THE PHENOMENON OF USING FACE FILTERS IN FINDING PARTNERS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: E-ISSN: 2541-5263 P-ISSN: 1411-4380	*The use of face filters on social media has become part of a self-presentation strategy, especially in the context of finding a partner. This study investigates the motives, perceptions and impact of women's use of face filters in building online relationships. The method used is a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques with four informants, consisting of two unmarried women and two widows. The results of the study indicate that the reasons for using filters are related to the desire to appear more attractive, to increase self-confidence and as a form of self-expression. The informants' perceptions of filters are divided into two views: as a form of manipulation and as a way to show the best version of themselves. In addition, it was found that unmarried women showed a greater tendency to rely on filters than widows.*

Keywords: Face filters, Social media, Finding a partner

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology, especially social media, has changed the way individuals interact, communicate, and build relationships. Social media is not only a platform for sharing information, but also a space for self-expression, building an image, and finding a partner. One phenomenon that has attracted attention is the use of face filters in the process of finding a partner on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and online dating applications. Face filters, which were originally designed for entertainment and creative expression, have now become an integral part of self-presentation and visual communication (Dalimunthe, 2018; Ritonga et al., 2023). Social media users often use these filters to enhance their appearance, or even hide physical flaws. The main reasons individuals use filters are to make their images look better, have fun, and follow the latest trends (Qaili, 2024; Dalimunthe et al., 2024). Face filters allow users to

modify their appearance instantly, creating a more attractive self-image or in accordance with the desired beauty standards. Because through the application in finding a partner, it has a very large potential to change or improve something (Finkel et al., 2012). This phenomenon not only affects the way individuals present themselves, but also has an impact on the dynamics of social interactions, including in the context of finding a partner.

The main problem that arises from this phenomenon is the potential for distortion of reality and dishonesty in self-presentation. Face filters can significantly change natural features such as smoothing the skin, enlarging the eyes, or changing the shape of the face. This creates unrealistic expectations for potential partners, who may feel deceived when meeting in person. The use of face filters can increase the user's self-confidence and influence how they are perceived by others. However, the use of face filters also raises questions about honesty, authenticity, and challenges and their impacts (Barrett, 2022). In addition, the use of face filters can also affect the user's self-confidence, where they may feel unattractive enough without the help of filters. This psychological impact needs to be further studied, especially in the context of how individuals view themselves and others in the process of finding a partner.

Previous research has shown that the use of face filters can have an impact on social perception and expectations in relationships. One study found that individuals who frequently use face filters tend to have higher levels of trust in online interactions, but are also at risk of incompatibility when meeting in person. Visual manipulation in online profiles can create unrealistic expectations in romantic interactions (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Another study showed that the use of face filters can not only increase attractiveness in online contexts but also increase the risk of disappointment due to inconsistencies with reality (Fox & Rooney, 2015).

This research is important for several reasons. First, social media has become a primary platform for many people, especially younger generations, to find partners. Online dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble, and others often integrate face filter features, so understanding their impact is crucial. Second, this phenomenon reflects changes in social and cultural norms, where visual appearance is becoming a dominant factor in initial interactions. Third, this research can provide insight into how technology influences interpersonal relationships and self-concept, which are important aspects in communication studies.

This study proposes a qualitative approach to explore the subjective meanings and experiences of social media users who use face filters in finding partners. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and social media content analysis, allow researchers to understand the social and psychological context behind this phenomenon. In addition, this study can also identify new trends in digital communication, such as the emergence of filters specifically designed to

attract the attention of potential partners or filters that create the illusion of a certain personality. This study is formulated in two main questions, namely how are the motives and perceptions of individuals towards the use of facial filters in the process of finding a partner on social media and the impact of using facial filters on self-confidence and social interactions in the context of finding a partner through social media (Ritonga et al., 2024; Ohorella et al., 2024)

More broadly, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions in the field of communication, especially in the study of self-presentation, visual communication, and the impact of technology on interpersonal relationships. The findings of this study can also be the basis for developing policies or ethical guidelines related to the use of face filters on social media, especially in the context of online dating applications. Thus, this research is not only academically relevant, but also has practical implications for society and the technology industry.

In the context of Indonesia, this phenomenon is also interesting to study considering the high penetration of social media and the popularity of online dating applications among the younger generation. Indonesian culture that emphasizes the importance of appearance and first impressions in social relationships can strengthen the impact of the use of face filters. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how this global phenomenon is practiced and perceived in the local context. Thus, the study on "The Phenomenon of Using Face Filters in Finding Partners on Social Media" has high relevance, both academically and socially. Through a qualitative approach, this study aims to reveal the complexity of this phenomenon and provide new insights in the field of digital communication.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. A qualitative approach is used because this study focuses on an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals in using face filters when searching for partners on social media. The phenomenological method was chosen because it aims to explore how individuals experience and give meaning to certain phenomena. In the context of this study, the phenomenological method is used to understand how individuals feel, interpret, and experience changes in self-identity when using face filters in social interactions and searching for partners on social media. Qualitative research can be understood as a type of research that is not based on statistical procedures but rather on how researchers understand and interpret the behavior, interactions, or behavior of subjects in certain situations based on their own perspectives (Fiantika, et al., 2022).

This research was conducted online on social media platforms that are commonly used for interaction and searching for partners such as Facebook. The selection of digital-based locations was carried out because the phenomenon being

studied occurred in a digital space. The selection of informants was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely the deliberate selection of participants based on characteristics that are in accordance with the objectives of the study (Patton, 2002). Four women were selected as informants through purposive sampling techniques, consisting of two widows and two unmarried women. The subjects in this study were individuals who use face filters in social interactions and partner searches on social media.The informants in this study consisted of four women who actively use face filters on social media and have used the platform to communicate with the opposite sex. Informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques with the following criteria: Women aged at least 20 years, Have experience using face filters in partner searches, Have the status of a widow or unmarried, Willing to be interviewed in depth.

The informant profiles are as follows: Informant WD: Female, 57 years old, widow, Informant LA: Female, 31 years old, widow, Informant RM: Female, 26 years old, unmarried, Informant ZZ: Female, 21 years old, unmarried.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. The data obtained were then analyzed using NVivo 15 software. The analysis process includes creating codes (categories), coding interview transcript data, and visualizing the results in the form of coding summaries, matrices, and hierarchy charts. Data validity is strengthened by source triangulation techniques and researcher discussions.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study conducted interviews with four women as participants. The four participants or informants, two of whom were widows and two of whom were unmarried. The names of the four participants in this article are the initials of their real names in order to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' identities. The initials of the participants are WD, LA, RM and ZZ. Interview data from the four participants were compiled in the form of transcripts which were then imported into the Nvivo 15 software for analysis. In this study, there are four Top-Level Codes, namely the use of face filters, the purpose of finding a partner, perceptions of face filters and the impact of using face filters. Based on the search results using the Word Frequency Query feature in the Nvivo software, the word "Filter" is a word that often appears in the data, followed by the words "face", "partner", and other words as in the Word Cloud in Figure 1. Word Frequency Query is used to describe the most frequently appearing words, variations, or phrases (Endah et al., 2020)

Use of Face Filters
Based on the results of data analysis using NVivo software, it was found that the major theme related to the Use of Face Filters consists of two main subthemes,

namely 'Purpose of Using Filters' and 'Reasons for Using Filters'. This theme is visualized using a Hierarchy Chart as shown in Figure 2.

In the subtheme Purpose of Using Filters, the majority of respondents stated that they had used filters with the aim of attracting the attention of the opposite sex, especially in the context of initial interactions on social media that allow the relationship to continue towards romance. Meanwhile, in the subtheme 'Reasons for Using Filters', several specific reasons were found, namely: (1) to make the face look fresher, (2) just for fun, and (3) to make the face look prettier.

Based on the number of coded references, the reasons for beautifying oneself and increasing sexual attractiveness were the most dominant ones that emerged from the informants. Face filter technology allows its users to change the appearance of the face in the original photo that is considered less attractive or beautiful to be more beautiful.

> *"The main reason for using filters is to make the photo more aesthetic and beautiful and to appear fresher." (Informant LA, 31 years old)*
> *"The reason is to appear more beautiful, for fun too." (Informant RM, 26 years old)*

This filter helps users in building identity and beauty according to the standards that apply in society, namely by changing skin color, smoothing the surface of the face, changing posture to be slimmer and so on (Tambunan et al., 2024). This strengthens that the use of face filters is closely related to the strategic self-presentation process on social media, as stated by Goffman (1959) and reinforced by Mehdizadeh (2010) in a study on the construction of self-image in cyberspace. Figure 2 also shows that the informants tend to have diverse reasons but are still interconnected in one big theme regarding self-presentation through the use of face filters. The motives for using face filters by informants are mostly rooted in the desire to obtain personal satisfaction in interacting on social media. Based on the Uses and Gratification Theory approach, as explained by Rohmah, individuals use social media as a form of fulfilling personal needs such as identity, entertainment, and escape from psychological stress (Ni, 2020). In this context, the use of filters becomes part of personal integrative needs and affective needs, namely the need to feel more confident, attractive, and socially accepted.

Purpose of Finding a Partner

The motivation for finding a partner is also a focus in this study. Two informants (one widow and one unmarried) have a serious goal of finding a life partner, while the other two just want to make friends. This goal affects the intensity of filter use, where those who want to find a partner are more careful in choosing photos and filters

Tabel 1. Coding Matrix Purpose of Finding a Partner

Purpose of Finding	Unmarried	Widow Partner
Looking for Boyfriend	0	1
Looking for Husband	1	1
Looking for Friend	1	0

Based on the Coding Matrix analysis using NVivo software, it was found that women with widow status were more likely to use face filters on social media for the purposes of "finding friends" and "finding a husband". Meanwhile, unmarried respondents were more dominant in showing the intention to "find a boyfriend" or "future husband". This finding indicates a tendency for differences in relational orientation based on marital status, which strengthens the theory of self-presentation in the context of searching for a digital partner (Goffman, 1959; Ellison et al., 2012).

Perceptions of Filter Use

The behavior of building self-image on social media, including through the use of filters, is closely related to the concept of the front stage and back stage in Goffman's dramaturgy theory. As in Prasetya's research (2020), micro-influencers tend to only display positive content and avoid negative or overly personal impressions in the public space of Instagram. This is in line with the findings of this study, where informants stated that filters were used to "maintain image" and hide shortcomings (Prasetya, 2020).

Perceptions of filter use vary. Some consider it a form of manipulation, while others see it as a legitimate form of self-expression in the digital age. The results of data analysis using NVivo software show that respondents' perceptions of the use of face filters in the context of finding a partner on social media tend to be viewed as a form of visual manipulation. The "Manipulation" node was recorded as more dominant with a total of 5 references, compared to the "Honesty" node which only received 3 references. Both widowed and unmarried sources expressed the view that the use of filters is often done to create a visual impression that does not fully represent reality. One unmarried female source stated,

> *"I don't think it's manipulation but it's not honest either. But if I choose one, I tend to be more into manipulation because face filters are indeed made to change appearance."*

Interestingly, although the perception of manipulation is quite dominant, there are also sources who consider the use of filters to be within the limits of honesty, as long as it does not drastically change the structure of the face. This indicates a moral ambivalence in the perception of social media users regarding the boundaries between beautification and deception. Thus, the perception of the use of filters is not entirely negative, but depends on the extent to which users are

aware of and agree with the use of filters as part of a self-image strategy in the world

Table 2. Coding Matrix of Perception of Face Filters

Marital Status	Honesty	Manipulation
Widow	1	2
Unmarried	2	3

Impact of Filter Use

The use of face filters on social media has been proven to not only function aesthetically, but also create a communication experience that resembles real interactions. Based on a study by Lee and Borah (2020), rich media features—such as Instagram with visualizations, filters, and interactive effects—increase users' perceptions of the media's functionality in supporting self-presentation. This is reinforced by the findings of this study, where the informants felt that filters helped convey a positive self-image and were more easily accepted in the context of finding a partner.

As explained by Lee and Borah, perceived media richness plays an important role in encouraging self-presentation behavior because it provides a more personal and expressive communication experience. This is in line with the narrative of the informants in this study who felt more confident in presenting themselves when using filters on social media. In this context, face filters can be interpreted not only as a beautification tool, but also as a visual communication tool that is rich in social and emotional meaning, thus having an impact on the formation of stronger interpersonal connections as explained by Lee & Borah (2020), that self-presentation on Instagram also increases the possibility of friendship development (Danielle et al., 2020).

This study reveals that the use of face filters on social media is not just a digital cosmetic activity, but is part of a self-presentation strategy that has social and psychological consequences. In the context of finding a partner, face filters are used to form a visual impression that is considered ideal by users, with dominant reasons such as wanting to look more attractive, appear fresh, beautify themselves, and attract the opposite sex.

From the results of interviews with four informants (two widows and two unmarried women), it was found that the motives for using face filters have different tendencies based on marital status. Unmarried women tend to show a higher level of dependence on filters compared to women who have been married (widows). This is shown by the intensity of filter use in each upload and the self-confidence that depends on the results of the visual modification. Filters are a tool that is considered important in building appeal in the digital realm.

The psychological impacts that arise from filter use include increased self-confidence, but also dependence. Filters function as a means of expressing aesthetics that can instantly increase self-confidence. However, on the other hand,

excessive use can increase the gap between ideal self-image and physical reality, which can lead to social pressure and decreased self-confidence in direct interactions. Filters play a role in forming performative self-representations in cyberspace, reinforcing the need for social validation, and creating tension between online and offline identities. Linear regression analysis shows that the more often someone uses filters, the more likely they are to feel dissatisfied with their bodies (Millenia & Hidayat, 2025).

> *"Sometimes yes, especially when I'm not confident. But I also realize that using filters too often can be addictive. So now I try to appear more natural and confident with my own version or make up." (Informant RM, 26 years old)*

Although feeling more confident, there are concerns about other people's perceptions when seeing their real face directly. NVivo coding shows that two informants show a tendency to depend on filters, while the other two feel confident even without filters.
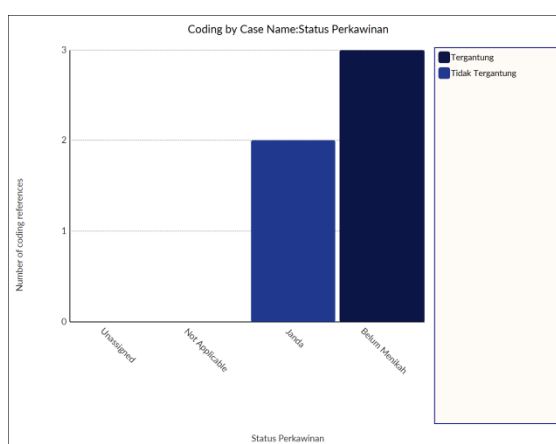

Figure 3 Coding Matrix of Dependency Based on Marital Status

4. CONCLUSION

This study found two major perceptions about the use of face filters. First, filters are considered a form of manipulation, namely an attempt to present a version of oneself that is not in accordance with reality in order to gain more attention or appeal. This perception tends to arise from negative user experiences or from ethical reflections on interactions on social media. Second, filters are considered a form of contextual honesty, meaning that the use of filters is permissible as long as it does not go beyond the limits, because it is considered part of the aesthetics of social media and self-expression that is not entirely deceptive. In addition, the psychological impact of filter use was also identified in the form of temporary increased self-confidence, strengthening social expectations, and the potential for long-term dependence on the ideal image that is digitally formed. Several

informants even expressed disappointment when meeting someone in person who looked different from their filtered photos on social media, raising questions about authenticity and honesty in relationships built online. Thus, the use of face filters in the context of finding a partner is not only a technological practice, but also a social phenomenon involving identity dynamics, romantic expectations, and representational pressures in the digital space. Based on the research findings, it is important for individual social media users, especially women, to develop critical awareness of the use of face filters, especially when involved in online partner searches. The use of filters should not only be understood as a tool to enhance visuals, but also as a representation of identity that can shape expectations, perceptions, and relational dynamics with potential partners.

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