

Social Construction of Body Positivity Movement on Instagram among Teenage Girls in Surabaya, Indonesia

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Abstract: Body image on digital platforms, particularly Instagram, has become a significant arena for negotiating and redefining ideals of beauty, self-esteem, and identity, reflecting broader social shifts. This research examines the social construction of the body positivity movement on Instagram among teenage girls in Surabaya through Peter L. Berger's theoretical framework, which posits that social reality is formed through externalization, objectivation, and internalization, where individuals and society co-create meanings through interaction. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this study involved 12 female informants aged 13-21 who actively use Instagram. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews and visual content analysis, and were then analyzed thematically to identify patterns in body image narratives, self-acceptance, and digital resistance. Findings reveal that these young women are not passive recipients of beauty norms; instead, they actively reconstruct bodily meanings through their everyday media practices. The body positivity movement emerges as a counter-narrative that transforms collective identity and redefines women's bodies from objects to dignified subjects. This research contributes to media and body sociology, emphasizing critical digital literacy and inclusive education in fostering youth empowerment and gender-sensitive interventions.

Keywords: body positivity; Instagram; social construction; social media; young women

Abstrak: Gambaran tubuh di platform digital, khususnya Instagram, telah menjadi arena penting untuk menegosiasikan dan mendefinisikan ulang ideal kecantikan, harga diri, dan identitas, mencerminkan pergeseran sosial yang lebih luas. Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi sosial gerakan *body positivity* di Instagram di kalangan remaja putri di Surabaya melalui kerangka teoritis Peter L. Berger yang menjelaskan bahwa realitas sosial terbentuk melalui eksternalisasi, objektivasi, dan internalisasi, di mana individu dan masyarakat bersama-sama menciptakan makna melalui interaksi. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan 12 informan perempuan berusia 13-21 tahun yang aktif menggunakan Instagram. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dan analisis konten visual, kemudian dianalisis secara tematis untuk mengidentifikasi pola dalam narasi citra tubuh, penerimaan diri, dan resistensi digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa remaja perempuan ini bukan penerima pasif norma kecantikan, melainkan secara aktif merekonstruksi makna tubuh melalui praktik media sehari-hari. Gerakan *body positivity* mun-

cul sebagai narasi alternatif yang mengubah identitas kolektif dan mendefinisikan ulang tubuh perempuan dari objek menjadi subjek yang bermartabat. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada sosiologi media dan tubuh, menekankan literasi digital kritis dan pendidikan inklusif dalam mendorong pemberdayaan pemuda dan intervensi yang sensitif terhadap gender.

Kata Kunci: *body positivity; Instagram; konstruksi sosial; media sosial; remaja putri*

A. Introduction

The recent proliferation of information on ideal body shape is closely related to the industrial and consumer culture in Western countries. This culture, especially for women, has made appearance one of the main values that influence people's views on ideal body standards.¹ Western culture characteristically positions physical beauty as the primary quality by which individuals are valued, with thinness often equated with success in life.² The influence of this culture extends to various parts of the world, including Indonesia, through social media, which is now the main platform for spreading these values. In the midst of globalization, Indonesians, especially teenagers, are massively exposed to the beauty standards displayed in Western culture.

Instagram, as one of the most popular social media platforms in Indonesia, plays an important role in shaping perceptions of the ideal body. With more than 61 million active users, the platform is dominated by women, especially those aged 18-24.³ Teenage girls in this age group often utilize Instagram to share and search for content related to lifestyle, beauty, and the latest trends. However, this social media use also encourages them to make social comparisons, both with peers and celebrities, which often triggers dissatisfaction with their own bodies.⁴ This dissatisfaction becomes a serious problem,

¹ Fitri Fidiandi, "Analisis Semiotika Barthes tentang Makna dalam Postingan Foto Body Positivity Media Sosial Tara Basro," *E-Proceeding of Management* 8, no. 2 (2021): 1614.

² Bianca Puntarelia, Gabriella A. Di Capua, and Carolina Jimenez, "Influence of the Body-Positive Movement on Youth Habits, Eating Behavior and Social Participation," *African Journal of Biological Sciences (South Africa)* 6, no. 10 (2024): 273–95, <https://www.afjbs.com/uploads/paper/b004d821d9fd8e51b4ea915e7a0c6e5.pdf>.

³ Fidiandi, "Analisis Semiotika Barthes tentang Makna dalam Postingan Foto Body Positivity Media Sosial Tara Basro."

⁴ Era Kurnia Aristantya and Avin Fadilla Helmi, "Citra Tubuh pada Remaja Pengguna Instagram," *Gadjah Mada Journal of Psychology (GamaJoP)* 5, no. 2 (2019): 114–28, <https://doi.org/10.22146/gamajop.50624>.

especially when adolescents feel they do not meet the beauty standards dictated by the media.

Teenage girls in Surabaya, for instance, are active users of Instagram, using the platform not only to share photos and videos but also to form and reinforce their self-image. Instagram, as a visual-based platform, significantly influences the beauty standards and body image of teenage girls. Their study involving 155 teenage girls aged 12-19 in Surabaya found that body image affects their self-esteem, with social comparison as a key factor in this relationship.⁵ This phenomenon provides a crucial foundation for understanding how Instagram psychologically impacts teenage girls in Surabaya, particularly in shaping their self-image and self-esteem as active social media users.

The body positivity movement in Indonesia gained serious attention in 2019, offering an alternative perspective to narrow beauty standards. The movement is spearheaded by Floranita Kustendro and Ririe Bogar, who aim to create a space where individuals can love and accept their bodies for who they are.⁶ Through initiatives such as counseling, workshops, and positive events, the movement aims to raise awareness of the importance of self-acceptance. The campaign is not only relevant for adult women but is also important for teenagers who are vulnerable to social pressures regarding body ideals. With the presence of Body Positivity Indonesia, it is hoped that people will increasingly recognize the importance of spreading positive energy, fostering self-acceptance, and maximizing their potential.

However, despite this optimism, social media platforms like Instagram are often a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it serves as a tool for building a virtual self-image, where teens can choose the content they publish to create a specific impression in the eyes of their followers. This process creates a duality between the “front stage”—what is shown to the public—and the more authentic “back stage”.⁷ On the other hand, the pressure to create an idealized

⁵ Sherly Yuriko Kato and Stefani Virlia, “Self Esteem Remaja Pengguna Instagram Ditinjau dari Body Image dan Social Comparison sebagai Moderator,” *Jurnal Psikologi* 17, no. 1 (2024): 174–88, <https://doi.org/10.35760/psi.2024.v17i1.10828>.

⁶ Editors, “Body Positivity Indonesia, Wadah Baru untuk Gerakan Mencintai Diri,” *Kumparan Style*, February 28, 2019, <https://kumparan.com/kumparanstyle/body-positivity-indonesia-wadah-baru-untuk-gerakan-mencintai-diri-1551338097285887139/full>.

⁷ Nisa Sartika Tobing, Rahma Hayati, and Henri Sitorus, “Platform Instagram sebagai Media Pembentuk Citra Diri Virtual pada Mahasiswa,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik* 5, no. 1 (2023): 47–53, <https://doi.org/10.56552/jisipol.v5i1.112>.

self-image often leads adolescents to feel insecure about their own bodies. When social expectations do not align with reality, teens usually experience internal conflicts that can impact their self-confidence.

New expressions in the form of body positivity campaigns are present as a countermeasure to the rampant body shaming phenomenon.⁸ This campaign is not only an educational platform but also creates an inclusive community of support. In contrast to the traditional narrative of exclusive beauty, this movement encourages acceptance of all body shapes, skin colors, and facial features. This initiative is crucial for fostering a more inclusive environment, particularly for teenagers as they develop their self-identity. As such, the body positivity movement is a highly relevant counter-narrative to the harmful beauty standards.

In the Indonesian context, this campaign also adapts to local values that emphasize social harmony and togetherness. Various activities initiated by Body Positivity Indonesia provide a healthier alternative in shaping views about the body. The movement encourages individuals to focus on their health, happiness, and potential, rather than being trapped by narrow beauty standards. However, it cannot be ignored that collective awareness about the importance of self-acceptance still needs to be encouraged. Education on self-acceptance, particularly for teenagers, is a crucial aspect of supporting this transformation.

On the other hand, social media remains a complex terrain for body image formation, especially for adolescent girls. The social comparisons that adolescents often make when viewing peer or celebrity posts cause significant psychological distress. When their bodies do not match the standards displayed on social media, feelings of self-dissatisfaction often arise. This is a reminder that the role of social media needs to be balanced with good digital literacy to help adolescents sort out the content they consume. Thus, digital literacy becomes an important element in supporting the body positivity movement.

In addition, popular media representations such as movies also play an important role in shaping adolescents' perceptions of ideal bodies and self-acceptance. Research conducted by Anisa and Winduwati on the movie *Imperfect* reveals that the character Rara (Jessica Mila) in the movie offers

⁸ Fidiandi, "Analisis Semiotika Barthes tentang Makna dalam Postingan Foto Body Positivity Media Sosial Tara Basro."

valuable lessons for teenagers to avoid repeating the same mistakes in assessing their own bodies. The movie is considered to encourage an understanding of the importance of having a body positivity mindset and increase awareness of self-acceptance, so that individuals do not constantly compare themselves to the standards promoted by the media.⁹

Not only through movies, but social media such as Instagram is also proven to have a close relationship with the construction of body image among adolescent girls. Based on the results, there is a positive and strong relationship between self-esteem and body image in adolescent girls who use Instagram. The higher the self-esteem, the more positive the body image they feel.¹⁰ This finding confirms that social media has a dual role—as both a source of pressure and a potential space of empowerment—depending on how individuals interact with and interpret the content they encounter.

Instagram serves as a complex space for shaping beauty standards, having a double impact on society, particularly on adolescent girls. On the one hand, the platform creates pressure to appear “perfect” through content that promotes unrealistic beauty ideals, the use of filters that distort reality, and its function as a site of constant comparison and commercial endorsement. On the other hand, Instagram also serves as a platform for the development of the body positivity movement, which facilitates the construction of more inclusive definitions of beauty through photo-sharing practices and hashtags such as #BodyPositivity. In the Indonesian context, particularly among young women in Surabaya, these evolving notions of body positivity intersect with local social values and global cultural flows, creating dynamic interpretations of the body. However, the movement continues to face challenges as conventional beauty standards remain deeply embedded in popular culture and often dominate social media content.

In line with previous research, a comprehensive review highlights the dualistic nature of the body positivity movement on social media, showing that while body-positive content can improve mood and body appreciation, it can also increase an appearance-focused mindset and self-objectification.¹¹ In a similar

⁹ Ayu Reni Anisa and Septia Winduwati, “Pemaknaan Body Positivity dalam Film Imperfect pada Kalangan Remaja di Jakarta,” *Koneksi* 5, no. 2 (2021): 427, <https://doi.org/10.24912/kn.v5i2.10421>.

¹⁰ Waode Syaifatul Rohmadhani and Tiara Diah Sosialita, “Hubungan antara Self-esteem dan Body Image pada Remaja Perempuan,” *Buletin Riset Psikologi dan Kesehatan Mental*, 2022.

¹¹ Rachel Cohen, Toby Newton-John, and Amy Slater, “The Case for Body Positivity on Social Media: Perspectives on Current Advances and Future Directions,” *Journal of Health Psychology* 26, no. 13 (2021): 2365–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105320912450>.

vein, one framework introduces the idea of a “Perfect Storm” that integrates developmental, sociocultural, and social media factors to explain the rise in body image concerns among adolescent girls.¹² Another study adds a quantitative perspective, revealing that social comparison with influencers on platforms like Instagram is directly associated with lower body appreciation.¹³ Furthermore, experimental findings indicate that the effectiveness of body-positive content on mood and body satisfaction may vary depending on the model’s body size.¹⁴ While another review underscores the importance of body functionality—the appreciation of what the body can do—as a crucial element of positive body image.¹⁵

While previous works have offered valuable insights, they differ from this research in terms of focus, context, and methodology. Most existing studies consist of broad literature reviews or quantitative and experimental analyses conducted in various cultural settings. In contrast, the present research adopts an in-depth qualitative approach to explore the social construction of the body positivity movement within a specific local context, namely among teenage girls in Surabaya. By centering on this demographic, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how global media trends are interpreted and adapted at the local level.

The originality of this study is further demonstrated by its distinctive theoretical lens. Meanwhile, a study on gender construction in poor Islamic communities in Surabaya also applies social construction theory to a Surabaya community, it centers on gender dynamics within an Islamic context.¹⁶ In

¹² Sophia Choukas-Bradley et al., “The Perfect Storm: A Developmental-Sociocultural Framework for the Role of Social Media in Adolescent Girls’ Body Image Concerns and Mental Health,” *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 25, no. 4 (2022): 681–701, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-022-00404-5>.

¹³ Federica Pedalino and Anne-Linda Camerini, “Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction: The Mediating Role of Upward Social Comparison with Peers and Influencers among Young Females,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19, no. 3 (2022): 1543, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031543>.

¹⁴ Kathleen Simon and Megan Hurst, “Body Positivity, but Not for Everyone: The Role of Model Size in Exposure Effects on Women’s Mood, Body Satisfaction, and Food Choice,” *Body Image* 39 (2021): 125–30, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2021.07.001>.

¹⁵ Jessica M. Alleva and Tracy L. Tylka, “Body Functionality: A Review of the Literature,” *Body Image* 36 (2021): 149–71, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2020.11.006>.

¹⁶ Ahmad Ridwan and Muhammad Faruki, “Gender Construction at Islamic Poor Community: Study of Critical Ethnography in Sidosermo, Surabaya,” *Jurnal Partisipatoris* 6, no. 2 (2024): 16–26, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jp.v6i2.35888>.

contrast, our research applies Peter L. Berger's dialectical framework (externalization, objectivation, and internalization) to the distinct digital context of Instagram and its role in shaping beauty standards. By examining the complex processes through which these young women actively negotiate and redefine beauty narratives, this research fills a gap in the literature, providing a deeper and more contextual understanding of how modern beauty standards are challenged and reconstructed through social media practices.

According to the concept of social construction, reality is formed through three interconnected processes: externalization (the expression of ideas and meanings into the social world), objectivation (the institutionalization of these expressions into social facts such as norms or traditions), and internalization (the absorption of these social facts into individual consciousness and identity).¹⁷ This ongoing dialectical process is central to understanding how adolescent girls interpret, negotiate, and sometimes resist dominant beauty narratives through body positivity discourses on Instagram.

Therefore, this article aims to examine the social construction of the body positivity movement on Instagram and how this narrative is shaped and interpreted by young women in Surabaya in response to social pressures related to the ideal body. As a group in the midst of identity formation and highly active in digital spaces, adolescent girls are critical subjects for understanding how bodily meanings are socially constructed. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on media and body sociology, while also offering practical implications for enhancing digital media literacy among young people.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to explore the social construction of the body positivity movement on Instagram among adolescent girls. The participants were 12 female teenagers aged 13 to 21 years old, all of whom reside in Surabaya and are active Instagram users. The argument for this specific subject selection is based on several key factors. First, adolescents are in a critical period of identity formation, making them particularly vulnerable to social pressures regarding body ideals. Second, their

¹⁷ Muhamad Sidik Pramono et al., "Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's Social Construction of the Institutionalization of Tolerance Values in the Nyadran Perdamaian Tradition," *Al Ma'arif: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial dan Budaya* 6, no. 1 (2024): 49–61, <https://doi.org/10.35905/almaarief.v6i1.9759>.

high engagement with social media, especially visually-driven platforms like Instagram, makes them a crucial demographic for studying how beauty standards are negotiated in the digital age. Third, focusing on young women in Surabaya provides a specific local context, which is essential for understanding how global cultural trends are interpreted and adapted in a unique social setting. Previous findings have shown that body image and social comparison on Instagram have a significant impact on the self-esteem of teenage girls in Surabaya, highlighting the urgency and relevance of this topic in the local context.¹⁸ Participants were selected through purposive sampling, taking into account variations in their social backgrounds, education levels, and engagement with social media (see Table 1). This method allows the researcher to contextualize the phenomenon within local social and cultural dynamics.

Research data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with the subjects, while secondary data were obtained from relevant articles, research reports, and social media posts. The researcher also analyzed Instagram content using text and image analysis methods to understand the construction of body positivity narratives that develop on the platform.

Table 1
Research Participans

No.	Name	Age (years old)	Origin
1	Adella	19	Surabaya
2	Imroatus Sholihah	19	Surabaya
3	Saadha	20	Surabaya
4	Alya	14	Surabaya
5	Asifa Marsya	16	Surabaya
6	Fadillah	14	Surabaya
7	Fatimah	20	Surabaya
8	Anastasya	14	Surabaya
9	Ardelia	15	Surabaya
10	Ariela	18	Surabaya
11	Maritza Pradnya	20	Surabaya
12	Bilqis	17	Surabaya

¹⁸ Kato and Virlia, “Self Esteem Remaja Pengguna Instagram Ditinjau dari Body Image dan Social Comparison sebagai Moderator.”

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify patterns and main themes, such as self-acceptance, social comparison dynamics, and the impact of social media content on teenagers' body image. The analysis process was conducted systematically to ensure comprehensive and in-depth results.

This research adhered to ethical principles, particularly since it involved young subjects. Before the interview, the researcher explained the purpose, benefits, and procedures of the study to the subjects and sought informed consent. For subjects under 18 years old, additional consent was obtained from parents or guardians. Subjects' privacy and confidentiality were maintained by not including their real identities in the research report. With this approach, the research is expected to provide relevant insights into how adolescent girls in Surabaya construct the meaning of body positivity through Instagram social media.

C. Results and Discussion

The Social Construction of Body Positivity: A Dialectic of Externalization, Objectivation, and Internalization

According to Peter L. Berger's perspective, social reality is shaped through a dialectic between objective and subjective realities. Objective reality is socially shaped through external structures—such as norms, traditions, and institutions—that guide individual development from birth to adulthood. Through daily interactions, individuals internalize these social values, creating patterns of behavior (*habitualization*) that are repeated and considered normal. On the other hand, subjective reality reveals that individuals not only passively accept social structures but also actively create meanings based on their personal experiences and societal preferences.¹⁹ Similarly, the social construction of women as a second social class was not formed instantly, but rather through a long process involving the dialectical moments of externalization, objectification, and internalization that continuously take place

¹⁹ Hussein Ruslan Rafsanjani, "Teori Konstruksi Sosial Peter L. Berger: Profil, Perspektif, Contohnya," *Sosiologi Info*, 2022, <https://www.sosiologi.info/2022/02/teori-konstruksi-sosial-peter-l-berger-profil-perspektif-contohnya.html>.

in society.²⁰ It aligns with Berger's view that social meanings are produced through a continuous interaction between individual subjectivity and collective structures. In this context, the meaning of body and beauty is not natural or universal, but socially constructed through interaction and media exposure.

The body positivity movement that has emerged on social media, particularly on Instagram, is a manifestation of this process of social construction. The movement emerges as a response to dominant beauty standards that have been internalized for a long time through media, advertisements, and cultural norms. Through photo uploads, personal narratives, and the use of hashtags such as #BodyPositivity, individuals—especially women—attempt to reframe the meaning of their bodies beyond the idealized templates imposed by popular culture and the beauty industry. In this regard, body positivity is a movement that promotes acceptance of diverse body types and challenges stereotypical norms about physical appearance.²¹ It indicates that social media serves as a symbolic space where individual subjectivity plays a significant role in shaping new social realities about the body.

The concept of body positivity is also closely tied to cultivating a healthy and appreciative mindset toward one's own body. Every individual has the right to feel comfortable and valued regardless of their physical form.²² Representations of bodies that were once considered "not ideal"—such as those with fat folds, cellulite, acne, scars, natural body hair, or disabilities—are now increasingly given space in digital narratives.²³ Through this process, people reclaim the social world that once emphasized the "perfect body" and collectively shape a more inclusive narrative. Thus, body positivity on Instagram is not merely a trend or campaign, but rather part of a broader social construction that reflects the shifting values of contemporary society. The

²⁰ Ahmad Ridwan and Faruki, "Gender Construction at Islamic Poor Community: Study of Critical Ethnography in Sidosermo, Surabaya."

²¹ Puntarelia, Capua, and Jimenez, "Influence of the Body-Positive Movement on Youth Habits, Eating Behavior and Social Participation."

²² Anisa and Winduwati, "Pemaknaan Body Positivity dalam Film Imperfect pada Kalangan Remaja di Jakarta."

²³ Jasmin Jannatania, Dadang R. Hidayat, and Sri S. Indriani, "Wacana Gerakan Body Positivity sebagai Respons dari Perilaku Body Shaming di Instagram," *Jurnal Ilmiah Muqoddimah: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik, dan Humaniora* 7, no. 3 (2023): 687–97, <https://doi.org/10.31604/jim.v7i3.2023.687-697>.

voices of young women in Surabaya reflect how this multilayered process of meaning-making happens in real life, addressing the editor's points on externalization, objectivation, and the movement's inclusive implications.

Externalization of the body positivity movement is evident in the participants' active engagement and conscious search for diverse body narratives on Instagram. Instead of passively consuming idealized images, they actively seek content that challenges narrow beauty standards, a form of digital resistance. What begins as a personal act of resistance—exploring diverse body images—is repeated and shared by many, transforming body positivity into a widely recognized social norm. The interviews show that this movement has been objectified to the point where it now serves as a new frame of reference for young women.

"Menjelajahi konten yang ada di Instagram dengan unggahan-unggahan bentuk tubuh yang berbeda-beda. Dari hal tersebut membuat saya sadar akan persepsi saya tentang kecantikan. Selama ini, saya terjebak dalam standar kecantikan yang sempit dan tidak realistis, sering membandingkan diri dengan gambar-gambar yang telah diedit dan disaring (Exploring the content on Instagram with various body type uploads. From that, I became aware of my own perception of beauty. All this time, I was trapped in narrow and unrealistic beauty standards, often comparing myself to edited and filtered images)," Ariela (18 years old).

It is the process of objectivation, where a shared understanding becomes an objective, institutionalized social reality. Imroatus's statement about social media "steering" people's opinions on body weight illustrates how the movement has created a new collective reality, influencing what is considered "normal" and empowering individuals who previously felt insecure. This objectivation is not always simple; it can also merge with other norms, as seen in Adella's experience, where the idea of self-love becomes tied to the objective norm of a healthy lifestyle.

"Salut sih, karena kan sekarang banyak tuh pemikiran seseorang disetir sama konten media sosial. Di medsos banyak yang menggiring opini kalau bb segini normal, bb segini obes. Padahal ya ada perhitungannya tentang bb normal atau ga. Body positivity di IG bikin masyarakat yang dulunya insecure fisik jadi lebih pede dan salah satunya aku (I really appreciate it, because nowadays many people's thoughts are shaped by social media content. On social media, opinions are often formed around what body weight is 'normal' or 'obese.' But actually, there are calculations for that. Body positivity on Instagram has helped people who used to be insecure become more confident—including me)," Imroatus (19 years old).

"Pernah, saya dulu adalah orang termasuk agak gemuk dan tidak mencintai tubuh saya sendiri. Tetapi, karena maraknya konten tersebut membuat saya lebih

mencintai bentuk tubuh saya menjadikan saya melakukan diet, karena menurut saya dengan mencintai fisik Anda itu dengan membuatnya menjadi sehat dan dengan kegiatan diet ini membuat saya memiliki tubuh yang sehat (I was once a person who was a bit overweight and didn't love my own body. But, because of the proliferation of that content, it made me love my body more, which led me to go on a diet, because in my opinion, loving your body means making it healthy, and this diet activity makes me have a healthy body),” Adella (19 years old).

The final stage of this process is internalization, where the objectified social reality is absorbed by individuals, shaping their personal identity and worldview. This is where the true inclusive implications of the movement become clear: its ability to foster a sense of shared identity and mutual support. In this context, body positivity is no longer just a digital trend but a lived experience that supports adolescents in constructing healthier self-narratives.²⁴ The interviews with Saadha and Asifa highlight the inclusive nature of this internalization. By seeing others with diverse bodies confidently express themselves, they feel a sense of relief and solidarity. The stories of struggle and acceptance shared by influencers create a powerful emotional connection, validating their own experiences and motivating them to prioritize mental health, happiness, and self-care over meeting unattainable standards. These experiences illustrate how the movement fosters a sense of community and shared struggle, transcending individual change to achieve collective empowerment.

“Melihat konten body positivity di Instagram tuh rasanya kayak lega banget di tengah standar kecantikan yang sering bikin insecure. Ada rasa nyaman pas liat orang-orang dengan berbagai bentuk tubuh bisa tampil pede tanpa takut di-judge ... konten-konten kayak gini lebih banyak kasih energi positif sih (Seeing body positivity content on Instagram feels like such a relief amidst the beauty standards that often make people insecure. It's comforting to see people with different body types confidently showing up without fear of judgment... these kinds of posts give off positive energi),” (Saadha, 20 years old).

“Saya pernah melihat unggahan dari seorang influencer yang membagikan cerita tentang perjuangannya untuk menerima tubuhnya setelah melahirkan. Cerita tersebut sangat menginspirasi saya karena menunjukkan bahwa perjuangan untuk menerima diri sendiri adalah proses yang panjang dan memerlukan kesabaran. Saya merasa termotivasi untuk lebih fokus pada kesehatan dan kebahagiaan saya, dan tidak terlalu memikirkan tentang standar kecantikan yang tidak realistis (I once saw

²⁴ Antonius Tri Wibowo et al., “Promoting Body Positivity: Psikoedukasi Meningkatkan Kesadaran Citra Tubuh Positif,” *Jurnal Pengabdian Olahraga Masyarakat (JPOM)* 3, no. 2 (2022): 124–32, <https://doi.org/10.26877/jpom.v3i2.13587>.

a post from an influencer who shared her story about her struggle to accept her body after giving birth. The story was very inspiring to me because it showed that the struggle to accept yourself is a long process that requires patience. I felt motivated to focus more on my health and happiness, and not to worry too much about unrealistic beauty standards),” (Asifa, 16 years old)

The body positivity movement on Instagram among teenage girls in Surabaya is a transformative social process that actively challenges and reconstructs beauty norms. Through this dynamic platform, they externalize new values, objectify them into social reality, and internalize them to build self-resilience. This movement empowers them to redefine beauty and shift their self-perception from objects to subjects of dignity.

Representation of Body Positivity Narratives on Instagram

The body positivity movement is a modern counter-discourse that actively challenges and reconstructs prevailing beauty norms. In this sub-chapter, the focus shifts from a general discussion of social media to a deeper examination of how this movement manifests and is practiced by young women. The first point of discussion is the intersection between personal narratives and a critical awareness of social structures, as exemplified by a prominent figure in the movement.

The Instagram post by Melissa Viviane Jefferson, known professionally as Lizzo, a prominent American singer and activist for body positivity and self-love, opens this discussion by highlighting the intersection between personal narratives and critical awareness (see Figure 1). In a post dated December 15, 2024, she wrote:

“There was a time when it was illegal for my granny’s granny to read. Now all I see is ‘I ain’t reading allat’. Pay attention to the illusion of freedom, your mind is your most valuable instrument.”²⁵

This quote illustrates that body positivity is not solely about physical appearance but also involves reclaiming mental and emotional autonomy in the face of structural oppression. Lizzo’s consistent advocacy in this movement exemplifies how Instagram has evolved into a powerful digital stage for challenging dominant narratives of beauty, health, and self-worth. Instagram is one of the most popular visual-based social media platforms among teenagers today.

²⁵ Lizzobeeating, “There was a time when it was illegal for my granny’s granny to read ...,” Instagram, December 15, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DDksv6fTicg/>.

Figure 1
Lizzo (@lizzobeeating)



Source: Instagram post.²⁶

The platform allows users to share photos and videos enhanced with various filters, hashtags, and locations to increase visibility. Instagram, owned by Meta Platforms, has become a dominant part of digital life for Generation Z.²⁷ A report found that 94% of Generation Z respondents actively use Instagram, making it the most popular social media platform among youths.²⁸ This suggests that narratives on Instagram strongly influence users' perceptions and attitudes, especially concerning beauty and body image.

In today's digital age, social media often shapes beauty ideals more aggressively than traditional media. Instagram, in particular, serves not only as a platform for sharing moments but also as a powerful space where visual trends are produced and circulated. These trends frequently promote idealized body standards—such as fair skin, slim bodies, symmetrical faces, and straight

²⁶ Lizzobeeating.

²⁷ "Instagram," Wikipedia, n.d., <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram>.

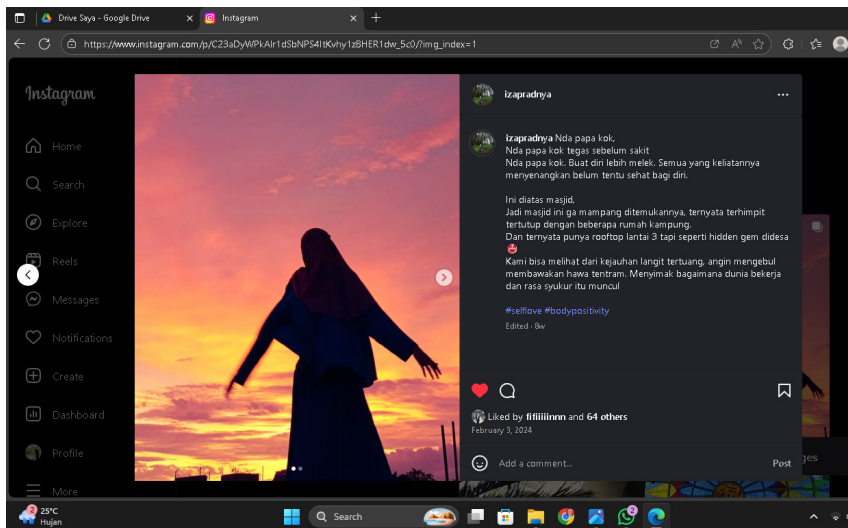
²⁸ Basuki Eka Purnama, "Instagram Jadi Media Sosial Terpopuler di Kalangan Gen Z," *Media Indonesia*, March 29, 2024, <https://mediaindonesia.com/teknologi/662211/instagram-jadi-media-sosial-terpopuler-di-kalangan-gen-z>.

hair—that do not reflect the full diversity of human appearances. This can generate a sense of inadequacy among young women who feel pressured to conform. In contrast, this same platform also provides a space for resistance through the body positivity movement.

One of the most concrete forms of this resistance is the externalization of body-positive narratives through personal content from the research subjects themselves. A prime example is an Instagram post from Iza, a teenager from Surabaya.

This post was uploaded on February 3, 2024, by the Instagram account @izapradnya, one of the teenage research subjects originally from Surabaya (see Figure 2).²⁹

Figure 2
Iza (@izapradnya), a subject of this research



Source: Instagram post.³⁰

²⁹ Pradnya.

³⁰ Iza Pradnya, "Nda papa kok, nda papa kok tegas sebelum sakit ...," Instagram, February 3, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/p/C23aDyWPkAlr1dBnNPS4ltKvhy1zBHER1dw_5c0/.

Through her caption, *"Nda papa kok tegas sebelum sakit. Nda papa kok Buat diri lebih melek. Semua yang keliatannya menyenangkan belum tentu sehat bagi diri...,"* ("It's okay to be firm before getting hurt. It's okay. Make yourself more aware. Not everything that looks pleasant is necessarily healthy for yourself...") accompanied by the hashtags #selflove and #bodypositivity, Iza conveys a message of self-acceptance and awareness about the importance of honesty and gentleness toward oneself. This post does not merely present an idealized image but emphasizes that not everything that appears pleasurable or enjoyable is good for oneself, inviting teenagers to engage in critical reflection, gratitude, and authentic self-care. By presenting real and reflective stories from Surabaya teenagers like Iza, the discussion on body positivity becomes more tangible and shows how the movement is formed and practiced within the local social context.

Body positivity functions as an alternative narrative that challenges the singular construction of beauty. On Instagram, this narrative is often conveyed through content such as unedited body photos, personal testimonials, and hashtags like #loveyourbody and #selflove. These posts emphasize body diversity and promote self-acceptance, positioning the movement as a form of symbolic resistance against the cultural hegemony of idealized beauty norms. This resistance is often deeply personal, rooted in past experiences of body shaming.

"Pernah, dulu pas SD aku pure sedih dan kecewa banget [karena body shaming]. Tapi sekarang aku mulai belajar skincare, makeup, dan outfit yang cocok untuk diriku—bukan sesuai standar masyarakat. Ini adalah bentuk perlawananku terhadap masa lalu buruk itu (Once, when I was in elementary school, I was really sad and disappointed [because of body shaming]. But now I'm starting to learn skincare, makeup, and outfits that suit me—not according to society's standards. This is my form of resistance against that bad past," (Fatimah, 20 years old).

"Dulu aku sering disebut 'kayak tiang' karena kurus. Sekarang? Aku kebal. Aku yang tau diriku sendiri. Aku bersyukur masih bisa hidup dan nggak kekurangan gizi! (I used to be called 'like a pole' for being skinny. Now? I'm immune. I know myself. I'm grateful to be alive and not malnourished!)," (Maritza, 20 years old).

For many users, the *body positivity* narrative serves as a form of informal education, allowing them to embrace bodily differences and challenge societal prejudices. Instagram content creators—especially women—often share personal experiences of *body shaming* and how they reclaimed self-worth through self-love practices. These stories not only influence their followers but also create a supportive community that validates diverse identities.

"Menurut saya, media sosial, khususnya Instagram, memiliki peran yang sangat besar dalam membentuk pandangan masyarakat tentang standar kecantikan. Media sosial seringkali menampilkan gambar-gambar yang tidak realistis dan tidak mencerminkan keberagaman tubuh yang sebenarnya. Namun, gerakan body positivity di Instagram juga membantu untuk mengubah pandangan masyarakat tentang standar kecantikan dan mengajarkan untuk menerima dan mencintai diri sendiri apa adanya (In my opinion, social media, especially Instagram, has a huge role in shaping people's views on beauty standards. Social media often displays images that are unrealistic and do not reflect the true diversity of the body. However, the body positivity movement on Instagram also helps to change people's views on beauty standards and teaches them to accept and love themselves for who they are)," (Asifa Marsya, 16 years old).

"Ya, gerakan body positivity di Instagram sangat membantu saya lebih menerima diri sendiri. Sebelumnya, saya sering terjebak dalam perbandingan dengan standar kecantikan yang tidak realistis. .. Saya mulai menghargai keunikan tubuh saya sendiri, dengan segala kelebihan dan kekurangannya (Yes, the body positivity movement on Instagram really helps me accept myself more. Before, I was often caught up in comparisons with unrealistic beauty standards ... I started to appreciate the uniqueness of my own body, with all its advantages and disadvantages)," (Ariella, 18 years old).

"Peran media sosial sangat penting di era sekarang, karena banyak sekali masyarakat yang pintar sekali untuk bersilat lidah mengejek perbedaan, contohnya warna kulit, bentuk tubuh, perbedaan yang seharusnya itu adalah hal yang tidak merugikan siapapun tapi justru akan menjadi bahan tertawaan. Dengan adanya konten tersebut, masyarakat lebih melek terhadap hal tersebut (The role of social media is very important in today's era, because there are so many people who cleverly mock differences—like skin color or body shape—which should not harm anyone but are instead made into jokes. With this content, people become more aware of the issue)," (Adella, 19 years old).

Despite its inclusive message, the *body positivity* movement is not universally accepted. Some still perceive self-acceptance as a sign of weakness or complacency. It indicates a cultural tension between striving for the "ideal body" and embracing the body as it is. Instagram, therefore, becomes a contested space where competing narratives of perfection and authenticity coexist.

"Melihat konten body positivity di Instagram tuh rasanya kayak lega banget di tengah standar kecantikan yang sering bikin insecure. Ada rasa nyaman pas liat orang-orang dengan berbagai bentuk tubuh bisa tampil pede tanpa takut di-judge... konten-konten kayak gini lebih banyak kasih energi positif sih. Jadi semacam dorongan buat lebih nerima diri sendiri dan lebih peduli ke kesehatan mental daripada sekadar fokus ke penampilan luar (Seeing body positivity content on Instagram feels like such a relief amidst the beauty standards that often make people insecure. It's comforting to see people with different body types confidently

showing up without fear of judgment; these kinds of posts radiate positive energy. They're like a push to accept myself and care more about mental health than just physical appearance)," (Saadha, 20 years old).

"Salut sih, karena kan sekarang banyak tuh pemikiran seseorang disetir sama konten media sosial. Di medsos banyak yang menggiring opini kalau BB segini normal, BB segini obes. Padahal ya ada perhitungannya tentang BB normal atau ga. Body positivity di IG bikin masyarakat yang dulunya insecure fisik jadi lebih pede dan salah satunya aku (I really appreciate it, because nowadays many people's thoughts are shaped by social media content. On social media, opinions are often formed around what body weight is 'normal' or 'obese.' But actually, there are calculations for that. Body positivity on Instagram has helped people who used to be insecure become more confident—including me)," (Imroatus, 19 years old).

The statement above illustrates how exposure to body positivity content provides emotional comfort and nurtures a healthier self-perception among young users. Rather than reinforcing superficial ideals, such representations offer an alternative discourse that values authenticity, self-acceptance, and emotional well-being. Overall, the representation of *body positivity* narratives on Instagram facilitates collective awareness around body diversity and challenges hegemonic ideals. From a social constructionist perspective, this illustrates that body image and beauty standards are not fixed but are continually shaped through media and social interaction. Instagram, in this light, plays a central role in redefining self-worth and visual culture among today's youth.

Social Media and the Legitimization of Beauty Standards

In today's digital age, social media has immense power in shaping the social construction of the ideal body. This dynamic is a complex one, with platforms serving as both enforcers of traditional beauty standards and as catalysts for change. The following infographic provides context on the digital landscape in Indonesia, which is a key setting for this discussion.

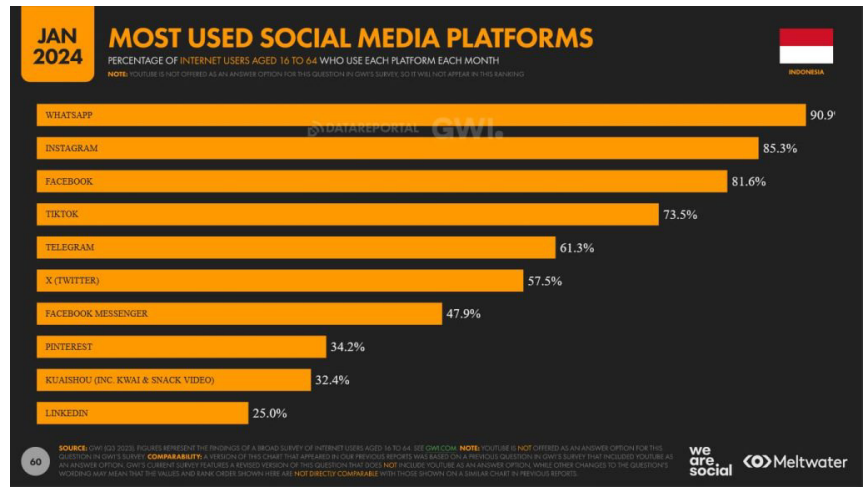
As shown in the infographic, a significant portion of Indonesia's population is highly active on social media platforms. Data from early 2024 reveals that Indonesia has over 221 million internet users, with Instagram being the second most used platform by 85.3% of the digital population aged 16–64.³¹ This

³¹ Asseanila Wisefa, "Analisis Data Media Arus Utama dan Media Sosial Tahun 2024," Indosiana.id, February 28, 2025, <https://www.indonesiana.id/read/180619/analisis-data-media-arus-utama-dan-media-sosial-tahun-2024>.

widespread usage positions Instagram as a powerful tool for shaping perceptions, especially among adolescents who are in a crucial stage of identity formation and self-discovery. It is within this influential digital environment that the body positivity movement emerges as a form of resistance (see Figure 3).

The body positivity movement is a direct counter-narrative to the dominant beauty standards perpetuated online. This movement is widely echoed on visual-based platforms like Instagram due to its ability to spread messages quickly and widely.³² Through photo uploads, inspirational captions, and online campaigns, messages about self-acceptance and body diversity are increasingly reaching young audiences. This is an important step in countering the practice of body shaming, which still occurs frequently.

Figure 3
Infographic “Most Used Social Media Platforms in Indonesia, January 2024”



Source: Indonesiana³³

³² Jannatania, Hidayat, and Indriani, “Wacana Gerakan Body Positivity sebagai Respons dari Perilaku Body Shaming di Instagram.”

³³ Asseanila Wisefa.

Body positivity stems from the idea that all bodies are good, without exception. This statement rejects cultural pressures that have set certain beauty standards as the only acceptable body shape.³⁴ Thin, white, tall, and symmetrical bodies are not the main benchmarks for being considered beautiful or attractive. Social media then becomes a means to voice the values of self-acceptance openly. This narrative is crucial in building a more inclusive and equitable society that values physical diversity.

As time progresses, social awareness of issues surrounding the body is also increasing. People are encouraged to be more aware of the social pressures that influence their perception of their own bodies.³⁵ Issues about the body are not only aesthetic, but also psychological, social, and even economic. It demonstrates that narratives about the body must be understood critically, not merely by following trends shaped by the media. In this context, body positivity comes as a social movement that reflects a change in perspective towards the human body.

Self-image plays a crucial role in shaping one's beliefs and behaviors in daily life; it is a reflection of how a person interprets their existence, both physically and psychologically. Generally, adolescents today place great importance on physical appearance because they want to present themselves as well as possible.³⁶ If a person constantly sees ideal body standards in the media without a counter-narrative, then it is likely that they will experience inner pressure and low self-esteem. In fact, a healthy self-image is essential in building positive social relationships. Therefore, social media should be used to reinforce messages of self-acceptance instead of narrowing the definition of beauty.

Unfortunately, the lack of educational media focused on the body positivity movement in Indonesia means that many individuals, especially adolescents, still feel insecure about their bodies. In this situation, several

³⁴ Anisa and Winduwati, "Pemaknaan Body Positivity dalam Film Imperfect pada Kalangan Remaja di Jakarta."

³⁵ Aiga Diwani and Ratih Hasanah Sudrajat, "Analisis Konten Social Marketing Campaign Dove #RambutAkuKataAku Di Youtube Pada Konsep Body Positivity," *Jurnal Interaksi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 7, no. 2 (2023): 165–76, <https://doi.org/10.30596/jiv7i2.13702>.

³⁶ Talitha Paramesti Huwaidah, "Hubungan Antara Body Image Dengan Self Presentation Pada Remaja Putri Pengguna Media Sosial Instagram Di SMA Islam Al Azhar 14 Semarang [Undergraduate Thesis]" (Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2024).

people experience feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem when confronted with unrealistic beauty standards and comparisons through social media content.³⁷ They are more easily exposed to content that displays idealized bodies rather than messages that reinforce the diversity of body shapes. This condition underscores the importance of media platforms that promote inclusivity. Without adequate education, body positivity narratives risk being overshadowed by dominant currents of popular culture that perpetuate body stigma. Therefore, the role of educators, content creators, and communities is crucial in balancing the discourse within the digital space.

Thus, social media plays a dual role in legitimizing beauty standards. It can be a tool of cultural domination that instills the ideal body image, but it can also be a space for struggle to dismantle the construction. The body positivity movement on social media aims to shift the way society perceives the body in a more humane and inclusive manner. But for this movement to be effective, it requires continuous education and active participation from the media users themselves. Because at the end of the day, the body is not just a visual object—it's a part of our identity, dignity, and right to be respected.

Conclusion

This research reveals that the social construction of the body positivity movement on Instagram among teenage girls in Surabaya occurs through a complex dialectical process, as conceptualized in Peter L. Berger's theory. Through externalization, teenagers actively shape alternative narratives about the body with posts and hashtags that challenge dominant beauty standards; objectivation then occurs when these personal narratives crystallize into collective social realities legitimized in digital communities; while internalization of body positivity values results in fundamental transformations in perception and behavior, encouraging self-acceptance and health practices that are based on love, not fear. Instagram serves as a field of symbolic contestation, where conventional beauty standards and body positivity narratives compete for collective consciousness, creating a dialectical space that reflects a paradigmatic shift in contemporary visual culture, slowly democratizing the representation of women's bodies in the digital public sphere.

³⁷ Ageng Kanda Saepudin and Ayu Oktaviani, "Dampak Media Sosial terhadap Rasa Percaya Diri Terkait Citra Tubuh Generasi Z di Kota Cimahi," *Janaloka: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 1, no. 2 (2023): 81, <https://doi.org/10.26623/janaloka.v1i2December.8143>.

The findings expand the theoretical understanding that the body positivity movement is not just a surface phenomenon focused on physical appearance, but a profound sociocultural movement that reshapes values, norms, and collective meanings about the body. It operates at multiple levels: individually, by fostering self-acceptance and body appreciation; socially, by creating supportive communities that validate diverse bodies; and culturally, by challenging and reconstructing dominant beauty standards in digital spaces. Through this multilayered process, the movement contributes to the construction of a new, more inclusive collective identity for adolescents in the digital era. The implications underscore the urgency of promoting critical digital literacy as a means to navigate the impact of social media on body image formation, as well as the importance of developing educational policies that foster a positive body image as a counterbalance to narratives that may harm mental health. Although not fully able to subvert the hegemony of conventional beauty standards, this movement has provided a foundation for Surabaya's young women to reconstruct the meaning of the body in a more equitable social dialogue—a transformation of consciousness that reflects a fundamental change in the way digital society understands the body, from an objectified entity to a subject that is valued in its diversity.[s]

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