THE SEMIOTICS OF SNAPCHAT FILTERS: UNDERSTANDING THEIR INFLUENCE ON USER SELF-PRESENTATION

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Abstract

This research explores the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation. Utilizing the Media Culturalist Perspective and Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory, it investigates how Snapchat filters, as visual signs, construct meaning and shape user self-presentation on the platform. The study employs a qualitative research design, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with Snapchat users and performing a visual semiotic analysis of the filters. Thematic analysis identifies patterns within the data, providing insights into the cultural implications of Snapchat filters. This research fills a significant gap in existing literature by focusing on the cultural impact of these filters, integral to the Snapchat experience. The findings highlight the role of visual elements in social media self-presentation, contributing to broader discussions on digital culture. These qualitative insights reveal how Snapchat filters shape online self-presentation, offering implications for users, the platform, and future research.

Keywords: Semiotics, Snapchat Filters, User Self-Presentation, Media Culturalist Perspective, Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory

Introduction

Snapchat, a widely-used social media platform, has revolutionized user interaction through its unique feature: filters. These filters range from simple color overlays to complex augmented reality transformations and have become a cornerstone of the Snapchat experience. They significantly alter how users communicate and express themselves, enhancing the visual appeal of snaps while playing a crucial role in self-presentation. Filters can change the user's appearance, add context to snaps, or transform an entire snap into a piece of art, thus influencing digital identities and self-perceptions (Cruz, 2019; Tasha R. Dunn, 2018).

Despite their popularity, there is a noticeable lack of academic research focusing specifically on the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation. This study aims to address this gap by examining how users employ Snapchat filters for self-presentation and how these filters, as visual signs, convey meaning within the Snapchat community. The research investigates the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of Snapchat filters, providing a comprehensive understanding of their role in digital identity construction and visual communication dynamics in the digital age.

The study draws from the Media Culturalist Perspective, which emphasizes the role of media in shaping cultural practices and identities. This perspective originated from cultural studies, where scholars began to examine how media texts and practices contribute to constructing cultural meanings (Barker, 2020; Alsaggaf, 2021). The key concepts of this perspective include the active audience, meaning-making, and the negotiation of cultural identities. It posits that audiences actively interpret and negotiate meanings based on their cultural backgrounds and experiences, challenging the notion of passive media consumption (Choi & Sung, 2018).

Additionally, the study employs Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory, which considers how signs generate meaning. According to Saussure, a sign consists of the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or meaning represented by the sign) (Chandler, 2022). This theory emphasizes the constructed nature of visual communication and the persuasive power of visuals in shaping perceptions and understandings. By

analyzing Snapchat filters through this lens, the study aims to understand how these filters function as visual signs within the Snapchat community and how they are used as a form of visual rhetoric in self-presentation contexts.

Integrating these two theoretical perspectives provides a robust framework for examining the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation. The study's findings will contribute to the broader discourse on digital culture and self-presentation, offering new insights into the cultural implications of Snapchat filters. By exploring how users actively engage with filters as cultural resources to negotiate self-presentation and how these filters function as visual signs conveying cultural meanings, the research aims to shed light on the complex dynamics of visual self-presentation on social media platforms like Snapchat.

Literature Review
Media Culturalist Perspective

The Media Culturalist Perspective is a theoretical approach that emphasizes the role of media in shaping cultural practices and identities. This perspective emerged from the field of cultural studies, where scholars began to examine the ways in which media texts and practices contribute to the construction of cultural meanings. (Denis McQuail, 2010) highlights that media play a critical role in the formation of cultural identities and practices by providing a platform for the dissemination and interpretation of cultural symbols and narratives. (Nayeem Showkat, 2015) further asserts that media, through its various forms and channels, influence how individuals perceive and engage with their cultural environments.

Key concepts of the Media Culturalist Perspective include the active audience, meaning-making, and the negotiation of cultural identities. This perspective posits that audiences are not passive consumers of media but active participants who interpret and negotiate meanings based on their cultural backgrounds and experiences (Sommier & Mélodine, 2014; Kellner, 2014). It emphasizes that audiences have agency in creating cultural meanings, challenging the notion of passive media consumption. This active engagement is crucial in understanding how media, such as

Snapchat filters, are used by individuals to construct and express their identities.

This perspective is relevant to the study as it provides a framework for understanding how Snapchat filters, as a form of media, contribute to the construction of cultural meanings and identities. Snapchat filters are not merely tools for visual enhancement; they are cultural artifacts that users engage with to express their identities, emotions, and social affiliations. By examining how users actively engage with these filters to negotiate their self-presentation on the platform, we can gain insights into the broader cultural implications of Snapchat filters. This perspective allows us to explore how users interpret and use these filters as part of their everyday cultural practices, thereby constructing and negotiating their digital identities (Biggio, 2021; Fahmy et al., 2014).

Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory

This theory, attributed to Saussure (1983), considers how signs generate meaning. Key concepts include the signifier (physical form of the sign) and the signified (concept or meaning represented by the sign), highlighting the constructed nature of visual communication. The theory posits that visual element act as signs consisting of signifiers and signifieds. It emphasizes the persuasive power of visuals and their role in shaping perceptions and understandings (Chandler, 2022; Handyside & Ringrose, 2017; P Messaris, 2003).

Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory, attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure (1983), is a foundational theory in the study of signs and symbols. Saussure's theory focuses on the relationship between the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or meaning represented by the sign). This relationship is central to understanding how signs generate meaning. (Chandler, 2022) explains that visual signs, such as images and symbols, consist of signifiers and signifieds, and this relationship is fundamental to the process of meaning-making in visual communication.

Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory posits those visual elements act as signs consisting of signifiers and signifieds. This theory emphasizes the

constructed nature of visual communication and the persuasive power of visuals in shaping perceptions and understandings. Visual signs are not merely reflections of reality but are constructed through cultural and social conventions. This construction process involves the interpretation of visual signs based on cultural codes and contexts, which influence how meaning is generated and understood (Bayer et al., 2016).

This theory is relevant to the study as it provides a framework for understanding how Snapchat filters, as visual elements, communicate specific meanings. Snapchat filters can be seen as visual signs that users employ to convey particular messages or identities. For instance, a filter that adds a crown or halo might signify royalty or purity, while a filter that distorts facial features might signify humor or playfulness. By analyzing how these filters function as signs within the Snapchat community, we can explore how users use them as forms of visual rhetoric in self-presentation contexts. Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory enables a detailed analysis of the meanings associated with Snapchat filters, examining how users construct and convey identities through these visual tools (Lavrence & Cambre, 2023).

Connection of these theories to Snapchat filters and user self-presentation

By integrating the Media Culturalist Perspective and Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory, this study provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for examining the semiotics of Snapchat filters. The Media Culturalist Perspective allows for the examination of how users actively engage with filters as cultural resources to negotiate self-presentation. It highlights the role of media in shaping cultural practices and identities, emphasizing the active role of users in interpreting and using media texts. Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory enables the analysis of how filters function as visual signs made up of signifiers and signifieds that convey cultural meanings, shaping identity construction. Together, these theories facilitate an exploration of the complex dynamics of visual self-presentation on Snapchat, illuminating how users leverage filters' symbolic qualities when presenting digital selves. This integrated framework provides new insights into filters' cultural and semiotic roles in digitally

mediated identity performance, enriching the understanding of the interplay between media technologies, culture, and self-expression.

Previous studies on Snapchat filters

While some research has begun to explore the cultural dimensions of Snapchat filters, there is a lack of studies specifically focusing on the semiotics of filters and their implications for identity performance. For instance, (Alsaggaf, 2021) study in The International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking examined the psychological effects of beautifying filters but did not analyze meanings constructed through signification. Similarly, (Barker, 2020) article in the journal New Media and Society critiqued ideological notions embedded in filters without delving into their symbolic roles as visual rhetorical resources used in self-presentation.

Other studies, such as (Choi & Sung, 2018) research in the Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media, have explored visual self-presentation tactics on Instagram, and (Dumas et al., 2017) article in the Journal of Creative Communications discussed selfies, but filters as identity symbols remain underexamined, especially on predominantly visual platforms like Snapchat, which popularized. For example, (Bayer et al., 2016) highlighted the ephemeral nature of Snapchat interactions and how this temporariness affects the use of filters in everyday communication. However, they did not deeply explore the semiotic implications of these filters in identity construction.

Therefore, while existing literature acknowledges filters' transformative potentials, their socio-cultural roles as signifiers conveying meanings that users strategically leverage for self-expression require deeper investigation through a semiotic lens. This gap underscores the necessity of examining Snapchat filters from both cultural and semiotic perspectives to understand their complex roles in digital self-presentation.

Previous studies on self-presentation in social media

There is a rich body of literature on self-presentation in social media. These studies have examined various aspects of self-presentation, including the construction of digital identities (Sauter, 2013), the

management of online impressions (Rui et al., 2013), and the negotiation of public and private selves. For instance, (Tong et al., 2019) explored how individuals manage their impressions in text-based computer-mediated communication, highlighting the strategic aspects of self-presentation.

However, most of these studies focus on text-based social media platforms, with less attention given to visually-oriented platforms like Snapchat. Moreover, while these studies acknowledge the role of visual elements in self-presentation, they often do not delve into the specific visual tools used for self-presentation, such as Snapchat filters (Utz et al., 2015). For example, (Phua et al., 2017) compared the use of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat for social capital, but did not specifically analyze the visual self-presentation tactics employed on these platforms.

Given the increasing importance of visual communication in social media, it is crucial to examine how users utilize visual tools like Snapchat filters for self-presentation (JW Rettberg, 2017). This study aims to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their implications for identity performance. By focusing on the visual and cultural dimensions of self-presentation, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of digital identity construction in visually-oriented social media environments.

Research Method
Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to capture the nuanced perspectives of Snapchat users regarding their use of filters and the impact on self-presentation. A qualitative approach is particularly suited for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and interpretations, which are essential for understanding the semiotic and cultural implications of Snapchat filters.

The choice of qualitative methods is grounded in the need to explore the subjective meanings and social contexts that quantitative methods might overlook. Qualitative research is advantageous in this context because it provides rich, detailed data that can reveal the complexities of how users engage with Snapchat filters. This approach enables the

researcher to capture the diverse ways in which users perceive and use filters, providing insights into the symbolic and cultural roles these filters play in their digital identities (Grossoehme, 2014).

Potential limitations of this approach include the relatively small sample size, which may not be representative of all Snapchat users. Additionally, the findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to other social media platforms or cultural settings. However, the depth and detail of qualitative data offer valuable insights that can inform future research and theoretical development in the field of digital self-presentation and visual semiotics.

Data collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five Snapchat users aged 20-30 from different cultural backgrounds. The sample was chosen using a convenience sampling method, relying on personal networks and word-of-mouth. This method was selected to ensure a diverse group of participants who could provide a wide range of perspectives on the use of Snapchat filters.

The semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow flexibility in probing deeper into emerging topics while still covering consistent questions across all participants. This format enabled the researcher to explore the participants' experiences and interpretations in detail, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how they use Snapchat filters for self-presentation. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, with each session lasting between 30-40 minutes.

The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' use of Snapchat filters, their reasons for choosing specific filters, and how these filters influence their self-presentation on the platform. Example questions included:

1. How often do you use Snapchat filters when posting a snap?
2. Can you describe the types of Snapchat filters you typically use and why you choose them?
3. How do you think the Snapchat filters you use influence your self-presentation on the platform?

4. Can you give an example of a time when you used a Snapchat filter to convey a specific impression or message about yourself?
5. How do you interpret the meaning of Snapchat filters used by others?
6. Do you believe there is a connection between the Snapchat filters you use and your identity on the platform? If so, can you elaborate?
7. In your opinion, what cultural meanings or messages are associated with certain Snapchat filters?

These questions were designed to cover various aspects of filter use, from frequency and purpose to personal and cultural interpretations, providing a comprehensive view of how Snapchat filters are used for self-presentation.

To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, all interviews were anonymized, and any identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Additionally, the interviewees' consent was obtained for the use of their responses in the research. The researcher also employed representative images, using their own photo modified with filters discussed by the interviewees, to illustrate visual elements without compromising participant anonymity.

By using a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews, this study aims to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation. The methodology ensures a thorough exploration of individual experiences and cultural interpretations, contributing to a richer understanding of digital identity construction in the context of social media.

Research Ethics

In this research, ethical considerations were prioritized to ensure the protection and well-being of participants. The study adhered to principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for participants' autonomy. While participants' names, ages, and countries were included in the study to provide context, these details were used judiciously to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

To maintain confidentiality, identifying information was carefully managed. Participants were assigned pseudonyms or referred to by general identifiers (e.g., User 1, User 2) where necessary to protect their identities. The data were stored securely, accessible only to the researcher, ensuring that personal information was safeguarded throughout the research process.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted. Participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, the procedures involved, their right to withdraw at any time, and how the data would be used. Consent was obtained verbally at the beginning of each Zoom interview session, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications before agreeing to participate.

The participants' autonomy was respected throughout the study. They were given the choice to exclude their photos from the research paper, and this decision was fully respected. Instead of using actual photos of the interviewees, representative images were used in the Signifier section to illustrate the visual elements discussed. The researcher's own photo, modified with the filters mentioned by the participants, was used to provide visual context. This approach ensured that the findings were presented while maintaining the privacy and anonymity of the participants.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. An ethical review was conducted to ensure that the research design, data collection methods, and analysis procedures complied with ethical standards. The research was continuously reviewed and adjusted to address any ethical concerns that arose during the study, ensuring that the participants' rights and well-being were prioritized at all times.

Additionally, all data collected were used solely for the purposes of this study and were not shared with any third parties. The researcher ensured that the participants were aware of their rights and the measures taken to protect their privacy. These steps were essential in fostering trust and cooperation among participants, ultimately contributing to the validity and reliability of the research findings.

By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aimed to protect the participants' confidentiality, respect their autonomy, and ensure that the

research was conducted in an ethically responsible manner. The ethical considerations were integral to the research process, guiding the methodology and ensuring that the participants' rights and well-being were upheld throughout the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis for this study was conducted in two stages: thematic analysis of the interview data and visual semiotic analysis of the Snapchat filters. Each stage was designed to uncover different aspects of how Snapchat filters influence user self-presentation, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within a data set (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This method was chosen for its ability to organize and describe the data in rich detail, providing insights into the commonalities and differences in participants' experiences and perceptions. The following steps were undertaken manually:

- Familiarization with the data: The interview transcripts were read and re-read to gain a deep understanding of the content. Initial ideas and observations were noted during this phase to identify recurring themes and patterns.
- Generating initial codes: The transcripts were systematically worked through to identify significant patterns related to the use and interpretation of Snapchat filters. These patterns were coded, allowing the researcher to categorize and organize the data. For instance, if a participant mentioned using a specific filter to portray a certain image of themselves, this was coded as "use of filter for self-image."
- Searching for themes: The codes were collated, and potential themes were identified. This step involved grouping similar codes together to form overarching themes. For example, several

participants mentioning using filters to portray a certain image of themselves might form a theme around "self-image and filter use."

- Reviewing themes: The themes were reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. This step ensured that the themes accurately reflected the data and were coherent. It involved refining, splitting, combining, or discarding initial themes as necessary to achieve a comprehensive representation of the data.

- Defining and naming themes: Clear definitions and names were developed for each theme. These captured the essence of what each theme was about and what aspect of the data it represented. For example, a theme might be named "expressing emotions through filters" to reflect participants' use of filters to convey their feelings.

- Producing the report: The final step involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts, contextualizing this analysis in relation to the research question and literature. This report provided a detailed and nuanced understanding of how Snapchat filters influence user self-presentation.

2. Visual Semiotic Analysis

The visual semiotic analysis for this study aimed to uncover the underlying symbolic and cultural meanings associated with Snapchat filters. By analyzing the visual elements of these filters, the study sought to understand how they function as signs within the Snapchat community and influence user self-presentation (Chandler, 2022). The following steps were undertaken for the visual semiotic analysis:

- Identify the signs: Each Snapchat filter used by the participants was examined to identify the signs it contained. These signs included various visual elements such as colors, shapes, symbols, and other features that convey meaning. For example, a filter that adds animal ears or funny glasses was identified as a sign that can alter the user's appearance and convey certain playful or humorous meanings.

- Analyze the signifiers and signifieds: For each sign, the signifier (the physical form of the sign) and the signified (the concept or meaning it represents) were analyzed. This step involved exploring the

relationship between the visual elements of the filters and the meanings they conveyed. For instance, animal ears as a signifier might signify playfulness or cuteness, while funny glasses might signify humor or quirkiness. By dissecting these elements, the analysis revealed how the filters are designed to evoke specific reactions or convey particular messages.

- Consider cultural and social contexts: The interpretation of signs can be influenced by cultural and social contexts. These contexts were considered in the analysis of the Snapchat filters, providing a deeper understanding of how cultural background shapes the use and interpretation of filters. For example, certain filters might be more popular in specific regions due to local cultural preferences or trends. The analysis took into account how these cultural contexts affect the meanings users derive from the filters and how they incorporate them into their self-presentation.

- Link to broader themes and theories: The findings from the visual semiotic analysis were linked to the broader themes identified in the thematic analysis and interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks of the Media Culturalist Perspective and Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory. This step involved integrating the insights from both analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Snapchat filters function as visual signs within the Snapchat community and how they influence user self-presentation.

By examining how users interpret and employ these visual signs, the analysis highlighted the symbolic roles of filters in constructing digital identities. For example, filters that enhance beauty might be used to align with societal standards of attractiveness, while filters that add humorous elements might be used to convey a playful or light-hearted persona.

This integrated approach provided a nuanced understanding of the semiotics of Snapchat filters. The visual semiotic analysis revealed not only the intended meanings behind the filters but also how users creatively repurpose them to fit their self-presentation goals. This dual perspective on design and user interaction enriched the overall findings, offering a

comprehensive view of the cultural and semiotic dimensions of Snapchat filters.

Results and Discussion
Interview Findings

The interview findings provide a detailed overview of each participant's responses to the interview questions. This section presents the key themes that emerged from the interviews, supported by direct quotes to illustrate the participants' perspectives on the use of Snapchat filters and their influence on self-presentation.

Table 1. Interview Responses

User	Frequency of Filter Use	Types of Filters Used	Influence on Self-Presentation	Example of Filter Use	Interpretation of Others' Filters	Connection with Identity	Cultural Meanings of Filters
User 1 (Zahra Olia, Age 18, Indonesia)	Every other day	Funny elements like bunny ears or glasses	Makes snaps more entertaining and engaging	Used an alien filter to show excitement for a sci-fi movie	Others are trying to add a fun element to their snaps	Reflects humorous and light-hearted personality	Bunny ears suggest playfulness and humor, glasses suggest intelligence or nerdiness
User 2 (Ahmad Fikri, Age 22, Indonesia)	A few times a month	Vintage or retro look	Helps present a unique and artistic image	Used a black and white filter for a historical monument to give it a timeless feel	Others use filters to enhance their snaps or convey certain moods or themes	Reflects love for vintage aesthetics	Black and white filter suggests a sense of nostalgia or timelessnes s, sepia filter suggests warmth or nostalgia
User 3 (Mozamil, Age 19,	Only on special occasions	Festive elements like balloons	Adds a celebratory mood to snaps	Used a confetti filter on New Year's Eve	Others use filters to enhance the	Reflects tendency to share special moments	Balloons suggest a birthday celebration ,

Afghanistan)		or confetti		to convey celebration	mood or theme of their snaps	and celebrations	snowflakes suggest winter
User 4 - (Mohsin, Age 23, Afghanistan)	Every time a snap is posted	Different filters depending on mood and message	Allows expression of emotions and thoughts in a visual way	Used a rainbow filter when feeling happy to spread positivity	Others use filters to express their emotions or thoughts	Reflects emotions and thoughts at the time of posting the snap	Colorful filters suggest positive emotions like happiness or excitement, black and white filters suggest negative emotions like sadness or nostalgia
User 5 (Maryam, Age 25, Thailand)	Rarely, only when a filter is really interesting or unique	Filters that transform the snap into a piece of art	Adds a creative touch to snaps and makes them stand out	Used a painting filter for a snap of a sunset, making it look like a beautiful piece of art	Others use filters to express their creativity or make their snaps more visually appealing	Reflects creative side	Art filters suggest a love for creativity and aesthetics, funny filters like the face swap filter suggest a sense of humor

The interview findings highlight the diverse ways in which Snapchat users engage with filters and how these filters influence their self-presentation on the platform. The use of direct quotes from the participants adds authenticity and richness to the findings, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural and personal significance of Snapchat filters.

Thematic Analysis Findings

The thematic analysis presents the main themes that emerged from the interviews. These themes provide a summary of the key findings and help

us understand the broader patterns and trends in the data. Direct quotes from participants are included to illustrate these themes and add depth to the analysis. More details provided in table below as follow:

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

No	Theme	Description	Example Quotes
1	Frequency and Purpose of Filter Use	All users mentioned using filters with varying frequency and for different purposes, such as adding funny elements, giving a vintage look, adding a celebratory mood, expressing emotions and thoughts, or adding a creative touch to snaps.	"I love using the bunny ears filter because it makes my snaps look playful and cute." (User 1) "The black and white filter gives my snaps a timeless feel." (User 2) "On New Year's Eve, I used a confetti filter to show that I was celebrating." (User 3)
2	Influence of Filters on Self-Presentation	All users believed that the filters they use influence how they present themselves on Snapchat. This includes making snaps more entertaining, presenting a unique and artistic image, adding a celebratory mood, expressing emotions and thoughts visually, and making snaps stand out.	"Filters are a way for me to visually express how I'm feeling." (User 4) "Art filters show my love for creativity and beauty. They make my snaps stand out." (User 5)

3	Interpretation of Filters	All users provided their interpretations of what different filters might suggest or convey. This includes adding a fun element to snaps, enhancing snaps or conveying certain moods or themes, expressing creativity, or making snaps more visually appealing.	"When I see others using vintage filters, I feel like they are trying to convey nostalgia or a sense of history." (User 3) "Others are trying to add a fun element to their snaps." (User 1)
4	Connection of Filters with Identity	All users believed that the filters they use reflect various aspects of their identity on the platform. This includes reflecting a humorous and light-hearted personality, a love for vintage aesthetics, a tendency to share special moments and celebrations, emotions and thoughts at the time of posting the snap, and a creative side.	"The bunny ears reflect my fun personality." (User 1) "Using a painting filter reflects my creative side." (User 5)
5	Cultural Meanings of Filters	All users provided their interpretations of the cultural meanings or messages associated with certain Snapchat filters. This includes suggesting playfulness and humor, a sense of nostalgia or timelessness, a birthday celebration, positive or	"Bunny ears suggest playfulness and humor; glasses suggest intelligence or nerdiness." (User 1) "Black and white filter suggests a sense of nostalgia or timelessness; sepia filter suggests

		negative emotions, and a love for creativity and aesthetics or a sense of humor.	warmth or nostalgia." (User 2)

The thematic analysis reveals that Snapchat filters serve multiple functions for users, including enhancing visual appeal, expressing emotions, and shaping digital identities. The filters are used strategically to convey specific messages and moods, reflecting the users' personalities and cultural backgrounds. The direct quotes from participants add richness to the analysis, providing insights into the personal and cultural significance of Snapchat filters.

Visual Semiotic Analysis Findings

The visual semiotic analysis presents a detailed overview of the visual semiotic analysis of Snapchat filters used by the participants. This analysis focuses on the types of filters used and their signified meanings, providing insights into the cultural and personal significance of these visual elements.

Table 3. Visual Semiotic Analysis Findings

Users	Sign (Filter)	Signifier	Signified Meanings	Example Quotes
User 1	Funny elements like bunny ears or glasses		Playfulness, humor, intelligence, nerdiness	"I love using the bunny ears filter because it makes my snaps look playful and cute."

User 2	Vintage or retro look like Black and white filter, sepia filter		Nostalgia, timelessness, warmth	"The black and white filter gives my snaps a timeless feel."

User 3	Festive elements like balloons, snowflakes or confetti		Birthday celebration, winter	"On New Year's Eve, I used a confetti filter to show that I was celebrating."

| User 4 | Different filters depending on mood and message like Rainbow filter, black and white filter | | Positive emotions like happiness or excitement, negative emotions like sadness or nostalgia | "I use the rainbow filter when I'm feeling happy because it spreads positivity." |

User 5	Filters that transform the snap into a piece of art like Painting filter, face swap filter		Creativity, aesthetics, sense of humor	"I used a painting filter for a snap of a sunset, and it made it look like a beautiful piece of art."

The visual semiotic analysis findings underscore the multifaceted roles that Snapchat filters play in digital self-presentation. They are tools for enhancing visual appeal, conveying emotions, and expressing cultural identities. By analyzing the signifiers and signifieds of these filters, the study reveals the depth of meaning that users attach to their digital interactions, providing a richer understanding of the cultural and personal significance of Snapchat filters.

These insights contribute to the broader discourse on digital culture and self-presentation, highlighting the complex interplay between visual technology and identity construction. The use of direct quotes from participants adds authenticity to the analysis, offering a window into the lived experiences of Snapchat users and their creative use of filters to navigate and negotiate their online identities.

Note: To uphold participant confidentiality, the images used in table 3 above in the Signifier section do not feature the actual interviewees but are illustrative representations. The decision was made to use the researcher's own picture, applying the filters discussed by each interviewee for visual context. This approach ensures that the research findings are presented in a manner that is respectful of the participants' privacy. The purpose of using these illustrative representations is solely to communicate the visual elements discussed by the interviewees without compromising their anonymity.

Interpretation of the Findings in Relation to the Theories and Literature

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation, which can be interpreted in relation to the Media Culturalist Perspective and Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory. Additionally, these findings contribute to and extend existing literature on digital identity construction and visual self-presentation.

1. Media Culturalist Perspective

The Media Culturalist Perspective emphasizes the role of media in shaping cultural practices and identities. This study found that Snapchat filters are used by participants not just as visual enhancements, but as tools for negotiating and expressing their identities. For instance, User 1 user bunny ears and funny glasses to convey playfulness and humor, reflecting her light-hearted personality. This aligns with the Media Culturalist Perspective, which posits that media users actively interpret and use media content to construct and communicate their identities (Denis McQuail, 2010).

Participants' use of filters to enhance their snaps and convey specific moods or themes illustrates how media can serve as a cultural resource. Ahmad's use of vintage filters to present a unique and artistic image, and user's 3 use of festive filters during special occasions, demonstrate how media practices are embedded in cultural contexts and personal experiences. These findings support the idea that media practices, such as

using Snapchat filters, are culturally situated and reflect broader societal trends and individual identities (Sommier & Mélodine, 2014).

2. Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory

The Visual Communication Theory focuses on how visual elements communicate meaning. Consistent with this theory, the interview responses suggest that Snapchat filters, as visual elements, communicate specific meanings and influence users' perceptions of themselves and others. For instance, all users provided their interpretations of what different filters might suggest or convey, such as playfulness and humor, a sense of nostalgia or timelessness, a birthday celebration, positive or negative emotions, and a love for creativity and aesthetics or a sense of humor. This indicates that Snapchat filters are not just visual enhancements, but also signs that carry specific meanings.

Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory focuses on how signs generate meaning through the relationship between the signifier (the physical form) and the signified (the concept). This study's visual semiotic analysis revealed that Snapchat filters function as signs that carry specific meanings. For example, the bunny ears filter (signifier) conveys playfulness and humor (signified) for user 1, while the black and white filter (signifier) evokes nostalgia and timelessness (signified) for User 2.

By examining the signifiers and signifieds of various filters, the study demonstrates how users employ these visual signs to communicate aspects of their identities and emotions. User's 5 use the rainbow filter to express happiness and the black and white filter to convey sadness highlights how filters are used as visual rhetoric to communicate complex emotional states. This supports Saussure's theory that signs are powerful tools for meaning-making and communication (Chandler, 2022).

Contribution to Existing Literature

The study's findings contribute to existing literature on digital identity construction and visual self-presentation in several ways. Previous studies have explored various aspects of self-presentation on social media platforms, but few have focused specifically on the semiotics of Snapchat

filters. This study fills that gap by providing a detailed analysis of how these filters are used to construct and communicate identities.

The thematic analysis revealed that users employ filters strategically to enhance the visual appeal of their snaps, convey emotions, and reflect their cultural backgrounds. This finding aligns with and extends previous research on visual self-presentation, such as (Bayer et al., 2016), which highlighted the role of visual elements in shaping online interactions. By focusing on the semiotic aspects of filters, this study adds a new dimension to our understanding of visual self-presentation on social media.

Additionally, the study's emphasis on cultural contexts and personal interpretations enriches our understanding of how digital identities are negotiated and expressed through visual media. For example, Maryam's use of art filters to showcase her creative side and Javid's use of festive filters during cultural celebrations illustrate the interplay between individual identity construction and cultural practices. This supports and extends the work of (Phua et al., 2017) on the role of visual elements in social media self-presentation.

Implications of the Findings

The findings from this study have several significant implications for Snapchat users, the platform itself, and future research directions. These implications highlight the importance of understanding the semiotic and cultural roles of Snapchat filters in digital self-presentation and identity construction.

1. Implications for Snapchat Users:

The study reveals that Snapchat filters are not merely decorative tools but play a crucial role in how users present themselves online. Understanding the semiotic meanings of these filters can help users become more aware of the messages they are conveying through their snaps. For instance, user 1 who use playful filters may be seen as fun and humorous, while those like Ahmad who prefer vintage filters may be perceived as nostalgic and artistic. Awareness of these connotations can help users make more deliberate choices in their filter usage to align with their desired self-presentation.

Additionally, the findings suggest that filters can serve as a means of emotional expression. User 5 employ different filters to visually communicate their moods, using the rainbow filter to express happiness or the black and white filter to convey sadness. Recognizing the emotional impact of filters can help users better articulate their feelings and connect with their audience on a deeper level.

2. Implications for Snapchat as a Platform:

For Snapchat, the study highlights the importance of continually expanding and diversifying its range of filters to cater to the varied needs and preferences of its user base. By offering a wide array of filters that cater to different cultural contexts and personal identities, Snapchat can enhance user engagement and satisfaction. The platform could also consider developing educational resources or tutorials to help users understand the semiotic meanings and cultural connotations of different filters, enabling more informed and intentional use.

Furthermore, Snapchat could explore partnerships with cultural organizations or artists to create filters that celebrate cultural diversity and heritage. For example, festive filters that align with local celebrations, like Javid's use of confetti filters during New Year's, can enhance the cultural relevance of the platform and strengthen user loyalty.

3. Implications for Future Research:

The study opens several avenues for future research. One potential area of investigation is the cross-cultural examination of Snapchat filter usage. This study focused on participants from specific cultural backgrounds, but a broader comparative study could reveal how cultural differences influence the interpretation and use of filters. Understanding these differences can provide deeper insights into the role of visual media in global digital culture.

Another area for future research is the longitudinal study of Snapchat filter usage and its evolution over time. As new filters are introduced and cultural trends shift, it would be valuable to examine how users' preferences and interpretations change. This could provide insights into the dynamic nature of digital self-presentation and the ongoing negotiation of identity in social media contexts.

Lastly, future research could explore the psychological effects of Snapchat filter usage on self-esteem and identity perception. While this study touched on the emotional aspects of filter use, a more focused investigation could reveal the long-term impacts of visual self-presentation on users' mental health and well-being.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their influence on user self-presentation. By integrating the Media Culturalist Perspective and Saussurean Visual Semiotic Theory, the research demonstrates how users actively engage with these visual tools to construct and communicate their identities. The findings reveal that Snapchat filters are not merely decorative elements but significant tools for emotional expression and identity negotiation.

The thematic analysis highlighted the diverse ways in which users employ filters to enhance the visual appeal of their snaps, convey specific moods and themes, and reflect their personalities and cultural backgrounds. The visual semiotic analysis further underscored how filters function as signs with specific signifiers and signified meanings, enabling users to navigate and negotiate their online identities in nuanced ways.

The study's findings have several significant implications. For Snapchat users, understanding the semiotic meanings of filters can lead to more intentional and impactful self-presentation. For Snapchat as a platform, there is an opportunity to enhance user engagement by diversifying filter offerings and providing educational resources on the cultural connotations of filters. For researchers, the study opens new avenues for exploring the cultural, psychological, and longitudinal aspects of visual self-presentation on social media.

Overall, this research underscores the multifaceted roles that Snapchat filters play in digital self-presentation and identity construction. It highlights the importance of understanding the semiotic and cultural dimensions of these visual tools, offering new insights into the complex interplay between visual technology, culture, and identity in the digital age.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest several avenues for future research to further explore the semiotics of Snapchat filters and their broader implications for digital self-presentation and identity construction.

- Cross-Cultural Examination: Future research should investigate how Snapchat filter usage varies across different cultural contexts. This study focused on participants from specific cultural backgrounds, but a broader comparative study could reveal how cultural differences influence the interpretation and use of filters. Understanding these differences can provide deeper insights into the role of visual media in global digital culture and how cultural backgrounds shape digital self-presentation.

- Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies on Snapchat filter usage could provide valuable insights into how users' preferences and interpretations evolve over time. As new filters are introduced and cultural trends shift, examining how these changes impact filter usage and self-presentation can enhance our understanding of the dynamic nature of digital identities. Longitudinal research could track the same users over an extended period, revealing patterns and shifts in their filter usage and self-presentation strategies.

- Psychological Effects: Further research should delve into the psychological effects of Snapchat filter usage on self-esteem, body image, and identity perception. While this study touched on the emotional aspects of filter use, a more focused investigation could reveal the long-term impacts of visual self-presentation on users' mental health and well-being. This could involve both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore how filters influence users' perceptions of themselves and their interactions with others.

- User Intentions and Motivations: Exploring the intentions and motivations behind users' choices of specific filters could provide a richer understanding of the strategic use of visual tools for self-presentation. Future studies could investigate why users select particular filters for different contexts or audiences, uncovering the underlying psychological and social drivers. This could involve in-

depth interviews or surveys to gather detailed data on users' thought processes and decision-making criteria.

- Impact of Technological Advances: As Snapchat and other social media platforms continue to innovate with new filter technologies, future research could examine the impact of these advancements on user behavior and self-presentation. For instance, the introduction of augmented reality (AR) filters or machine learning-driven personalization could significantly alter how users engage with visual content. Research could explore how these technological changes influence the semiotics of filters and the ways users construct and communicate their identities.

- Intersectionality and Identity: Future studies should explore how intersectional identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) intersect with the use and interpretation of Snapchat filters. Investigating how different aspects of users' identities influence their filter choices and self-presentation strategies could provide nuanced insights into the complex ways visual media interact with multifaceted identities. This could involve analyzing the experiences of diverse user groups and considering the role of social and cultural contexts.

- Platform Comparisons: Comparative studies between Snapchat and other visually-oriented social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, could reveal unique and shared patterns in filter usage and self-presentation. Understanding how different platforms' features and user interfaces influence visual self-presentation can provide a broader perspective on the role of digital media in identity construction. This could involve cross-platform analyses and interviews with users who engage with multiple platforms.

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