

SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION DRAMATURGY: MILLENNIAL-Z SOCIAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH BLOK M AFTERNOON STROLL PHENOMENON



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Abstract

The transformation of urban public spaces, particularly the afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M, reflects a shift in consumption patterns from utilitarian to symbolic among Millennials and Gen Z. This study analyzes impression management and social identity performativity of these generations through digital representations of symbolic consumption in Blok M on social media. Employing a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods, the research involves three informants selected based on diverse experiences related to the phenomenon. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations, and analyzed using Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Tajfel-Turner's social identity theory. The findings indicate that content creation is guided by deliberate strategies, such as choosing aesthetic locations, coordinating outfits, and applying visual edits. Motivations for posting range from self-documentation to performing trendiness, with implications for social identity construction. Symbolic consumption is evident in the selection of dining spots and fashion that align with social media trends. The afternoon stroll becomes a lifestyle expression, where social media serves as an extended identity stage. Ultimately, the phenomenon reflects how consumption in urban spaces transforms into performative acts, reinforcing symbolic markers of class and shaping collective youth identity in digitally mediated environments.

Keywords: Dramaturgy, Symbolic consumption, Social identity, Social Media, Millennial-Z generation

INTRODUCTION

The Transformation of Urban Public Spaces in recent years has undergone a significant shift, particularly in strategic areas of Jakarta. In a study conducted by (Jermias and Rahman 2025), the influx of youth utilizing public spaces has triggered social practices such as “hanging out.” This phenomenon is worth examining considering the fundamental changes in how public spaces are utilized. For instance, shopping malls no longer merely serve as economic transaction centers but have transformed into spaces of social and cultural expression for urban communities (Trihanondo 2024).

A concrete manifestation of this phenomenon can be observed in the Blok M area, South Jakarta, which has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2024), in the 1980s Blok M developed rapidly as a shopping hub and a popular hangout for the capital’s youth at that time. The area experienced a decline in visitors, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the launch of the MRT station in 2019 and the area’s rebranding, Blok M has succeeded in attracting more visitors. Once a conventional shopping center, it has now become a viral afternoon stroll destination on social media, illustrating how public space functions as a performative backdrop for the expression of social identity, particularly by Millennials and Gen Z.

The post-pandemic afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M is not merely a recreational activity, but a symbolic consumption practice laden with social and cultural meanings. Activities such as “OOTD in Blok M,” “coffee shop hopping,” and “nighttime culinary tours” have gone viral on social media, indicating that experiences in Blok M are no longer just physical, but digital documented, circulated, and given meaning through social media. This reflects the character of Jakarta’s urban society, shaped by various factors such as culture, social and cultural dynamics, income levels, political conditions, and lifestyle patterns (Amirrudin in Setiawan et al., 2022).

Data from the 2020 Population Census published by the Jakarta Office of Empowerment, Child Protection, and Population Control (2023) shows that out of 10,562,088 Jakarta residents, Millennials and Gen Z dominate the demographic with proportions of 26.66% (2.82 million) and 25.36% (2.68 million), respectively. These two generations are highly attached to digital technology and view social media as a second living space, where they construct, display, and negotiate their social identities.

According to Zis, Effendi, and Roem (2021), Millennials exhibit increased familiarity with digital technologies as communication and media tools, while Gen Z whose born in the digital age is deeply integrated with technology and has been engaged with it from an early age.

The phenomenon of afternoon strolling in Blok M has undergone a significant transformation, reflecting a shift in consumption patterns and the construction of social identity in the digital age. According to a Kompas report (2025), Blok M is now described as "Jakarta's all-purpose destination that never sleeps," indicating the evolution of public spaces from mere centers of economic transactions into arenas of social performativity operating on a 24-hour cycle. The shift from utilitarian to symbolic consumption reflects a fundamental transformation in contemporary society. Symbolic consumption refers to the practice of consumption that emphasizes meanings, signs, and symbols attached to a product or experience rather than its practical utility (Wijaya & Wahyuni 2019). Within Jean Baudrillard's theoretical framework, symbolic consumption is no longer related to real needs or the function of an object but rather to a system of signs and images constructed by society. In the digital era, consumption functions as a tool to construct and maintain social status, where prestige is created through individuals' ability to access, choose, and visually present consumption experiences in aesthetically appealing ways on social media (Firinanda et al., 2023).

Consumption as a symbol of status and prestige in the digital era is constructed through several mechanisms. First, exclusive access is demonstrated through the ability to visit trending or viral places, enjoy experiences in premium locations, and display financial capability to consume in certain venues. Second, digital cultural capital encompasses knowledge of current trends, the ability to produce aesthetic and engaging content, and extensive social networks. Third, social validation is measured by positive responses from digital audiences, such as likes, comments, shares, and recognition from communities as trendsetters or opinion leaders (Skulsuthavong and Wang 2025).

Thus, consumption in the digital era is not merely an individual activity but also a means of reproducing social structures, with social media serving as a new arena to pursue and maintain both social and symbolic capital. Various studies have shown that social media significantly influences consumer behavior, particularly in the tourism and culinary sectors. According to Dewi et al. (2023), social media plays an important role in constructing destination images. Moreover, Rahman et al. (2023), along with Chopra &

Gupta (2020), found that user-generated reviews and recommendations on social media significantly impact consumer choices regarding dining venues.

This pattern of symbolic consumption mediated by social media reflects a fundamental transformation in the construction of contemporary social identity (Wardhana 2024). Unlike in previous eras, social identity today is not only formed through direct interactions and material ownership but also through digital representations of consumption experiences (Fauzan et al. 2024). Social media becomes a performative stage where individuals present their desired identities through curated consumption content. For instance, preferences for certain cafés or trending tourist destinations do not merely reflect personal taste but also aspirations to be associated with particular social groups (Wibowo, Alie, and Elanda 2022). This phenomenon illustrates that consumption in the digital era has become an integral part of identity projects, where the value of an experience increasingly depends on its potential to be communicated and socially validated through digital platforms. This phenomenon is further reinforced by the findings of (Faiza et al. 2025), who revealed how media and advertisements strengthen the link between consumption and identity by creating narratives that owning certain goods can enhance social status, attractiveness, or quality of life. In Blok M, similar narratives are shaped through social media content that associates experiences in the area with a sophisticated and trendy urban lifestyle.

Millennial and Gen Z consumption patterns in the digital era have undergone a significant transformation, with social media becoming the primary ecosystem shaping their purchasing decisions. Based on research by (Aini et al. 2024), platforms such as Instagram (68%) and TikTok (52%) dominate the preferences of younger generations, with influencer recommendations (65%), product reviews (58%), and competitive pricing (52%) being the key factors influencing purchases. Social media serves as a digital public space where individuals not only seek references but also showcase what they consume (Shidiqie, Akbar, and Faristiana 2023). Consumption has become a highly visual form of self-expression, curated and aimed at garnering social recognition in the form of likes, shares, and comments.

Although previous studies have explored the influence of social media on youth lifestyles, identity formation, and consumption behavior, most of them tend to focus either on economic implications, user engagement patterns, or generalized digital trends without paying sufficient attention to the interplay between physical public spaces and their transformation into performative digital stages. For example, research by (Sari et al.

2024) highlighted the role of social media in shaping cultural identity among youth, yet did not elaborate on the symbolic dimensions of physical spaces. Similarly, (Colombo et al. 2023) addressed the impact of digital platforms on consumption patterns but lacked analysis of identity performativity within spatial contexts. To date, there has been limited scholarly attention given to how urban public spaces such as Blok M are repurposed as curated stages for symbolic consumption and digital identity negotiation among Millennials and Gen Z. This research seeks to address that gap by analyzing the afternoon stroll phenomenon not merely as a lifestyle trend, but as a socially meaningful practice in which individuals consciously perform and circulate identities through symbolic acts of consumption embedded within both physical and digital spaces.

This study uses the basic theoretical frameworks of Erving Goffman on the Dramaturgical Theory and Tajfel and Turner on Social Identity Theory. Goffman's Dramaturgical Theory explains that individuals interact with others as if performing on a stage, managing impressions to control how they are perceived. The concept of front stage, back stage, and performance is central to understanding how social media becomes a curated space where users present idealized versions of themselves to a digital audience (Goffman 1959). Meanwhile, Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory emphasizes that a portion of an individual's self-concept is derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. Through processes such as social categorization, in-group identification, and social comparison, individuals construct their social identities in ways that align with group norms and values (Tajfel and Turner 1979). This theory helps explain how young people express affiliation with social groups such as "Jakarta urban youth" or "aesthetic content creators" through symbolic acts of consumption in public spaces like Blok M. In addition, Bourdieu's concept of Symbolic Capital strengthens the analysis by framing consumption as not merely functional but also as a display of taste, status, and social power. Symbolic capital refers to the value derived from recognition, prestige, and legitimacy within a particular social field. In the context of digital culture, visiting viral locations, wearing fashionable outfits, and producing aesthetic content are strategies for acquiring symbolic capital among peers (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2013).

The theories are used in this study to analyze how Millennials and Gen Z curate their identities through digital content during their visits to Blok M, particularly within the afternoon stroll phenomenon. Based on the background above, this study aims to address the following research problem: how do Millennials and Generation Z construct and perform their social identities through digital representations of symbolic

consumption in the context of the afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M? Specifically, this study investigates how impression management is practiced via curated content on social media, and how symbolic consumption in public space becomes a means of group affiliation and social recognition.

Despite various studies on digital identity and youth culture, few have explored how public space like Blok M is transformed into a performative stage that blends physical presence with digital aesthetics. Therefore, by integrating Goffman's dramaturgical theory and Tajfel & Turner's social identity theory, this study offers a novel lens to examine identity construction within urban youth digital cultures. This study offers a novel contribution by integrating Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory with Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory to examine how urban public space specifically Blok M functions as a digitally mediated stage for symbolic consumption among Millennials and Generation Z. Unlike previous research that treats social media content as a reflection of identity, this study positions social media as an active performative arena where individuals construct, display, and negotiate their social identities through curated acts of consumption. The unique analytical lens of this research lies in its emphasis on the intersection between physical public space and digital aesthetics, revealing how everyday activities such as afternoon strolls are transformed into structured social performances aimed at gaining symbolic capital. By conceptualizing Blok M as a form of digital theatre, the study highlights the ways in which identity, prestige, and group affiliation are continuously performed and reproduced in both physical and virtual domains.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in the paradigm of social constructivism and utilizes phenomenological methods to analyze the role of social media in shaping the consumption practices and social identities of Millennials and Generation Z through the afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M. The phenomenological approach was chosen to reveal the essence of participants' subjective experiences as they are directly lived and interpreted (Farid et al. 2018). This study was conducted in the Blok M area, located in South Jakarta, DKI Jakarta Province, which was selected based on its significant transformation from a traditional shopping center to a popular destination for afternoon stroll activities that are widely discussed on social media. Data collection focused on specific points that frequently become social media content, such as cafes,

restaurants, pedestrian paths, and gathering places in Plaza Blok M, Blok M Square, and the surrounding pedestrian areas.

Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling technique, where researchers determine samples based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Lenaini 2021). The study involved 8 informants divided into two main categories: 6 key informants and 2 supporting informants. Key informants consisted of 3 Millennial generation visitors (aged 28-44 years, born 1981-1996) and 3 Generation Z visitors (aged 13-27 years, born 1997-2012), all required to visit Blok M area at least twice monthly for the past 3 months, be active on social media with at least one post related to their Blok M visits, and use hashtags or geotags related to Blok M in their uploads. Supporting informants included 1 business owner/manager who has operated in Blok M area for at least one year and uses social media for marketing strategies, and 1 content creator/influencer with at least 5,000 followers who has created viral content about Blok M. Data collection was conducted through three complementary methods: in-depth interviews using semi-structured format with open-ended questions, participatory observation conducted for three weeks focusing on social media documentation behaviors, and documentation study involving visual evidence collection from both direct observation and social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

This study adapts the phenomenological analysis steps proposed by Colaizzi (Tumangkeng and Maramis 2022), including seven stages: reading all interview transcripts thoroughly, identifying significant statements related to symbolic consumption experiences, formulating meanings from those statements, grouping meanings into major themes, developing thematic descriptions, constructing essential descriptions of the phenomenon, and validating findings with informants. Data analysis involved thematic analysis for interview data, descriptive analysis for observational data, and discourse analysis for social media content. To ensure data credibility, triangulation techniques were employed including source triangulation by comparing information from key informants, supporting informants, and social media content, as well as method triangulation by validating data through different collection techniques. Member checking was conducted by returning to informants to confirm interpretation accuracy and ensure findings reflected their intended meanings.

This study adhered to research ethics principles throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, explaining research objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw

at any time without consequences. To protect participant privacy, anonymity was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and removing identifying information from transcripts and research reports, with personal data kept strictly confidential and accessible only to the research team. Data storage and security measures were implemented through password-protected files on secure devices for digital data and locked cabinets for physical documents, with data retention following institutional guidelines before secure destruction. Participants were fully informed about data storage procedures and their rights regarding personal information throughout the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Informants' Digital Content Curation Practices

The digitalization of consumption experiences particularly in the form of social media posts is not carried out haphazardly by users, but rather through a conscious and deliberate process of selection and curation. All three informants demonstrated a tendency to implement various strategies before and during the sharing of their experiences at Blok M. This curation process was evident in the choice of aesthetically pleasing locations, outfit coordination with the ambiance, capturing images from specific angles, and visual editing before uploading them to social media.

Informant 1 explicitly acknowledged that prior to visiting Blok M, they would search for popular spots through social media. Informant 1 stated:

"I usually look up cafés or restaurants that are trending among young people before going to Blok M. So that when I post the photos or videos, the place looks trendy too."

Similarly, Informant 3 conducted thorough research on Instagram and TikTok, selected an outfit, and ensured their phone was fully charged and equipped with editing apps before heading to the location.

"I stalk Instagram or TikTok to see which places are trending... I also choose an outfit that matches the vibe of the place... I make sure my phone is fully charged and download good editing apps like VSCO."

However, not all informants displayed the same level of curation intensity. Informant 2, for instance, tended to view posting content as a form of personal

documentation rather than a means of constructing a particular image or identity.

"Usually there's no special preparation; I focus more on the moment and who I'm with at the time."

When discussing favorite photo spots, the informants demonstrated a preference for locations imbued with symbolic and aesthetic value. Informant 3, for example, chose a rooftop bar because:

"...Jakarta's cityscape at night looks really cool for content."

In contrast, Informant 2 preferred old bookstores and vintage music shops for their unique and distinct atmosphere, reflecting a tendency to craft an anti-mainstream or niche identity.

Ultimately, when asked whether this curation strategy influenced the self-image they presented on social media, the informants gave varied responses. Informants 1 and 2 were modest and rejected the idea that their activities were meant to shape a specific image. However, Informant 3 openly admitted that content curation did help construct a certain impression in the eyes of the public:

"It does have some effect... the impression people get is that I'm up-to-date with the latest trends and socially active."

Motivations and Purposes Behind Social Media Posting

Interview results revealed that all three informants possessed a relatively conscious awareness albeit to varying degrees of how they wanted to be perceived on social media. Informant 1, for example, emphasized the desire to be seen as someone who is up-to-date and familiar with trendy locations. They stated,

"When my friends see my posts, I want them to know that I'm aware of the places that are currently popular."

Furthermore, Informant 3 expressed that by sharing certain moments, they could showcase their creative and socially active side.

"My posts kind of show that I'm a creative person, I like exploring places, and I'm pretty sociable too."

However, Informant 2 demonstrated a different approach. They stated that the main purpose of posting was for personal documentation rather than for crafting a particular public image.

"For me, it's mostly for documentation, like as a keepsake—not really about how people see me."

Upon deeper inquiry, the selection of spaces or locations shown in the posts also served as symbols of group affiliation. Informant 3, who preferred rooftop bars and night cityscape aesthetics, constructed an identity aligned with an urban-modern demographic. In contrast, Informant 2, who favored music stores or quieter, less mainstream spots, conveyed a more personal and exclusive identity, often deviating from the mainstream.

Consumption Patterns and Location Preferences

Informant 1 explained that both the choice of dining venues and fashion when visiting Blok M were made thoughtfully to align with current trends on social media. They stated,

"When I go to Blok M, I usually wear an aesthetic outfit so it looks good in photos for Instagram. If possible, I also choose food that's unique or currently trending on TikTok."

Informant 2 highlighted how certain locations in Blok M carry symbolic value that signifies cultural status or preferences. They said,

"If you hang out at M Bloc or Titik Temu, people will assume you're into the arts or at least appreciate culture. That's important for self-branding."

Meanwhile, Informant 3 noted that consumption habits such as buying trendy coffee or locally popular fashion brands serve as a form of support for the creative industry. However, they also acknowledged that these consumption choices help them "fit in" with their social circle, who frequently share similar lifestyle content on social media. They remarked,

"To avoid being left behind, you've got to join in. Especially when all your friends are already posting stories about grabbing coffee at those places."

Discussion

Symbolic Consumption as Digital Identity Construction

Interview findings reveal that consumption practices in Blok M have transformed from utilitarian activities into symbolic practices rich with social and cultural meaning. Based on Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959), consumption is understood as part of self-performance, where individuals consciously manage their appearance, behavior, and consumed objects to construct a particular image in social spaces (Theodoridis 2025).

Symbolic consumption in this context refers to consumption practices that emphasize meanings, signs, and symbols attached to products or experiences rather than their practical utility (Małecka, Mitręga, and Pfajfar 2022).

Informant 1 revealed planned curation strategies in consumption representation:

"When I go to Blok M, I usually wear an aesthetic outfit so it looks good in photos for Instagram. If possible, I also choose food that's unique or currently trending on TikTok."

This statement demonstrates how consumption is no longer spontaneous but carefully prepared like an actor preparing for a performance (Wilska, Holkkola, and Tuominen 2023). Every visual element is curated to create specific impressions on digital audiences. From the perspective of Tajfel and Turner (1979) social identity theory, these curation strategies are closely linked to how individuals build and maintain membership in specific social groups, such as digital communities of "South Jakarta youth," "coffee enthusiasts," or "aesthetic lovers". Sociological analysis shows that this phenomenon reflects a fundamental shift in contemporary social identity construction. Unlike previous eras, social identity today is formed not only through direct interactions and material ownership but also through digital representations of consumption experiences. Social media becomes a performative stage where individuals present desired identities through curated consumption content (Smaliukiene, Kocai, and Tamuleviciute 2020).

When Informant 1 expressed hope that their posts would inspire others to visit Blok M, they implicitly demonstrated how social identity is shaped through group recognition

"I hope people who see my post are also interested in stopping by Blok M, especially to try the food."

Validation from digital audiences, such as likes and comments, becomes a symbolic form of social acceptance that reinforces their group identity. In contrast, Informant 2 stated they paid little attention to others' reactions, prioritizing personal memories:

"I post only to keep memories, not to see how people perceive me."

Nevertheless, even this act of sharing contributes to their digital identity, as every decision what to show and what to hide becomes part of the "social script" they perform in the digital arena.

Selecting a rooftop bar with Jakarta's cityscape not only appeals visually but also symbolizes urban sophistication and exclusive access. The ability to access and enjoy elevated city views becomes a symbol of prestige, indicating certain economic and social status. This choice reflects aspirations for an urban-modern identity, aligning with the

social groups they wish to represent. It indicates that curation strategies are not just tools for image-making but also expressions of affiliation with certain subcultures on social media.

Informant 3's acknowledgment shows an explicit awareness of how content curation builds prestige by portraying them as trendy and socially active. Being "up-to-date with the latest trends" becomes a form of cultural capital highly valued within the young digital community. This aligns with Goffman's dramaturgical theory, which asserts that in public spaces including the digital realm we all act as performers trying to maintain a certain impression in front of an audience. Through these strategies, users position themselves within digital subcultures and gain symbolic capital by aligning their curated image with group values.

Through curation strategies, social media users essentially negotiate their identities across broader social spectra. They not only consume physical spaces like Blok M but also produce digital spaces rich with social and symbolic meaning. In this context, curation is not merely a stylistic choice but part of a social process in identity formation and meaning-making in the digital age.

Social Identity Performance on Social Media

In digital spaces, every post is more than just information sharing—it is a form of identity performance. Goffman (1959) argued that individuals actively "present themselves" to create particular impressions, and social media serves as the main stage in this process. Meanwhile, from a Social Identity Theory perspective, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that individuals gain a sense of belonging and self-worth through membership in social groups. In this context, identity performance on social media is not only a means to express affiliation but also to build and maintain prestige (Malecka et al. 2022), within the social hierarchy of the digital community. Thus, identity performance becomes a strategic act to declare group affinity and construct one's social position within intergroup dynamics.

The desire to be perceived as relevant and aligned with prevailing social norms fuels these identity performances. Viewed through a dramaturgical lens, this process mirrors front-stage management, where individuals deliberately script and curate their posts to gain approval from digital audiences. The construction of an identity as a "trendy Jakarta kid" or a "trend explorer" is visually and narratively manifested through outfits, captions, and even timing of uploads. Here, social media shifts from merely reflecting identity to actively producing it.

Importantly, Goffman also emphasized that even unintentional behaviors in front of an audience produce effects. These performative outcomes, as Partington and Cushion (2012) note, emerge regardless of deliberate intent. In digital environments, every image, caption, and aesthetic choice whether purposeful or not contributes to how individuals are perceived and affiliated. This means identity is continuously being constructed through audience interaction, with each post reflecting the norms and values of groups individuals aspire to be part of.

Beyond visuals, the symbolic power of digital signals such as captions, hashtags, geotags, and background music also plays a crucial role. According to Setiawan et al. (2022), these elements carry meanings beyond their functional roles. Hashtags like #JalanJalanSore or #BlokMExperience are not only tools for visibility but also markers of community belonging and lifestyle signaling. They represent coded messages about one's identity, values, and social aspirations. This layering of symbolic meaning amplifies one's presence and recognition in the digital social structure.

This strategy of digital impression management aligns with the findings of Julyanti, Komariah, and Nur Alia Abdullah (2025) who studied personal branding among Gen Z through Jaipong dance. In that context, young people did not use social media as passive archives but as intentional platforms for identity shaping. Participants paid close attention to aesthetic details such as costumes, expressions, backgrounds, and captions to reinforce the image they wanted to project. Their awareness of how self-image is constructed online echoes the performative nature of identity seen in urban consumption settings.

Parallel tendencies emerged in this study's fieldwork. Informants engaging in activities around Blok M demonstrated similar dramaturgical awareness. Their identity performances often revolved around visual and symbolic expressions, constructed momentarily through curated posts. Unlike traditional arts which may lead to deeper internal transformation, identity performances in Blok M emphasize transient aesthetic appeal and social recognizability within digital subcultures.

This process also highlights the mechanism of in-group identification and out-group differentiation. By aligning content with group aesthetics and values, individuals gain validation through likes, comments, and shares. Conversely, they distinguish themselves from those outside the group by emphasizing exclusive tastes, hangout locations, or fashion styles. In this way, lifestyle choices become tools for social differentiation among digitally savvy urban youth.

To strengthen this analysis, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2013) theory of symbolic capital provides a useful framework. In Blok M, symbolic capital is accumulated through curated consumption by selecting aesthetic outfits, visiting photogenic rooftop cafes, or choosing trendy foods for documentation. These elements, although ephemeral, carry social value. Symbolic capital is not merely about tangible possessions, but about one's capacity to access and represent signs that are valued by specific social groups. Informants in this study consciously use Blok M as a space for digital capital accumulation, where each curated post becomes an investment in their social status. In this light, the afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M not only reflects Baudrillard's notion of symbolic consumption, but also Bourdieu's perspective on how media platforms function as markets where identity and prestige are negotiated, traded, and validated.

Blok M as "Digital Theatre"

The conceptualization of Blok M as "digital theatre" reflects the fundamental transformation of urban public spaces in the social media era. In this context, Blok M is not just a physical location; it becomes a strategic "stage backdrop" for social roles. The afternoon stroll experience is no longer private, it is mediated and reproduced as content imbued with identity, status, and social value.

To broaden the scope of interpretation, the Blok M phenomenon can be compared to other digitally performative public spaces such as Citayam Fashion Week (CFW) and the concept of third places in modern hangout culture, such as Starbucks. According to (Syafa'ati and Khusyairi 2023), CFW is a form of youth expression that marks the democratization of public space in Jakarta's SCBD area. Teenagers from Citayam, Depok, and Bogor reappropriated urban spaces to showcase their identities through street fashion, creating digital spectators and forming instant celebrities based on virality. CFW exemplifies a public space reclaimed by marginalized groups as an inclusive performative arena.

Meanwhile, the third place concept, as applied to venues like Starbucks, shows how public spaces serve as alternatives to home and work. Mirsha et al. (2025) note that Starbucks provides a calm and comfortable atmosphere that draws visitors to work, study, or casually converse. These places become strategic settings for social interaction while also representing a particular lifestyle associated with the urban middle class. Like Blok M, Starbucks constructs a form of consumption that is not only functional but also symbolic.

In this context, both CFW and Starbucks function as stages for digitally mediated social identity, though with distinct characteristics. CFW is spontaneous and grassroots-based, Starbucks offers a tranquil space for middle-class professionals, while Blok M represents a more structured, aspirational form of performativity that relies heavily on digital symbolic capital. The area emerges as a lifestyle arena that is curated, trend-oriented, and shaped by visual expectations on social media.

This comparison shows that while all three play a role in shaping youth social identity, Blok M occupies a unique position as a convergence space between consumption, social aspiration, and digital aesthetics. Thus, Blok M can be seen as a new symbol of the urban middle class negotiating their existence through structured and viral visual representation.

CONCLUSION

The afternoon stroll phenomenon in Blok M represents a shift in the meaning of consumption among urban youth from a utilitarian activity of fulfilling needs to a symbolic practice rich in social and cultural meaning. Through Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, consumption is understood as part of self-performance, where individuals consciously manage their appearance, behavior, and the objects they consume to construct a particular image in the social space. Meanwhile, Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory emphasizes that consumption serves as a crucial medium for forming and affirming social membership, both in real-life interactions and through digital representations on social media. Interview findings reveal that the choice of location, clothing style, food and beverages, and activities engaged in while in Blok M are strategically curated to convey specific identities. Both online and offline, consumption becomes a tool for gaining recognition, building social connections, and signaling affiliation with social groups considered relevant or ideal. Social media amplifies this role by providing a stage for users to display their lifestyles, turning consumption into a performance that is not only individual but also collective.

To directly address the research question of how Millennials and Generation Z construct and perform their social identities through digital representations of symbolic consumption in the Blok M afternoon stroll phenomenon, this study reveals three key mechanisms. First, impression management through digital curation operates as a deliberate front-stage performance where informants strategically select aesthetic locations, coordinate outfits with ambiance, and employ specific editing techniques

before sharing content. This process transforms spontaneous consumption into calculated identity work, where every visual element serves as a symbolic resource for constructing desired social personas. Second, symbolic consumption functions as group affiliation markers through strategic selection of venues, fashion choices, and consumption patterns that signal membership in specific social groups, operating as coded messages that facilitate in-group identification while creating out-group differentiation within digital youth subcultures. Third, social validation through digital performativity reveals how likes, comments, and shares become mechanisms of social recognition that reinforce group identity and accumulated symbolic capital, creating a continuous cycle of identity negotiation and refinement.

This study makes significant theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends Goffman's dramaturgical theory by demonstrating how digital platforms create hybrid performance spaces that blur front-stage and back-stage boundaries, enabling curated performances that combine physical presence with digital aesthetics. The research contributes to Social Identity Theory by revealing how symbolic consumption facilitates group membership beyond traditional demographic boundaries, operating through lifestyle-based affiliations that transcend physical proximity. Furthermore, the study introduces the concept of "digital theatre" as an analytical framework for understanding how urban public spaces are transformed into performative stages for identity construction. From a practical standpoint, this research offers valuable insights for urban planners to design spaces with digital performativity in mind, for marketing practitioners to understand symbolic consumption patterns among young consumers, and for social media strategists to develop features supporting authentic identity construction while acknowledging the performative nature of digital self-presentation.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for various stakeholders. Urban planners should integrate social media-friendly design elements in public space development, including adequate lighting and aesthetic backgrounds that facilitate content creation, while developing policies that support the transformation of urban spaces into inclusive performative venues. Business operators in Blok M should design physical spaces with digital documentation in mind, creating Instagrammable installations and developing marketing strategies that encourage user-generated content. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies to examine how digital identity performance evolves over time and explore similar phenomena in other urban contexts to

test the generalizability of the digital theatre concept. Social media literacy programs should be developed to help young people understand the constructed nature of digital identities and promote critical thinking about consumption patterns and their relationship to identity construction. These recommendations aim to harness the positive aspects of digital identity construction while mitigating potential negative consequences, ultimately contributing to healthier urban youth culture and more sustainable consumption practices.

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