terms of age, gender, academic year, and the amount of time spent on Instagram. The data gathering was done via Google Forms. Two major measurement instruments were utilised: MLSS and ISPS. To analyse the construct validity of these both scales, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed with Mplus 8.0 software. CFA results suggest that both scales were satisfactory fit and thus, both scales were successfully validated through CFA. The goodness-of-fit indices for the MLSS were  $\chi^2/df = 3.51$ ; RMSEA = .090; CFI = .92; TLI = .90; SRMR = .066. For the Self-Presentation Scale, the indices were  $\chi^2/df = 3.41$ ; RMSEA = 0.09; CFI = .975; TLI = .967; SRMR = .019. The selected measurement scales underwent analysis for validity and reliability which confirmed the instruments met the required standards. Data was then analysed using SPSS 29.0. The first steps involved calculating the sample's demographic information through descriptive statistics. Differences were tested by independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA concerning gender, academic year, and time spent on Instagram. The final analysis included regression analysis to assess the impact of media literacy on Instagram self-presentational behaviour.

Results indicate that participants' media literacy and Instagram self-presentation scores fell within a moderate to high range. T-tests and ANOVA analyses showed no significant differences with respect to gender, academic level, or duration of Instagram use. Furthermore, no relevant association was made between academic achievement and media literacy, which implies that media literacy skills can be acquired without formal training (Buckingham, 2007). The most remarkable finding was that media literacy had a substantial predictive impact on Instagram self-presentation. Students that

possessed higher levels of media literacy engaged in more purposeful and controlled self-presentation actions. These findings underscore the preeminent role of media literacy in the management of digital identity and its implications on self-presentation in social media.

The results also indicate that the consumption of digital media in everyday life may impact media literacy levels, and that people's engagement with media content is a critical factor in acquiring these skills (Hobbs, 2022; Potter, 2018). The results highlight that media literacy is not only a scholarly skill, but also one that requires an individual's active participation and reasoned judgement as a citizen in a digital world. For that purpose, it is important to promote and incorporate media literacy into educational curricula with an emphasis on encouraging learners to think critically about the information provided to them through digital technologies. Furthermore, there is a need to develop media literacy training aimed at enhancing the individual's process of self-representation on social networking sites.

These findings from the study enrich the existing literature regarding media effects on social behaviour and also reveal the need for further study into the role media literacy has on social identity. Further development of media literacy skills empowers the individual to take charge of their digital identity. The impact of media literacy on the self-presentation of an individual in the digital world is an area of study that this research fills and simultaneously raises new questions for other researchers. This work anticipates future research to focus on the interaction of self-presentation and media literacy across different cultures and levels and on different social media sites. Also, employing qualitative research methods may strengthen the understanding of people's experiences of media literacy and self-presentation. These topics could help shape policy concerning digital literacy and encourage more responsible behaviour towards social media use. Additionally, the depiction underscores the concept that media literacy goes beyond simply engaging with media content; instead, enhancing these capabilities would enable users to mitigate the impact of psychological harm inflicted by social media and increase the effectiveness with which they use online platforms. Therefore, improving media literacy skills would be highly advantageous on a holistic scale. This research aids in the understanding of the processes of identity construction in the digital age by relating media literacy and self-presentation. Further research should address these issues in other sociocultural environments and with broader methodological frameworks.

**Keywords:** Media Literacy, Self-Presentation, Instagram, University Students, Social Media.

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Bu makale **intihal tespit yazılımlarıyla** taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

In this study, the rules stated in the “**Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive**” were followed.

Bu çalışmada “**Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi**” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.

The research was conducted by a **single author**.

Araştırma **tek bir yazar** tarafından yürütülmüştür.

This study was **assited** by the use of generative artificial intelligence tools, specifically, ChatGpt (GPT-5) was **used** at a minimal level for grammar checking and minor language editing.

Bu çalışma, üretken yapay zeka araçlarının kullanımıyla **desteklenmiştir**; özellikle ChatGpt (GPT-5), dilbilgisi kontrolü ve küçük dil düzenlemeleri için minimum düzeyde **kullanılmıştır**.

There is no **conflict of interest** with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile **çıkar çatışması** bulunmamaktadır.

#### **Etik Kurul İzni | Ethics Committee Permission**

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting Çankırı Karatekin University Science, Mathematics and Social Sciences Ethics Committee dated 23/08/2024 and numbered 44; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Çankırı Karatekin Üniversitesi Fen, Matematik ve Sosyal Bilimler Etik Kurulu'nun 23/08/2024 tarihli toplantısında alınan 44 sayılı karar çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.