

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION BASED ON A COMMUNAL LAYER OF CTI: A CASE ON BOOKSTAGRAM

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Abstract

In this digital information age, Instagram, as one of the online social media platforms, has gained more popularity among young generations as a virtual space to express themselves, including their hobby of reading. Since the number of Instagram users who enjoy reading has been growing rapidly, so has the community of readers and book lovers in this virtual space; hence, the terms bookstagram and bookstagrammer have become more well-known. This study investigates how bookstagrammers construct their language identity and online identity on Instagram by analysing the bookstagrammer's feeds on Instagram and implementing one layer of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), the communal identity. Using a method of virtual ethnography, it has been found that the bookstagrammer used English as the predominant language in her posts to connect and expand the interaction with other bookstagrammers worldwide, even though it was not her first language. Alongside, Instagram's features, such as hashtags and tags in her posts, were her visible efforts to build her identity by actively engaging in the Bookstagram community that supported her to actively participate in the bookstagram community, which eventually enriched the communal identity of bookstagram. A recommendation is offered since the communal layer, and the other three layers of CTI are interconnected and have the potential to bring a more thorough understanding of one's identity construction on social media.

Keywords: identity construction; Instagram; Bookstagram; communication theory of identity

Abstrak

Di era informasi digital ini, Instagram sebagai salah satu platform media sosial online semakin populer di kalangan generasi muda sebagai ruang virtual untuk mengekspresikan diri, termasuk hobi membaca. Karena jumlah pengguna Instagram yang gemar membaca meningkat pesat, komunitas pembaca dan pecinta buku di ruang virtual ini juga meningkat; karenanya, istilah bookstagram dan bookstagrammer menjadi lebih terkenal. Penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana bookstagrammer mengkonstruksi identitas bahasa dan identitas online di Instagram dengan menganalisis unggahan bookstagrammer di Instagram dan menerapkan satu lapisan Teori Komunikasi Identitas (CTI), yaitu identitas komunal. Dengan menggunakan metode etnografi virtual, ditemukan bahwa bookstagrammer di penelitian ini menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa utama dalam postingannya untuk menghubungkan dan memperluas interaksi dengan bookstagrammer lain di seluruh dunia, meskipun itu bukan bahasa pertamanya. Selain itu, fitur-fitur Instagram seperti hashtag dan tag pada postingannya merupakan upaya nyatanya dalam membangun identitas dengan aktif terlibat dalam komunitas bookstagram, yang pada akhirnya memperkaya identitas komunal bookstagram. Rekomendasi ditawarkan karena lapisan komunal dan tiga lapisan CTI lainnya saling berhubungan dan berpotensi membawa pemahaman yang lebih menyeluruh terhadap konstruksi identitas seseorang di media sosial.

Kata Kunci: konstruksi identitas; Instagram; Bookstagram; teori komunikasi identitas

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INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Other than as a tool of communication, languages carry the users' histories, traditions, cultures, values, and experiences. Therefore, the existence of a language entails the speakers' identity in a social setting, which leads the speakers to have a sense of belonging (Jaber, 2022). Through language, people can be categorised into a social group and construct their social identities. For instance, people who speak Indonesian are identified as Indonesians. Moreover, they can identify which part of Indonesia they are more likely to belong to when a particular dialect or some jargon is used. As Byram (2006) further adds, people's languages and varieties of dialects make their social identities easily recognised as those are expressions of identification and may be different from personal identities.

As the world is in the digital information age, communication technology is used daily, making our society more technology-centred. As a result, many populations nowadays can communicate using any language or English as the lingua franca by utilising online systems, such as social media. To O'Reilly (2005), social media is the backbone of Web 2.0, which refers to the advancement of online technology that operates interactive capabilities. Echoing Wood (2009) and Tuten & Solomon (2014), social media is an online means that can connect and collaborate with people wherever they are and has the capacity to build up online networking and community which consists of people who have similar interests. Furthermore, Seibel (2019) added that using social media allows users to plan, organise, communicate, perceive and develop the users' identities.

One of the social media platforms primarily used to upload and share photos is Instagram (Carpenter, et al., 2020). Instagram is an online social media platform used primarily by younger generations in their 20s and 30s (Kim and Kim, 2018). The users use this online platform for sharing photos and videos with some aesthetic filters, and those files can be shared through some provided features on Instagram, such as posts, stories, and reels. They can also connect with other enthusiasts by posting a photo or a video with a caption of questions to start a conversation in the comment sections or have interactive sessions with the followers and viewers using other Instagram features. The main aim is to channel hobbies by capturing photos of self or people, places, goods, or any activities, including hobbies (Mahendra, 2017).

Among various kinds of hobbies, reading is one of them. The number of Instagram users who use this online platform to share their hobby of reading can be detected by searching with any related hashtags, including the #bookstagram, which has reached more than 76 million posts and 295.600 posts under #bookstagramindonesia. These numbers depict the enthusiasm of book readers and can be observed further to investigate any sorts of activities that may evolve with reading and books. Budiman (2021) stated that bookstagram is a term within Instagram that refers to posts or any kind of feed regarding books and reading. Thus, the significant increase in Instagram users, particularly concerning a hobby of reading, has encouraged them to build a community of readers and book lovers and identify themselves as bookstagrammer (Zulfi and Esfandari, 2021).

The term bookstagrammer can be recognised as an online identity since it is constructed through social media, in this case, Instagram, and is an integral part of an individual's identity construction and self-representation (Frunzaru and Garbasevschi, 2016). The concept of online identity allows users to portray different self-identity online (Turkle, 2011). Therefore, this realisation fosters the idea that it is possible for a single user to possess multiple identities, impacting their self-identity construction and perception of self and potentially confusing private and public boundaries (Papacharissi, 2018). Thus, the combination of online and offline spheres provokes a realisation that people possess 'authentic' identities that can be misinterpreted online (Seibel, 2019).

In Goffman's (1959) formative work, it is stated that one's self-concepts are developed when one interacts with others. Later Mokros (2003) asserted that self-identity is composed of self-reflection of discourse and interaction. Therefore, one's identity is claimed, defined, and changed in

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mutual communication activities (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Hecht (1993) proposed the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), which pivoted on the reciprocal influences between identity and communication. Social relations and roles are developed through communication, and as a result, individual identities are performed as social behaviour through communication. In other words, CTI embraces the integration of the individual self, communication, relationships and society. This notion of multiple elements in one's identity construction is further refined in the four loci of identity: personal identity, enacted identity, relational identity, and communal identity.

Statement of Problems

Many studies on online identity constructions have been done since the increasing advancement of communication technology and social media usage. To the best writer's knowledge, studies concerning identity construction on general social media have been various. For instance, Gonzales and Hancock (2008) studied where identity shift occurred more often, whether in public or private computer-mediated communication and whether introversion and extroversion of users impact the identity shift. In the same year, Zhao et al. (2008) study, Facebook was chosen to investigate identity construction in the anonymous online environment. Still, with Facebook as the media, Rambe (2013) unravelled the influence of converged social media on students who used Facebook Mobile for exchanging learning resources and micromanagement their daily lives. In Saudi Arabia, a study on identity negotiation and construction among Saudi women using social media was done by Guta & Karolak (2015). Later in China, Yuan (2018) investigated Chinese college students' online identity construction on Sina Microblog. Yet, McWha & Laing (2018) explored how travel writers perceived their sense of self through writing and online media. Meanwhile, Li (2021) examined factors influencing bloggers' intentions to continue blogging.

Another popular social media that has been part of recent studies on identity construction in this digital information age is Instagram. Calkin (2015) investigated Instagram as a virtual space to prompt a retroactive identity construction. Meanwhile, in Lee et al. (2015) study, they uncovered the structural dimensions of consumers' motives for using Instagram. Vida et al. (2019) analysed how female travellers use Instagram as their "identity workshop", another term to replace identity construction. Slightly different in terms of the object, Kertamukti et al. (2019) sought identity construction of several Indonesian middle-class users through one of the features on Instagram, stories highlights. Yet Sithole's (2020) study explored millennials' perceptions of the role Instagram influencers play in identity construction.

Although there are abundant studies on identity construction on social media, there are still very limited studies, particularly on bookstagram or bookstagrammer. So far, there has been only a study to analyse feeds on Instagram owned by Gerakan One Week One Book conducted by Khairina (2019). This was a qualitative study with the result that Bookstagram was beneficial in promoting reading activities. Not much different from Khairina's study, Zulfi & Esfandari (2021) also figured out the motives and meaning of the activity of sharing content related to books on Instagram by some Indonesian bookstagrammers.

Moreover, up to this moment, there has been very limited study on language identity, which is integrated with studies on identity construction on social media, especially Instagram or Bookstagram, by referring to any layers in CTI. A study by Seibel (2019) was closely related to this domain by analysing the role of Instagram in the construction of identity using CTI. However, her study focused on how Instagram users apply its features to present and construct their identity with gender issues as the theme.

With that in mind, the writer is keen on filling the gap by investigating one of the top ten Indonesian bookstagrammers on how she constructs her language identity and online identity on Instagram. The relevant approach to analysing her feeds on Instagram is by implementing CTI.

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Research Questions

- How does the bookstagrammer utilise features of Instagram to construct her language identity?
- Based on CTI, What kind of communal identities does the bookstagrammer construct in her Instagram account?

Significance of the Study

This study aims to analyse how a bookstagrammer constructs her language and online identity using the features on Instagram and figure out what kind of identities have been developed during her time as a bookstagrammer. The communal layer in CTI has been chosen as the framework to examine her identities because of its relevance to the nature of Instagram as a social media and an online communication tool that connects and collaborates with people. It is hoped that this study will highlight the function of social media such as Instagram in constructing users' identities and provoke more similar studies to reveal identities that may evolve during an online interaction with other users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and Identity

Language and identity are closely interrelated. Languages are the representation of the users' identities. Using a language in communication allows the users to be categorised into different social groups (Jaber, 2022). In cultural studies, scholars developed an understanding that there are multiple ways in which identities are constructed and expressed through variations in language use. According to Ivanic (2006), it can be done by talking, writing, or acting like other people they want to be identified with. It is also a process of active identification, which is necessary to be known and participate within a social community. Therefore, language does not merely refer to linguistic repertoires but also includes other multimodal ways of meaning-making, such as using signs and gestures. These communicative ways are essential for the constitution and expression of people's identities, such as their involvements in social groups, their senses of belonging, their awareness of who they are, and their positions generally in the world, which may come from their own perceptions or others' (Zenker, 2018). Therefore, language is flexible and may be perceived differently since many aspects affect one's perceptions.

Identity Construction based on CTI

Michael Hecht and colleagues proposed the Communication theory of identity (CTI) in the 1980s. Before this theory emerged, identity had been considered a central element of human existence, and CTI perceived identity as a social phenomenon. There was a shift from a notion of "self" as a single and unified identity to the theory's understanding which argues humans are inherently social beings and communication, relationships, and communities are closely interlinked in their daily lives. Within those interactions with others, as a result, a person's identity can be multiplied and shifted (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

CTI proposes four layers of identity: personal, relational, enactment, and communal (Hecht et al., 2005). Studies focusing on cultural phenomena, such as multiculturalism, have integrated the CTI framework. For instance, Hecht's study in 2012 used this framework to examine the bi-cultural identity of Jewish-American people. The four layers of CTI, as a result, provided a structure to unveil this cultural phenomenon (Pang and Hutchinson, 2018).

The first layer of CTI is personal identity. By definition, it is an individual's self-concept which exists at the individual level and appears as the individual's characteristics. The second layer is enacted identity, an individual's expressed or performed identity established through an exchange in communication. Some aspects of communication, such as expressions of identity, are considered

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identity; thus, identity influences communication. The next layer is relational identity, with four levels in it. The first level is when individuals establish and shape their identity partly by incorporating others' perceptions of them. Secondly, an individual identifies themselves through the relationship this individual develops with others. Since an individual can possess more than one identity, the third level concerns the existence of identities associated with other identities. The last level of the relational identity layer is all about a relationship between or among individuals that can be a unit of identity. In brief, this layer examines how an individual develops and shares their identity by internalising how others perceive them, evaluating their relationships with others, how they view/himself concerning others, and the relationship itself (Jung and Hecht, 2004).

The last layer is called communal identity, which refers to how a community gives meaning to their identities. It can be seen from expressions of cultural identity used through their activities, in this case, on social media. In other words, it defines the character of a group of individuals.

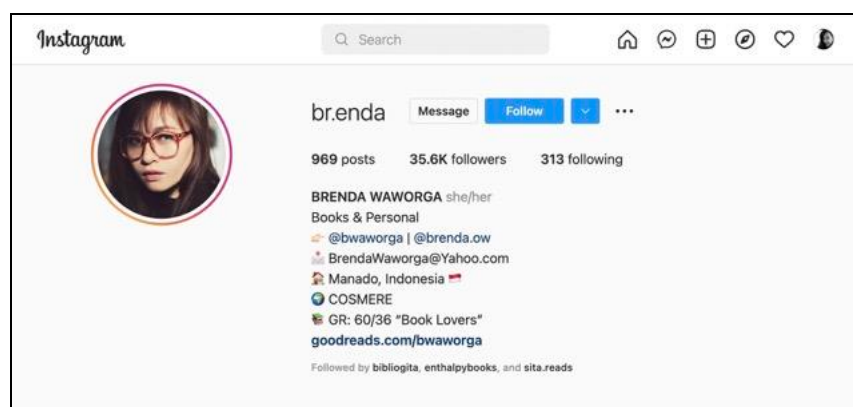
These four layers of identity are interconnected because a person's personal identity has always been mixed with their enacted, relational and communal identities, as much as communal identities take part in personal, enacted and relational identities (Jung and Hecht, 2004).

METHOD

This study will seek to better understand the bookstagrammer's language identity and identity construction through one of four layers of CTI: communal identity (Hecht et al., 2005). The communal identity is chosen as the basis since it depicts more of the complexity of identity construction compared to the other three layers. The bookstagrammer's cultural identity that is shared through posts about books, how the photos are taken, and any responses to the community can be examples of how the bookstagrammer's cultural identity is shared.

To reach the findings, the virtual ethnographic method is chosen. According to Martin et al. (2002), virtual ethnography deals not only with humans and digital technology but also with society. Furthermore, this method does not require the study to conduct a direct meeting; hence it can be carried out without restriction on time and space (Hine, 2000).

The main data source is retrieved from posts in 2021 and 2022 at an Instagram account under the username @br.enda. This bookstagram account has been active since 2017 as a solid bookstagrammer by consistently posting content in photos and stories about books and reading as the main themes. It has also been one of the top ten Indonesian bookstagrammers because of the highest number of followers. Below is the screenshot of the bookstagrammer's profile on Instagram, which was captured on June 28th, 2022.



Source: <https://www.instagram.com/br.enda/>

This screenshot suggests the basic information of @br.enda. On her profile, there is a profile picture in a circular shape on the left-handed side, and further details about the account are next to it. There have been more than 950 posts related to reading and books since 2017. From that year, the account has reached more than 35.600 followers, with 313 accounts that @br.enda follows. Below those details, the bookstagrammer states her name, followed by her gender status. The lines underneath state her account identity as a digital space for books and personal related. The next is followed by another two Instagram accounts dedicated to her other hobby, photography, and personal life. It is followed by her email address for partnership purposes, her origin, and her interest in “cosmere”, a fantasy world created by an epic fantasy and science fiction American author, Brandon Sanderson. The following detail concerns her Goodreads account (GR), which says she has read 36 books out of her annual target, 60 for this current year, and the book she is currently reading is titled “Book Lovers”. Lastly, this data is ended with a link to her Goodreads account, a cataloguing website that allows anyone to search its collections of books, quotes, and reviews.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Language Identity

The user's language tends to show others the user's identity. It could be where the user's come from, which part community they belong to, their position in a social community, and many more. The perceptions do not have to be explicitly stated, yet, others can make some of their own perceptions based on their knowledge and experience (Jaber, 2022). As shown in this bookstagrammer's account, English is predominantly used in her posts, although she is an Indonesian from Manado, South Sulawesi. This brings to the notion that using a lingua franca on social media can enlarge the possibility of reaching other English-speaking viewers from outside Indonesia. As a result, her bookstagram account has been followed by other similar enthusiasts in reading, especially fantasy genre lovers from many countries. Therefore, using English to narrate her posts' descriptions is part of identity construction to fit in some book communities. Here, the bookstagrammer tries to identify herself with a certain social community in which the process of active identification is essential to immerse in it (Ivanovic, 2006). The samples below can represent the bookstagrammer's identities through the language she used to describe the photographs and also to respond to followers' comments:

Figure 1



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Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

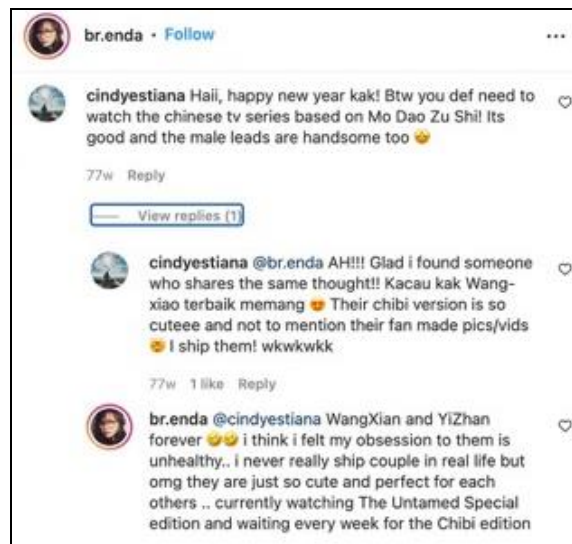


Figure 7



Figure 8



From the eight samples above, the bookstagrammer told her identities explicitly. In figure 1 up to figure 5, the bookstagrammer explicitly shared her identities other than what the profile description tells. Those first five figures provide some personal matters unrelated to her account's main concept. She expressed her matters along with the books captured in the photos. From those figures, her other identities as an office worker, a wife, a movie lover, and a Christian are expressed in her captions. Furthermore, the bookstagrammer's interaction with her followers can also be seen from their short conversation in the comment section, as shown in figures 6, 7, and 8. Their main topic of discussion here was not far from reading and books, and the language used depended on the follower's language. The bookstagrammer's language identity construction is surely not merely

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from the language she uses to express herself but also from the community she participates in, which is explained further in the next section.

Communal Identity

By definition, communal identity is how a group of people or community perceives their identity (Jung and Hecht, 2004). The expressions of cultural identity shared through Instagram posts, or feeds may contain cultural identity, which can be seen from how the users within a shared community or culture through the act of liking, tagging, and sharing (Seibel, 2019). Additionally, Seibel explains that identity is a social product and serves as a significant basis for the activities and ways of living. Therefore, one major feature of Instagram that relates to the communal frame of identity is the ability to interact with others within a shared community, in this case, is Bookstagram, through the act of liking, tagging or sharing. Below are the samples of posts by the bookstagrammer with some tags attached (circled in red):

Figure 9

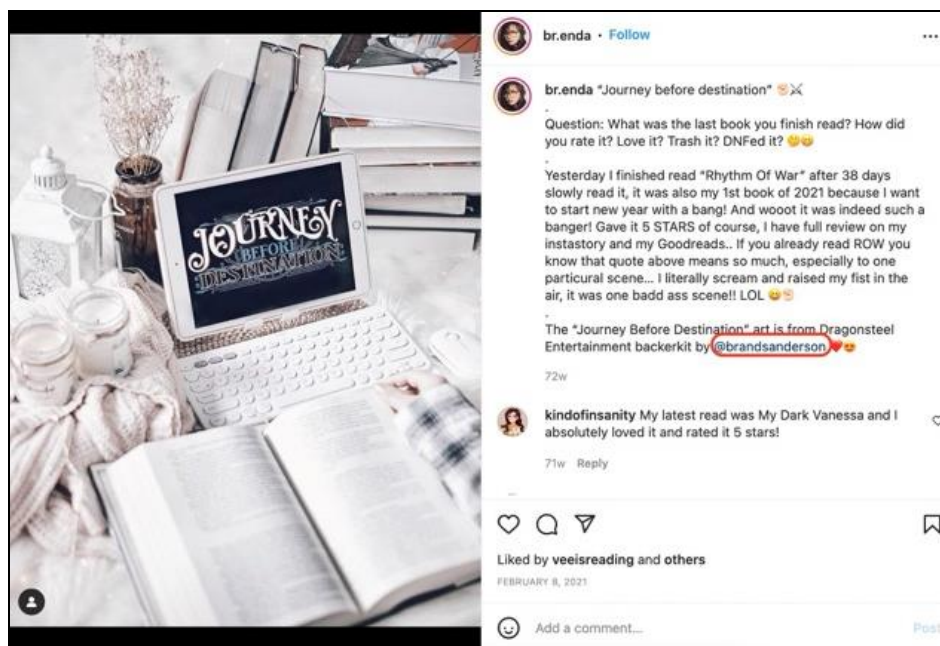


Figure 10

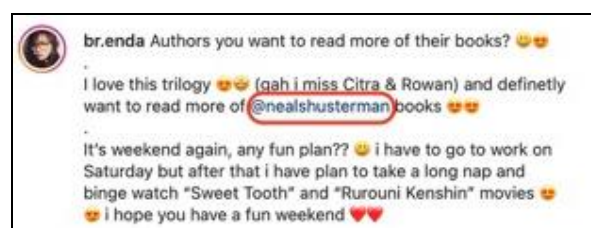
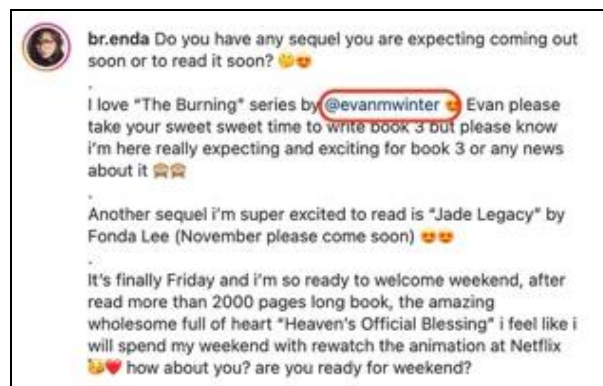


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figures 9 to 12 represent the bookstagrammer's way of her involvement with the authors of books in the photos. In all four samples above, the bookstagrammer tagged the author of the featured book in each post, @brandsanderson, @nealsushterman, @shafakelif, and @evanmwinter. The attempt was to raise the author's attention to how she felt and what she thought about their respective books.

Meanwhile, in the samples below, figures 13 to 16, the bookstagrammer tagged some other bookstagrammers from any part of the world who have a similar interest to hers in fantasy books. Their accounts were mentioned in the photo's description using an "@" to be directly noticed by the tagged accounts when the image was posted. Moreover, some hashtags were also seen in the photos' descriptions as another immediate connection to the community mentioned. This way, the bookstagrammer intentionally let her account be noticed within this community and instantly be part of this community (figure 14: #AsianReadathon, #StanAsianAuthors). Therefore, they can connect immediately and discuss further any plans they arranged:

Figure 13

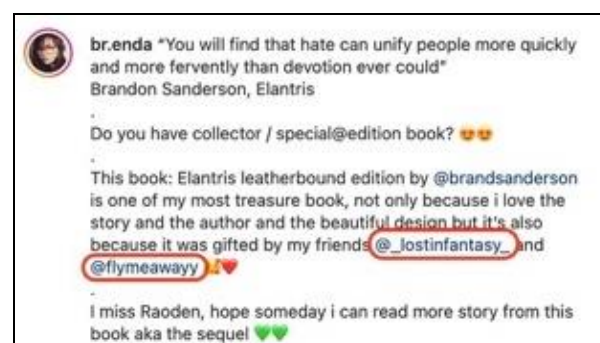


Figure 14



Figure 15

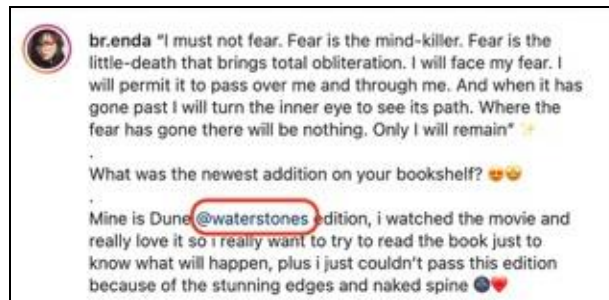


Figure 16



On a random occasion, such as shown in Figure 17, the bookstagrammer also tagged a bookstore, @waterstones, to provide and share some information to the viewers about where the featured book was purchased from, and it could also be a promotion method because it prints a special edition that cannot be found in any other publishers. This way, many more fantasy book lovers would take this post as a recommendation to satisfy their book collection.

Figure 17



Other samples can be seen in Figures 18, 19 and 20, in which the bookstagrammer used hashtags to identify the respective posts to a specific topic. The purpose was for other users to search keywords within Instagram to explore and discover other users' content tagged as relating to their search. In other words, the hashtag feature allowed the users to share their content with individuals interested in similar content. Furthermore, it allowed users to categorise and identify themselves in their photographs. For example, in figure 18, the bookstagrammer used the hashtags #bookworms, #bookish, #bookstagrammer, #bookphotography, #booknerdigans, #bookcommunity, #amreading, #booknerd, #bookstagramfeatures, #instaread, #bookstagramindonesia, #booksbooksbooks, #bookgram, #bookaesthetic, #pandora#, and #stenciledges. These hashtags were all selected by the bookstagrammer to make other Instagram users interested in those particular hashtags find hers, but also as the method for her to be part of the community of each hashtag. The hashtag was helpful as a medium to communicate with other users with similar interests. It reinforced the bookstagrammer's own self-perception that she identified herself to the book community as a bookworm, a bookstagrammer from Indonesia who had just finished reading "Pandora".

Figure 18

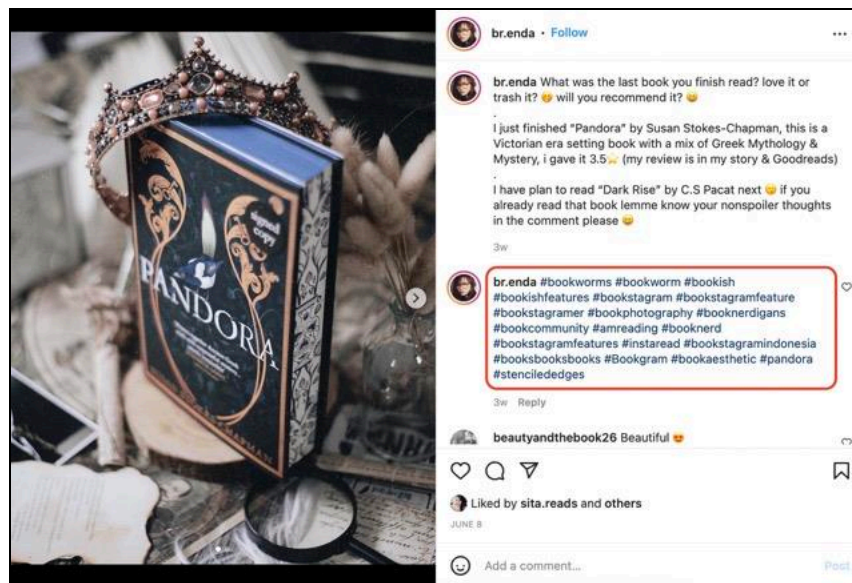
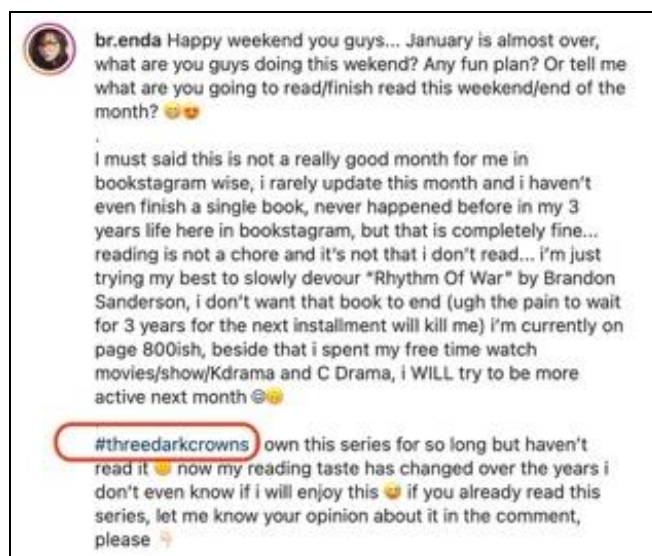


Figure 19



Figure 20



Basically, hashtags are a method to identify and categorise content and also provide a way to curate and categorise the identity of people. For example, by following #bookstagramIndonesia, Brenda can discover other people within this bookstagram community who use that hashtag and reinforce their cultural identity by liking and sharing other bookstagrammers' contents reinforcing their self-perception as a member of the bookstagrammer. This way, the bookstagrammer constructs and participates in a communal identity in which other bookstagrammers participate within those hashtags.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aimed to understand better how an Indonesian bookstagrammer uses Instagram's features to construct her language identity. From the findings and analysis above, the bookstagrammer used English predominantly in her captions and some responses to the followers in the comment section. Using this lingua franca has expanded her involvement in this book community by getting more followers from outside Indonesia who have similar interests in reading fantasy books. Both English and Indonesian were used to represent her identities that could attract other Instagram users with the same interest and who can speak those two languages. The feed feature was used maximally to express her interests and welcomed any other enthusiasts to be part of this bookstagram community. Other than for those purposes, the feed feature was also utilised for communicating her offline identities, which were quite different from the main theme of her bookstagram account.

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The other concern in this study is how the bookstagrammer constructed her communal identity as one of the layers of the CTI framework. It has been examined that the bookstagrammer made use of hashtags as an effort to build her identity. The tags and hashtags she attached, along with the photos, have helped her to be part of some communities, and other Instagram users with similar interests could search and find her account under the same hashtags. Therefore, her identity was constructed based on the hashtags she used, and she could actively participate in the bookstagram community by involving other Bookstagrammers she tagged in the posts.

Although this study has gained its aims in understanding how a bookstagrammer constructed her language identity and her communal identity through social media, it will be more thorough when the rest of the three layers in CTI are involved. Hence, future studies on identity construction on social media can take much more benefits in considering all four layers in CTI to comprehend the interconnectedness of a social media user's personal identity that may have been mixed with their enacted, relational and communal identities.

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