

"Ngopi Fancy as a Social Representation" A Phenomenological Study of Ngopi Fancy Posts on Instagram

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Submitted: June 06, 2024, Revised: July 29, 2025, Accepted: July 30, 2025,
Available: July 31, 2025

ABSTRACT:

Keywords:

Fancy Coffee;
Popular Culture;
Phenomenology;
Representation.

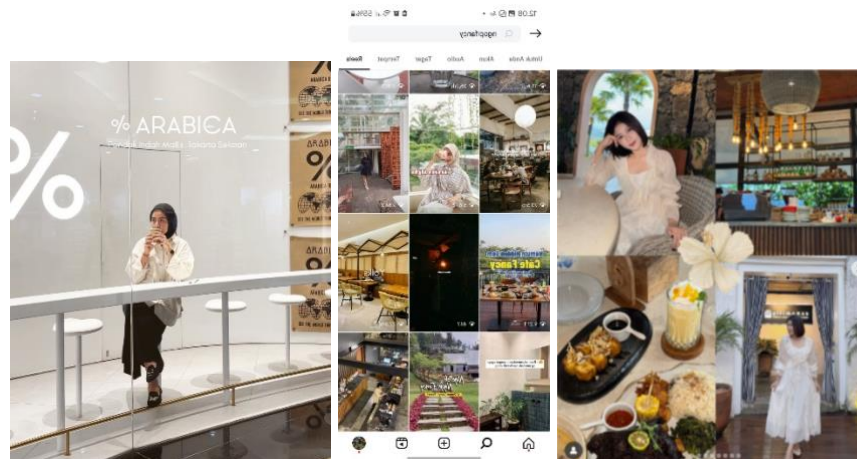
The phenomenon of ngopi fancy coffee among young urban Indonesians has evolved into a social practice encompassing identity, status, and lifestyle representations. This study aims to uncover the subjective meaning of the ngopi fancy coffee experience as part of the construction of social identity shaped through popular culture and digital media. Using a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with five urban middle-class Generation Z participants who are active on social media. The results show that ngopi fancy coffee is interpreted as a form of self-expression, achieving social validation, and a manifestation of aesthetic values in everyday life. This activity functions as a consumption practice and a means of identity performance in the digital space. Social media, especially Instagram, has become the primary medium reinforcing this identity construction by visualizing a modern, aesthetic, and exclusive urban lifestyle. This study concludes that ngopi fancy coffee reflects the relationship between popular culture, symbolic consumption, and digital identity performativity in contemporary urban society. These findings provide a theoretical contribution to the study of cultural communication and identity and a critical reflection on the capitalization of social space in the digital media era.

Introduction

The coffee culture in Indonesia has grown significantly in recent years. People identify with coffee drinking, often called "ngopi" in Indonesia, for informal activities such as discussions or gatherings. Previously, coffee was held in small shops or homes. Recently, "ngopi" has become a lifestyle staple in urban communities, with modern coffee shops, also known as coffeeshops, becoming a new social arena for various groups, especially young people.

In the context of popular culture, "ngopi" is more than just drinking coffee; it has become a cultural practice steeped in symbolic meaning. From the choice of coffee type and brewing method to the location chosen, to the choice of outfit, it can represent identity, social class, and even aesthetic taste. Aesthetically designed coffee shops are often the backdrop for social media posts, leading to a rapid growth in coffee shops to accommodate this phenomenon. According to data from the Indonesian Coffee and Chocolate Entrepreneurs Association (APKCI) reported on MediaIndonesia.com, the number of coffee shops in Indonesia is estimated to reach 10,000, consisting of local and international brands. Coffee consumption in Indonesia is expected to increase to 4.8 million bags, equivalent to 288,000 tons, by the 2024/2025.

This phenomenon is also inseparable from the process of globalization and the influence of foreign cultures, which are then adapted and negotiated in local contexts, such as the emergence of the term "ngopi dulu" (coffee first) to avoid misunderstandings, or the creative coffee-themed content scattered across social media. In the context of social media, the proliferation of posts related to coffee drinking activities in coffee shops has now become a discourse in itself. It presents a paradox that needs to be underscored. On the one hand, there is enthusiasm for the globalization of Indonesian coffee, which indirectly impacts coffee farmers and local coffee shops. On the other hand, there is a commodification of the content, even cultural identity, and a consumptive lifestyle. The role of social media magnifies the shifting meaning of coffee itself. Influencers and celebrities become role models, blurring reality with the virtual world, and creating new standards of aesthetics and a consumptive lifestyle that easily go viral among young people.



Source: Social Media Instagram

The image above is a snapshot of the "ngopi fancy" (fancy coffee) trend, which refers to coffee in coffee shops with a standardized visual aesthetic promoted by influencers and celebrities. As a result, young people visit coffee shops because they often feel compelled to follow what is considered viral to demonstrate their existence. Modern clothing designs and unique lifestyles are also born in these places to enhance their social status. Drinking coffee in these places is now often associated with high social status and a means of channeling prestige; thus, the phenomenon is often heard as "ngopi fancy." However, the stigma attached to this phenomenon and how young people think has not been entirely accepted in Indonesian society. Within modern society, there are certainly reasons inherent in the emergence and popularization of this new culture among young people (Triananda et al., 2021).

Based on this reality, this research aims to examine the phenomenon of ngopi (coffee drinking) as an expression of popular culture in Indonesia and to understand how this activity represents changes in the values, identities, and lifestyles of urban communities in the digital era. Through a social representation approach, it is hoped that it will provide new insights into the relationship between consumption, popular culture, and the construction of meaning in contemporary society's everyday lives.

Method

This research uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological study type. A phenomenological study is a more suitable strategy because the subject of this research digs deeper into the subjective meaning of individuals directly involved in the phenomenon of fancy coffee. (Rahardjo, 2018). This research focuses on the subjective meaning of informants regarding the

phenomenon of fancy coffee, starting from baristas, coffeeshop customers, and coffee content creators. Through in-depth interviews, researchers seek to understand how they experience, interpret, and form the meaning of coffee activities in the context of their personal and social lives. Data collection techniques used in this study are Observation and Interviews. Observation is the systematic observation and recording of observed phenomena. Interviews involve interaction and communication between researchers, informants, and secondary data sources. The next step is data analysis. The data analysis technique uses the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method by constructing interpretations from several key informants of the meaning of fancy coffee (Maulana & Budiyo, 2024).

Result and Discussion

Coffee as a Representation of Urban Identity

The phenomenon of fancy coffee drinking among urban youth can be understood as a powerful form of social identity construction in the digital era. This activity is not simply about drinking coffee; it has evolved into a symbolic practice imbued with social meaning. Within the framework of the social representation theory developed by Serge Moscovici (1973 in Putra et al., 2003), identity reflects existing reality and creates new meanings through social interaction. Social media, particularly Instagram, has become the primary space where these meanings are formed and disseminated. Users represent themselves through visual and narrative posts through consciously constructed, desired identities.

The social identity constructed through fancy coffee drinking activities serves as a means of orienting individuals within their social and material environments. This aligns with Jodelet's (2006) view that social representation is symbolic and serves to control the environment. In this case, young people drink coffee to shape the public's perception of themselves as modern, aesthetic, and sophisticated individuals. This representation helps them gain acceptance within specific communities and strengthens their presence in the digital social space. Thus, a simple activity like drinking coffee carries significant symbolic weight in constructing contemporary identity.

Fancy coffee has also become a symbol of an exclusive lifestyle often displayed by urban youth to gain social recognition within their digital circles (Situmorang & Hayati, 2023). This practice is a strategy to affirm social position through the consumption of a lifestyle displayed to

the public. The aesthetic coffee shops chosen are not simply places to drink coffee, but also visual settings suitable for photographing and sharing. This representation aligns with Debord's (1967) theory of the society of the spectacle, which states that contemporary social reality is shaped by the images and representations consumed by the public (Debord, 1967). In other words, young people now demonstrate who they are through what they display on social media.

In this context, Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory is highly relevant in explaining how individuals "play certain social roles" in public (Azizah, 2023). Azizah emphasizes that young people present themselves with constructed and polished identities through their fancy coffee uploads. They craft visual displays, choose venues, and prepare narratives to maximize their presence on the digital stage. They craft visual displays, choose venues, and prepare narratives to maximize their presence on the digital stage. Impression management (Indainanto & Nasution, 2020) has become a key strategy for gaining recognition and validation from online communities. This validation provides a sense of acceptance and strengthens digital presence as part of today's digital society.

Interviews with middle-class Generation Z members indicate that drinking fancy coffee is a means of self-expression and a pursuit of pleasure. Informants in this study demonstrated a tendency to choose appropriate clothing, attractive settings, and aesthetic angles to capture in photos and then upload to social media. The primary goal is to build a self-image that aligns with their desired social identity. (Hanif, 2011) states that social validation from audiences on social media creates a sense of satisfaction and happiness, further strengthening the practice. Thus, drinking fancy coffee has become a lifestyle habit and a social and emotional ritual.

Sociologically, drinking fancy coffee reflects the construction of identity and class representation in modern urban society. This activity is no longer simply a functional need but a symbol of status, lifestyle, and social existence in the digital world. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and social class (1984), upper-middle-class youth create new spaces and habits that align with their identities. Aesthetic coffee shops become a symbolic arena where they demonstrate their tastes and social status. Thus, fancy coffee drinking manifests a contemporary sociocultural dynamic fraught with identity, class, and consumption meanings.



Source: Informant's Personal Data

The image above is documentation of a source uploaded to the Instagram story feature. It is intended to inform viewers about the uploader's current situation, allowing them to speculate and interpret it. The uploader's deliberate identity ambiguity is a deliberate camouflage designed to construct the uploader's identity reality.

Coffee as a Digital Lifestyle Performance

Informants in this study emphasized the importance of aesthetic visual elements in their coffee drinking experiences. Statements such as "I like hanging out in aesthetic coffee shops because they are very Instagrammable" demonstrate that aesthetics serves as a medium for representing social identity. In the context of phenomenological interpretation, aesthetics is not only about visual preferences but also a symbolic means for constructing an ideal urban identity. Social media portraits serve as a language for conceptualizing a digital social identity image. Another informant mentioned that involvement in trendy coffee shop trends is sometimes driven by peer influence. The statement, "My friends often invite me to new, 'hip' coffee shops, so I tag along so I do not miss out," reflects social pressure and the urge to exist or fit in. Some further stated, "The place is cozy, so I feel at home for a long time, and I can also work while doing it." This demonstrates that coffee shops are physical and hybrid social and professional spaces. The statement, "I like to wear clothes that match the cafe's interior colors so I look good in photos," also illustrates self-performance deliberately constructed as a visual aesthetic.

Referring to Serge Moscovici's theory of Social Representation (1961), we understand that society forms, shares, and negotiates meaning through symbols, language, and everyday practices. Today, coffee shops symbolize a cozy, aesthetic, productive, and digitally connected urban lifestyle. This process of representation involves internalizing social norms and forming a new common sense that drinking coffee is synonymous with social and intellectual activity. In the context of social representation, coffee shops also become spaces for reinterpreting concepts of class, relationships, and self-existence. Individuals do not just drink coffee; they affirm their social identity as creative, productive, or trendy through their choice of venue, clothing style, Instagram captions, and even the frequency of posts. This process reinforces the formation of collective identity in highly visual popular culture.

Digital identity (digital self) is crucial in examining how individuals construct and present themselves through coffee drinking. According to Turkle (1995), individuals in a networked society not only live in the physical world but also simultaneously navigate a digital existence. In this phenomenon, coffee shops become stages for digital identity performance: settings for producing aesthetic, minimalist, and professional images. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Erving Goffman referred to this as impression management, where individuals appear before an audience (followers) with specific roles and scripts. This is reflected in the experiences of participants who design their clothing styles to match the cafe's interior, adjust color filters, or even choose specific seating for aesthetically pleasing photos. Identity becomes something to be worked on, not simply possessed.

Urban Lifestyle Criticism

The young generation's "Ngopi" (fancy coffee) posts are a widespread cultural practice that represents their identity and social status from their perspective. When viewed from a social perspective, as acknowledged by research respondents, this practice is nothing more than a hedonistic lifestyle. Urban lifestyles are often seen as focused solely on seeking instant gratification and temporary satisfaction, which can lead to long-term dissatisfaction.

One of the main criticisms of urban lifestyles is the lack of purpose and meaning in individual lives. Many people become trapped in a cycle of seeking validation without considering long-term goals or deeper values. Research by Ryan & Kasser shows that individuals who focus too much on seeking material pleasure, such as public validation, tend to experience dissatisfaction and a

loss of meaning (Ryan & Kasser, 1993). This can lead to emptiness and unhappiness, even when engaging in seemingly enjoyable activities. menunjukkan bahwa individu yang terlalu fokus pada pencarian kesenangan material dalam hal ini adalah validasi publik cenderung mengalami ketidakpuasan dan kehilangan makna dalam hidup mereka. Hal ini dapat menyebabkan perasaan hampa dan ketidakbahagiaan, meskipun mereka terlibat dalam aktivitas yang tampaknya menyenangkan. Furthermore, a study by Huang & Li (2023) suggests that consumers caught up in pleasure often experience a decline in their quality of life and the meaning they perceive in their daily activities (Huang & Li, 2023).

Another criticism concerns the identity crisis often experienced by individuals who adopt an urban lifestyle. When meeting social expectations and societal norms, individuals often lose their sense of self. Increased self-focus and the pursuit of pleasure can lead to identity confusion and an inability to build meaningful relationships. Research by Stancu (2020) also highlights how individuals' identities can be distorted when they focus too much on pleasure and consumption. (Stancu, 2020). An urban lifestyle can also lead to social isolation. Although enjoyable activities are often enjoyed in groups, excessive pleasure-seeking can lead to shallow relationships and a lack of emotional depth. Societies that focus too much on individual pleasure tend to experience a decline in social and community engagement. Research by Huang & Li (2023) shows that consumers experiencing social isolation are more susceptible to feelings of loneliness and depression (Huang & Li, 2023).

Coclusion

The phenomenon of "ngopi fancy" (coffee) among young urban Indonesians is not simply a beverage consumption activity, but has evolved into a social practice imbued with symbolic meaning. Through the lens of social representation theory (Moscovici, 1961), this activity demonstrates how individuals and groups construct and share the meaning of social identity through symbols, visuals, and narratives communicated in digital spaces (Debord, 1967), where social reality is reduced to images and visual displays consumed by the public. Ngopi is not simply about "enjoying coffee," but also about "how the coffee and the space are seen" on social media, particularly Instagram. In this context, the performance of digital identity is key: every post, fashion style, location choice, and caption is part of an impression management strategy.

Findings from participant interviews confirm that "ngopi fancy" is interpreted as a means of self-expression, the pursuit of visual pleasure, and the attainment of social validation. Popular culture has made this activity increasingly widespread, while simultaneously instilling aesthetic and consumer norms that have become new standards in the social life of the urban middle class. Thus, the phenomenon of ngopi reflects the relationship between identity, social space, and technology, constantly negotiated within contemporary cultural dynamics. The analysis shows that social spaces such as coffee shops have shifted into performative spaces, where social identities and digital existence are produced and maintained. This phenomenon demonstrates how seemingly trivial everyday practices can become complex reflections of today's urban society's social, cultural, and economic dynamics.

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