



## **The Phenomena of Using Instagram as an Educational Communication Tool Among University Students in Bandung**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore students' motives, communication experiences, and behavioral changes in Instagram use as an educational communication medium. It employs a qualitative method with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the subjective meaning of social action based on the structure of action motives: because motives and in-order-to motives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving 20 university students in Bandung City who actively used Instagram for educational purposes. Data analysis was conducted through Schutz's phenomenological stages combined with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, including open coding, subtheme categorization, and the reflective and iterative construction of meaning-based themes. The findings indicated that Instagram use is shaped by 'because motives' rooted in prior academic experiences, such as difficulties in understanding classroom materials and a preference for visual content, and 'in-order-to motives' oriented toward future goals, including sharing educational values, building continuous learning, and promoting social change. The study also identified positive communication experiences through intersubjectivity and collaborative learning, alongside negative experiences that stimulate self-reflection, emotional literacy, and adaptation to digital communication ethics. Theoretically, this study extends the application of Schutz's phenomenology within the field of digital educational communication. Practically, it strengthens digital literacy and optimizes Instagram as a meaningful learning space in higher education.

**Keywords:** Educational Communication; Instagram; Students

## INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has enabled people to access various information. One of the most widely used communication technologies is the social media platform Instagram (Purba & Nasution, 2025). As active Instagram users, the authors observed changes in the types of content shared by their Instagram followers (Hidayati & Rahmawati, 2023). Initially, the posts shared were mostly personal information, selfies, and aesthetic images. However, over time, they shifted towards educational content, particularly related to communication science and religious messages, many of which were reposted from Islamic missionary accounts.

Students residing in Bandung are a relevant group to study due to their active use of Instagram. One example is I-05, a student of Communication Studies, whom the author previously acknowledged as an individual who frequently uploaded artistic photos and natural landscapes. In a conversation with the author, I-05 stated that Instagram is no longer used solely as a photo-sharing platform but also as a source of information, including information related to Islamic religious knowledge. Based on initial observation, some changes have occurred in the informant I-05 as she actively follows Islamic da'wah accounts, which include the way she dresses, speaking style, conversation topics, and involvement in campus activities. These changes represent the religious knowledge that I-05 gained from da'wah content accessed through Instagram. The activity of re-uploading content from Islamic da'wah accounts has also become one form of social media activity that I-05 is now actively engaged in.

The researcher also observed that students required additional access to religious knowledge that would allow them to freely explore diverse information. Some informants told the researcher that they participated in a specific study group or learning community to improve their religious understanding. They received the information about the learning activities from the group's Instagram account.

According to TNS, a British research and analysis company, Indonesia ranks third as the country with the largest number of Instagram users (Digital Business Lab, 2022). Paul Webster, Instagram's Brand Development Lead for the Asia Pacific region, revealed that since its launch in 2010, Instagram has had more than 400 million active users worldwide. Indonesia is one of the countries with a high level of Instagram usage, with 89 percent of users aged 18–34 accessing Instagram at least once a week. The majority of them are young, educated, and established individuals. 59 percent of users are aged 18–24, 30 percent are aged 25–34, and 11 percent are aged 34–44. Female users are recorded as more active at 63 percent, while male users are 37 percent (Witanti, 2017). Based on this age range, students are included in the main target group of active Instagram users (Sari & Zukfekar, 2024).

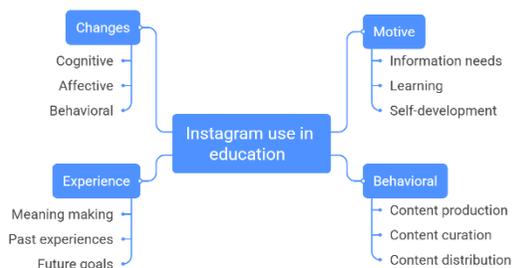
The use of Instagram as a medium for educational communication is a new phenomenon in the practice of social media utilization. To date, communication

practices in educational contexts tend to occur in group communication, public communication, or interpersonal communication in the classroom (Suryani, 2021). In educational communication via Instagram, the account owner acts as a communicator or teacher, conveying informative and motivational messages related to education to the audience, sourced from credible academic references. Thus, Instagram users act as communicants who receive the educational messages conveyed by the communicator (Simonigar, et al: 2023).

Educational communication is responsible for managing communication processes specifically designed to provide added value to target audiences and encourage behavioral changes among them (Cabyova et al., 2024). These changes encompass cognitive, affective, and conative or psychomotor aspects of community life (Sari & Zukfekar, 2024).

The phenomenon of Instagram use as an educational communication medium in this study is examined using Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach, which focuses on understanding the subjective meaning behind individual social actions. This approach explicates how students interpret the experience of using Instagram as an educational communication space, which is then reflected in their motives for action and communication behavior. From Schutz's perspective, the learning experience of the students from Instagram is the result of a meaning-making process rooted in past experiences (because motive) and goals to achieve in the present and future (in-order-to motive). Therefore, the researcher aimed to deeply uncover the structure of meaning in educational communication experienced by students (Shkurko, 2021).

This understanding of media use motives is strengthened by the Uses and Gratifications theory, which views individuals as active subjects in selecting and using media to meet certain needs, including the need for information, learning, and self-development. Furthermore, the use of Instagram as an educational communication space is also inseparable from convergence culture, where the boundaries between content producers and consumers are increasingly blurred, so students not only act as recipients of educational messages but also as active participants who produce, curate, and redistribute learning content (Jenkins). From a media ecology perspective, Instagram is a media environment that shapes the way students think, interact, and learn, where the characteristics of the medium also influence the communication patterns and educational experiences (Postman, 2000; Strate, 2017). Furthermore, the practice of educational communication through Instagram is also closely related to students' digital literacy levels, the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and critically interpret digital content in a learning context (Livingstone). Thus, the integration of Schutz's phenomenology with communication and media theories builds a comprehensive conceptual framework to understand the motives, communication experiences, and behavior of students in utilizing Instagram as an educational communication medium.



Source: Compiled from various sources

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Instagram Use in Educational Communication

Essentially, every human behavior is driven by a specific motive that grants purpose and direction for social action. Schutz as cited in [Khamis & Welling \(2023\)](#), divides motives into two: because motive, which refers to social actions oriented toward past experiences, and in-order-to motive, which refers to goals to achieve in the present or future. Therefore, students' use of Instagram is driven by certain motives, coming from either past experiences or the goals and expectations they wish to achieve, particularly in meeting information needs related to communication science and other fields of knowledge.

Studies on the use of Instagram in educational contexts have been extensively conducted. However, most of them focused more on learning effectiveness, student perceptions of Instagram-based learning, the use of Instagram for language skills, digital literacy, and the use of informal academic content-sharing media without in-depth theoretical studies (qualitative narrative, perception studies). For example, some studies revealed that Instagram serves as a medium for learning English and certain skills (e.g., writing or speaking) through students' perceptions of the available communication features (perceived educational usage). Therefore, it has not comprehensively revealed the subjective and phenomenological structure of user experience meaning in the context of educational communication and the motives of students' actions in using Instagram as an educational communication medium.

Besides, there has been very limited research that specifically links Schutz's phenomenological approach with the concept of educational communication in the use of Instagram as an educational communication medium, especially among students in Bandung City who have their own social and cultural characteristics on campus. It is, therefore, the use of Schutz's phenomenological approach to uncover the because and in-order-to motive in educational communication practices through the Instagram novel. The existing phenomenological literature is commonly related to the context of self-disclosure experiences or other general behaviors of social media users who do not focus on the dynamics of educational communication theoretically (meaning-making

of educational practices).

Thus, this study presents a novelty by integrating the concept of communication for educational purposes with Alfred Schutz's phenomenological approach to understand the motives, communication experiences, and behavioral changes of students in utilizing Instagram as an educational communication medium. This approach differs from previous studies of social media and education because it views Instagram as an educational tool and a communicative space for students to construct the meaning of their educational experiences. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the motives for using Instagram, the communication experiences, and the behavioral changes among the students based on Alfred Schutz's phenomenological framework.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach used specifically refers to Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology, which suggests understanding the subjective meaning of individual social actions based on life experiences (lifeworld) and the motives behind them. The phenomenological approach is used to explore and understand the meaning behind students' experiences in using Instagram as an educational communication medium (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldaña, 2025). Through this approach, the researcher attempted to uncover the motives, communication experiences, and behavioral changes of students in Bandung City due to their Instagram use for educational purposes, specifically through an analysis of “because motive” and “in-order-to motive” as proposed by Schutz (Flick, 2023).

This research was conducted over one year, throughout 2024, involving 20 informants from various universities in Bandung City. The informants were second- to fifth-semester students who actively used Instagram as a means of educational communication. The inclusion criteria for this study were students who had actively used Instagram for at least the past year, followed or accessed accounts containing educational content (communication, religious, or self-development), and shared and/or consumed educational content through Instagram. The exclusion criteria included students who used Instagram passively without educational interaction, or who only used Instagram for entertainment and commercial purposes. This criterion was established to ensure the depth of the informants' phenomenological experiences corresponding to the research focus (Guest et al., 2024; Sebele-Mpofu, 2024)..

The data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation (Musante & DeWalt, 2025). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which defined students who actively used Instagram to share and receive educational content (Peoples, 2021). To increase data validity and credibility, this study employed method and source triangulation, comparing interview data, observations of Instagram activity, and documentation in posts, captions, and digital interactions of the

informants. This triangulation enabled the researchers to gain a comprehensive and consistent understanding of students' educational communication experiences in the digital space (Carter et al., 2023; Hennink et al., 2020).

Data analysis was conducted through Schutz's phenomenological stages, which included epoche (bracketing) to suspend researcher bias, description of informants' conscious experiences, and interpretation of the meaning of social actions. To strengthen the data interpretation process, this study employed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis model to identify, group, and interpret themes of meaning emerging from the empirical data. In the analysis process, the data were first reduced by selecting significant statements relevant to the experience of using Instagram as an educational communication medium. After being reduced, the data were openly coded to identify units of meaning, which were then grouped into thematic categories based on similarities in meaning and the context of the informants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Knafllic, 2024).

Thematic analysis was conducted through six stages: (1) data familiarization, (2) initial coding, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) compiling thematic narratives connected to Schutz's phenomenological framework. This approach allowed the researcher to link empirical themes to students' motives for action, communication experiences, and behavioral changes in the context of digital educational communication (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Braun et al., 2023). The theme categorization process was carried out iteratively and reflectively, by linking the results of thematic coding to Schutz's phenomenological meaning structure, so that each theme was not only descriptive, but also interpretive in explaining students' motives and social actions (Nowell et al., 2023).

By combining Schutz's phenomenology and Braun–Clarke's thematic analysis, this study reveals the structures of meaning and thematic patterns that shape the students' educational communication practices through Instagram in depth and context. This approach contributes to digital communication studies by integrating the analysis of motives for action and thematic patterns of learning experiences on social media, a practice rarely applied in Instagram-based educational communication research (Coudry & Hepp, 2024).

Based on the research objectives and approaches, the informant criteria were formulated as follows: 1) active students at universities around Bandung City; 2) students in the second to fifth semesters; 3) actively using Instagram for at least the past year; 4) following or accessing Instagram accounts that contain educational content (communication, religious, self-development); 5) having experience consuming, sharing, or re-uploading educational content via Instagram. These criteria are designed to ensure that informants have relevant and in-depth phenomenological experiences related to educational communication practices via Instagram (Guest et al., 2024; Sebele-Mpofu, 2024). The informants' demographics are presented in the

following table:

Table 1. Informants' Demographic Profiles

No.	Code	Gender	Age	Semester	Length of Instagram Use	Educational Activities on Instagram
1	I-01	Female	19	2	> 1 year	Following accounts related to communications education
2	I-02	Male	19	2	> 2 years	Consuming digital Islamic content
3	I-03	Female	20	3	> 3 years	Reposting self-development content in Islam
4	I-04	Male	20	3	> 2 years	Discussing education via the comments column
5	I-05	Female	21	3	> 4 years	Following digital literacy accounts
6	I-06	Female	21	4	> 3 years	Reposting religious educational content
7	I-07	Male	22	4	> 2 years	Consuming Islamic contents
8	I-08	Female	22	4	> 4 years	Uploading light educational content
9	I-09	Male	22	4	> 5 years	Taking online Islamic learning classes via Instagram
10	I-10	Female	22	4	> 5 years	Reposting motivational learning content
11	I-11	Female	20	2	> 2 years	Consuming Islamic content
12	I-12	Female	21	3	> 3 years	Consuming self-development content

13	I-13	Female	21	3	> 4 years	Discussing educational content via DM
14	I-14	Male	22	4	> 5 years	Following the scientific study accounts
15	I-15	Male	23	5	> 4 years	Repost social education content
16	I-16	Female	23	5	> 3 years	Consuming academic literacy content
17	I-17	Female	22	5	> 2 years	Following accounts related to research and methodology
18	I-18	Female	22	5	> 2 years	Reposting content on communication education
19	I-19	Male	21	3	> 5 years	Consuming self-development content
20	I-20	Male	23	5	> 5 years	Re-uploading educational content

Source: Data Processing, 2025

In qualitative research with a phenomenological approach, research ethics is a fundamental aspect to guarantee the rights, dignity, and comfort of informants. Therefore, this study applied the principle of informed consent during the data collection procedure. Before the interviews and observations, each informant was given a verbal and written explanation of the research objectives, focus of the study, the type of data collected, and their role in the research. Informants were allowed to ask questions and consider their voluntary involvement without any coercion. Consent to participate was obtained after the informant expressed their willingness to participate voluntarily. The informant's identity was kept confidential using initials or a code to protect the privacy and security of personal data. Informants were also given the right to discontinue participation at any time during the research process without any consequences. The application of informed consent aligns with the ethical principles of qualitative research, which uphold participant autonomy, data confidentiality, and the researcher's responsibility to manage and present data ethically and responsibly (Hennink et al., 2020; Tracy, 2024).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The use of Instagram as an educational communication medium is influenced by motives rooted in past experiences (because motives) and future goals (in-order-to motives). This finding confirms Alfred Schutz's phenomenological perspective that individual social actions are grounded in a stock of knowledge—a collection of experiences, knowledge, and internalized meanings—and are directed toward the desired goals. From a digital educational communication perspective, this finding suggests that the use of social media in a learning context cannot be understood solely under a technological view but as a meaningful communication practice embedded in students' subjective and social experiences.

### **Because motives: Instagram as a Space for Understanding Academic Experience**

The research findings indicate that Instagram use is a meaningful action derived from previous academic experiences, not simply a response to technology. This is reflected in the statement of informant I-03, who said, *"Usually I look for re-explanations of lecture material on Instagram because the explanations are, sometimes, simpler and more visual,"* and is reinforced by informant I-07, who stated, *"Instagram helps me understand material that in class feels too fast."* In Schutz's framework, Instagram becomes part of the student's lifeworld, interpreted through everyday learning experiences. Critically, this finding indicates a pedagogical gap in formal learning that is then filled by social media as an alternative space for academic meaning.

This finding agrees with previous research showing that students utilize Instagram as a supplementary learning space to reconstruct academic understanding through visualizations and short narratives. Studies by [Alhabash & Ma \(2023\)](#) [Yang et al. \(2025\)](#) found that prior learning experiences shape students' preference for visual content on Instagram as a means of sense-making, particularly when formal learning is perceived as too fast-paced or abstract. It affirms Schutz's argument that past experiences (stock of knowledge) are the primary basis for students' use of media. However, this finding also challenges educational institutions to rethink pedagogical communication design to better align with how students construct meaning in the visual-digital era.

Curiosity drives students to utilize Instagram as an alternative source of information when formal learning is deemed inadequate. Instagram allows students to reinterpret academic material contextually and visually. Informant I-07 stated, *"If I don't understand a theory, I look for a concise version on Instagram, and then I understand the context."* Informant I-08 added, *"Explanations via infographics or reels are easier to understand than reading long modules."* This phenomenon supports the Uses and Gratifications theory, where students actively choose Instagram to fulfill cognitive and informational needs based on previous usage experiences. From Schutz's perspective, this choice shows

subjective rational actions shaped by past experiences (because motives). This analysis suggests that students act as reflective and strategic communication actors, not passive recipients, in the digital learning ecosystem.

This finding is consistent with recent research that confirms that curiosity and cognitive needs are dominant factors in social media use for academic purposes. [Muntaha et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Zhang et al. \(2023\)](#) found that students strategically choose Instagram because its infographic and short video formats allow for faster conceptual understanding than lengthy academic texts. Thus, the curiosity motive in this study is not spontaneous but rooted in previous media use experiences, as explained in Schutz's because motive framework. Critically, this condition demonstrates a shift in knowledge authority from formal institutions to a more fluid and participatory digital space.

A concise and clear educational content grounded with credible sources creates a fast meaning-making process. Students develop the ability to evaluate messages and filter content, as expressed by informant I-11, *"I trust accounts that provide references to books or journals more."* This statement is reinforced by informant I-13, *"If they provide sources, I believe in it more, and I can double-check the information."* The 'because' motive in this context is closely related to the concept of digital literacy (Livingstone), where previous media experiences shape students' competencies in accessing, evaluating, and interpreting digital information. Therefore, students' communication actions are the result of an integration between life experiences and skill development of digital literacy. This finding suggests that digital literacy is a critical capacity that develops through media communication experiences.

Correspondingly, previous research found that students' digital literacy is characterized by their evaluative abilities regarding information sources on social media. According to [Hussain et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Pangrazio & Sefton-Green \(2023\)](#), students trust Instagram content that includes academic references or institutional affiliations. It confirms that prior media experience shapes students' critical capacity, aligning with Livingstone's concept of digital literacy and Schutz's phenomenology of meaning-making based on experience. The implication is that higher education needs to position social media as part of the literacy ecosystem.

Instagram is also interpreted as a space for self-reflection that promotes personal evaluation and the search for identity. In Schutz's phenomenology, this practice of introspection is a form of subjective reflection on past experiences that keep influencing the way people understand themselves and social reality. This is reflected in the experience of informant I-15, who stated, *"Some content makes me rethink how I study and how I view myself as a student."* Informant I-17 added, *"Sometimes the content touches me and makes me aware of my position as a student."* Social media, from the perspective of media ecology ([Postman, 2000](#); [Strate, 2017](#)), functions as a reflective environment that shapes students' interpretation of their personal experiences. Critically, it shows that the digital learning process is not only cognitive but also affective and existential.

This finding corresponds to the previous research that views Instagram as a space for reflection on academic and personal identity. Valkenburg et al. (2023) and Mlambo et al. (2025) advised that educational content on social media encourages self-reflection and student identity formation. Thus, Instagram functions as a symbolic environment that shapes students' understanding of themselves and social reality, as suggested in the perspective of media ecology. These findings strengthen the argument that social media has become a cultural pedagogical space in contemporary higher education.

### **In-Order-to Motives: Educational Orientation and Transmission of Values to the Future**

Meanwhile, future orientation lies in the motive to motivate others through sharing positive content. Students are not merely consumers, but they also produce educational messages. The themes in the in-order-to motives – educational orientation and value transmission to the future – show that the act of sharing content is a goal-oriented social action (projected action). Informant I-02 stated, *"I repost educational content so that my friends also think about learning or changing for the better."* Similarly, informant I-06 stated, *"I want the content I share to be useful, not just entertainment."* This statement demonstrates students' awareness of the impact of their actions on influencing others and encouraging social change. Critically, this practice shows the internalization of educational values that enable students to be agents of communication for change in the digital space.

This finding supports the previous research on the shift in students' roles from consumers to prosumers in digital education. Khamis et al. (2023) and Logan (2023) argue that students consciously produce and disseminate educational content as a social participation and value contribution. This practice reflects projected action, as Schutz defines, communication actions are directed toward future social impact. Therefore, digital educational communication is no longer top-down but participatory.

The motive for acquiring sustainable knowledge also means a future orientation. Instagram is positioned as a flexible and sustainable informal learning space, as expressed by informant I-18, *"Instagram is a bridge to many other sources, so I use it to prepare for the future."* This view aligns with the experience of another informant, I-10, who stated, *"Through Instagram, I can continue to YouTube, articles, or webinars."* In this sense, Jenkins' Convergence Culture theory is relevant to explain how students utilize diverse formats and platforms of knowledge to build academic and professional readiness. The finding indicates that future learning increasingly relies on cross-platform navigation capabilities, not a single source of knowledge.

Consistent with this finding, previous research confirms that Instagram bridges students to a cross-media learning ecosystem. Jenkins (2024) and Erstad & Silseth (2024) suggest that media convergence allows students to integrate Instagram with YouTube, podcasts, academic articles, and webinars as a continuous learning strategy.

It strengthens Instagram's position as part of a participatory and adaptive learning culture.

### **Positive Communication Experiences: Intersubjectivity and Collaborative Learning**

Enjoyable communication experiences emerge when interactions on Instagram result in an equal exchange of meaning and supportive social relationships. The themes coming up in positive communication experiences are rooted in Schutz's concept of intersubjectivity, where meaning is constructed through shared social experiences. Informant I-01 described this experience, "*I often discuss in the comments section, and it turns out that many people share the same thoughts.*" It was confirmed by another informant, I-08, "*Through discussions on Instagram, I have new study partners.*" These discussions and collaborations strengthen a sense of togetherness and build participatory social learning practices, as explained in the Convergence Culture theory. Critically, this interaction demonstrates that digital learning is effective when supported by egalitarian and dialogical social relations.

This finding is consistent with that of previous research that digital social interactions can build collaborative learning. [Greenhow & Chapman \(2023\)](#) and [Zhao et al. \(2024\)](#) found that discussions in social media comment sections create a sense of community, social validation, and meaningful exchange among students. It reinforces Schutz's concept of intersubjectivity, where meaning is constructed through shared social experiences in digital spaces.

### **Negative Communication Experiences: Self-Reflection and Social Adaptation**

On the contrary, unpleasant communication experiences arise from negative responses to content or personal identity. The themes arising regarding self-reflection and social adaptation can be understood within Schutz's phenomenological framework as subjective experiences that influence subsequent adjustments in meaning and action. Informant I-04 revealed, "*I once received a negative comment. I was shocked at first, but then I became more reflective,*" and informant I-14 added, "*The negative comment made me more careful and learned about communication ethics.*" From the perspective of media ecology, this experience demonstrates how the digital media environment shapes students' communication ethics and social resilience. Critically, this negative experience becomes a space for ethical and emotional learning in digital communication. According to [Diefenbach & Anders \(2023\)](#) and [Helsper & Livingstone \(2024\)](#), exposure to negative comments encouraged self-reflection, emotional regulation, and adaptation of communication behavior. In this context, the digital media environment shapes both social interactions and users' psychosocial resilience. Therefore, digital educational communication should facilitate a safe and reflective space so that negative experiences can be interpreted as part of the learning process.

Table 2. Phenomenological Analysis of Instagram Use as an Educational Communication Media

Code	Subtheme	Theme	Meaning
Looking for a re-explanation of lecture material on Instagram	Reconstruction of academic understanding	Instagram as a space for interpreting academic experiences	Instagram is interpreted as an extension of previous learning experiences that helps students rebuild academic meaning based on their knowledge.
The material in class feels too fast	Pedagogical gap	Instagram as a space for interpreting academic experiences	Instagram comes up as a reflective response to the limitations of formal pedagogical communication.
Visual explanations are easier to understand	Visual-digital preferences	Actions based on past experience	Previous learning experiences shape preferences for visual formats as a way of interpreting knowledge.
Looking for a concise version of the theory	Conceptual simplification	Curiosity motive	Media actions are driven by cognitive needs rooted in past learning experiences.
Infographics and reels are more effective than long modules	Efficiency of understanding	Curiosity motive	Instagram was strategically chosen as a means of academic sense-making.
Choosing an account with academic references	Evaluation of information sources	Reflective digital literacy	Media experience shapes the capacity to critically assess the credibility of messages.
Double-checking information from sources	Critical attitude in the media	Reflective digital literacy	Digital literacy is understood as a process of life experience, not only a technical skill.
Content triggers reflection on learning methods	Academic self-reflection	Instagram as a space for self-reflection	Social media serves as a space for existential introspection in students' learning experiences.
Content relevant to student identity	Awareness of academic identity	Instagram as a space for self-reflection	The meaning of learning is not only cognitive but also affective and existential.
Reposting content to motivate others	Sharing educational values	Educational orientation and transmission of values	Communication actions are directed at future social goals (projected action).
Willingness to watch useful content, not entertainment	Internalization of educational values	Actions for the future	Students position themselves as agents of change in the digital space.
Instagram as a bridge to other sources	Continuous learning	Future knowledge orientation	Instagram is interpreted as a gateway platform in the convergent learning ecosystem.

Code	Subtheme	Theme	Meaning
Linking to YouTube, articles, and webinars	Cross-platform navigation	Future knowledge orientation	The future of learning depends on cross-media integration capacity.
Discussion in the comments column	Social exchange of meaning	Intersubjectivity and collaborative learning	Meaning is constructed intersubjectively through shared social experiences.
Finding new peers	Supportive social relations	Positive Communication Experiences	Digital learning is effective when supported by dialogic and egalitarian relationships.
Receiving negative comments	Initial meaning shock	Self-reflection and social adaptation	Negative experiences become reflective moments that shape meaning adjustment.
Be more careful in communicating	Adaptation of digital ethics	Communication interaction in building self-reflection	The digital media environment shapes students' emotional literacy and communication ethics.

Source: Data Processing, 2025

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the use of Instagram as an educational communication medium is not merely a technological practice, but it is a subjectively meaningful social action. The main findings reveal that students' motives for using Instagram are rooted in because motives, which comprise past learning experiences, such as limited understanding in formal classes, the need for visualization of materials, and digital media habits. These motives are then supported by in-order-to motives, which include the goal of increasing understanding, building academic identity, expanding knowledge networks, and providing an educational impact on others. Students also witness different communication experiences, both positive and negative, that encourage self-reflection and lead to changes in communication behavior, such as increased awareness of digital ethics, selectivity in interactions, and adaptation of communication strategies on social media.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Alfred Schutz's phenomenology by demonstrating that the concepts of knowledge stock, because motives, and in-order-to motives are relevant and operational in contemporary digital communication. Instagram is viewed as a digital lifeworld, where students interpret learning experiences, negotiate identities, and project their socio-educational goals. Therefore, this study extends the application of Schutz's phenomenology from face-to-face interactions to the realm of social media, as a space for reflective and goal-oriented social action.

For digital education, this study implies that Instagram can be an alternative learning medium that supports contextual, reflective, and participatory learning. However, its use needs to be accompanied by strengthening digital literacy, emotional

literacy, and communication ethics to prevent the learning experience from becoming bogged down in distractions, conflicting meanings, or counterproductive interactions. For educational institutions and digital education practitioners, this study recommends the use of Instagram as a microlearning tool through short, visual, and contextual content, developing interactive and reflective educational content, and integrating Instagram into the digital campus ecosystem to support formal learning that is more adaptive to student media culture.

This study has several limitations. First, the focus is limited to a specific group of students within a specific context, so the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Second, the qualitative phenomenological approach emphasized the depth of subjective meaning over quantitative measurements of effectiveness or learning impact. Third, this study involved a single platform, Instagram, so it did not address the dynamics of educational communication on other platforms. Therefore, this study recommends further research with a comparative approach between social media platforms and the use of mixed-method designs to combine the depth of meaning and the strength of quantitative data. Further studies can also explore the relationship between digital literacy, engagement levels, and the quality of students' learning experiences in the digital space.

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