



Youth-Oriented Digital Media Visibility on Instagram: A Multimodal Qualitative Analysis of USSFeeds

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Abstract—Social media platforms have reshaped how visibility is produced, sustained, and contested within contemporary digital media environments. Despite extensive research on social media branding and engagement, limited attention has been given to how youth-oriented digital media actors strategically construct visibility as an ongoing communicative process rather than mere exposure. This study aims to examine how a youth-oriented digital media account builds and maintains visibility on Instagram through everyday visual, narrative, and participatory practices. Employing a qualitative content analysis, this research analyzes selected Instagram posts published by USSFeeds between March and September 2025. The analysis focuses on three analytical dimensions: visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation. The findings indicate that visual coherence operates as a semiotic anchor that stabilizes media identity, while narrative framing grounded in youth culture enhances cultural resonance and interpretive alignment. The audience participation amplifies visibility by enabling relational circulation of meaning within platform-mediated and algorithmically structured environments. This study contributes to media and communication scholarship by conceptualizing digital visibility as a relational and processual phenomenon shaped by discourse, participation, and platform logics, thereby extending existing understandings beyond linear models of attention and reach.

Keywords: Digital Media; Instagram; Narrative Framing; Participatory; USSFeeds

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid digital transformation of communication has fundamentally altered how meaning, visibility, and identity are produced and circulated in contemporary media environments (Vit et al., n.d.). Social media platforms no longer function merely as channels for message dissemination but operate as interactive spaces in which communication becomes dialogic, participatory, and algorithmically mediated (Velazco et al., 2024). In these environments, audiences are not passive recipients of information but active participants who interpret, negotiate, and co-create meanings through everyday media practices (Bostrom et al., 2025). As a result, visibility and recognition emerge not simply from repeated exposure but from sustained interaction within complex socio-technical systems.

Among social media platforms, Instagram occupies a particularly influential position due to its emphasis on visual communication, narrative immediacy, and participatory affordances. The platform integrates images, short videos, captions, and interactive features into a multimodal environment where symbolic representation and audience engagement intersect (Dhiman & Singh, 2025). Instagram thus functions as a cultural media space in which identity, discourse, and algorithmic visibility are continuously negotiated (Khalil et al., 2025). Rather than operating as a neutral medium, the platform actively shapes which content becomes visible, relevant, and socially validated through engagement-driven algorithms.

In Indonesia, Instagram plays a central role in the everyday media consumption practices of young audiences. With more than 100 million active users, the platform is deeply embedded in the communicative routines of Millennials and Generation Z (Kemp, 2025). These demographic groups are characterized by high levels of digital literacy, selective attention, and a strong preference for content that resonates culturally and aesthetically with their lived experiences (Sarwar et al., 2025). Consequently, visibility in this environment is closely tied to the ability of media actors to align visual aesthetics, narrative tone, and participatory practices with the cultural sensibilities of youth audiences. For digital media platforms and lifestyle-oriented content producers, Instagram becomes a strategic site where media identity and audience recognition are constructed relationally rather than imposed unilaterally (Jegham et al., 2025). In this context, Instagram can be understood as a digital platform whose algorithmic visibility mechanisms shape how content is circulated, prioritized, and recognized through user interaction and engagement patterns.

USSFeeds, a youth-oriented digital media platform operating under USS Networks, represents a prominent example of this contemporary media phenomenon. Originally emerging from lifestyle and pop culture content, USSFeeds has developed into one of the most influential digital media accounts among Indonesian youth, amassing more than two million followers by 2025 (Putra & KN, 2024). Through humor, socio-cultural commentary, and visually consistent content, USSFeeds positions itself not only as a content distributor but as a participant in youth-oriented digital discourse (Chen et al., 2024). Its sustained visibility on Instagram reflects an ability to navigate visual symbolism, cultural resonance, and participatory engagement within an algorithm-driven media environment.

Despite the growing volume of research on social media communication, much of the existing scholarship continues to focus on commercial branding, corporate marketing strategies, or performance-driven metrics such as reach and engagement (Fei et al., 2025). Comparatively less attention has been given to digital media actors that cultivate recognition and visibility through participatory storytelling, cultural alignment, and everyday interaction rather than overt promotional campaigns (Matschke et al., 2026). Moreover, foundational frameworks such as Aaker's brand awareness mode (Aaker, 2014) which conceptualizes awareness as a hierarchical cognitive process of recognition,



recall, and top-of-mind presence, were developed in pre-digital contexts where communication was largely linear and exposure-based.

In participatory and algorithmic media environments, however, awareness operates under different conditions. Visibility is shaped not only by message frequency but by audience interaction, platform affordances, and cultural relevance. Recognition becomes intertwined with visual familiarity, narrative authenticity, and social validation within networked publics (France et al., 2025) This shift suggests the need to reinterpret classical awareness frameworks through a media and communication perspective that accounts for participation, discourse, and algorithmic mediation rather than treating awareness solely as a marketing outcome.

Existing studies on Instagram-based communication have predominantly employed quantitative metrics, experimental designs, or computational analytics to measure visibility, engagement, and brand performance (Fei et al., 2025). While such approaches are valuable for identifying patterns at scale, they often abstract visibility into numerical indicators and overlook the communicative processes through which meaning, recognition, and cultural relevance are produced in everyday media practices (Bulmer et al., 2024). In contrast, qualitative content analysis enables a deeper examination of how visual symbols, narrative structures, and participatory interactions operate together as meaning-making mechanisms within platform-mediated environments (Gardam et al., 2025). By adopting a qualitative and interpretive approach, this study offers an alternative analytical pathway that complements metric-driven research and foregrounds visibility as a communicative, relational, and culturally embedded process rather than a purely instrumental outcome (Muhammad et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to analyze how youth-oriented digital media visibility on Instagram is constructed and sustained through the interaction of visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation, using USSFeeds as an empirical case. The study seeks to contribute to media and communication scholarship in two key ways. Empirically, it provides insight into the everyday practices through which youth-oriented digital media actors negotiate recognition and relevance within algorithmically mediated platforms (Gurung et al., 2025). Theoretically, it extends existing awareness and visibility frameworks by demonstrating that recognition in digital environments emerges from relational, processual, and participatory dynamics rather than linear exposure or message repetition alone (Kozinets, 2022). By integrating discourse-oriented analysis with platform-aware perspectives, this research advances a communication-centered understanding of visibility in contemporary digital media ecosystems (Rogers, 2021).

Responding to this gap, the present study examines how USSFeeds constructs and sustains brand awareness on Instagram by integrating visual symbolism, narrative framing, and participatory practices. Drawing on Aaker’s (Aaker, 1991) brand awareness model as an interpretive reference and participatory communication perspectives, this study repositions awareness as a relational and processual phenomenon embedded in digital media practices. Through qualitative content analysis of selected Instagram posts, the study seeks to contribute to communication and media studies by demonstrating how awareness emerges from the co-creation of meaning between media actors, audiences, and platform infrastructures in contemporary digital culture.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine how a youth-oriented digital media actor constructs media discourse, cultural meaning, and visibility on Instagram. The research focuses on Instagram as a digital media space in which visual representation, narrative framing, and audience participation interact to shape media practices among young audiences.

The object of analysis is the official Instagram account of USSFeeds, a youth-oriented digital media platform operating in Indonesia. Data were collected through purposive sampling of Instagram posts published between March and September 2025. The selection of posts was guided by their relevance to visual symbolism, narrative content related to youth culture, and participatory features that encourage audience interaction, such as comments, reposts, and interactive formats. Qualitative content analysis was applied to interpret recurring patterns of meaning, media identity, and participatory circulation within the selected posts. Rather than treating Instagram as a promotional or branding platform, the analysis conceptualizes it as a media environment where discourse, visibility, and engagement are continuously negotiated. This interpretive approach allows the study to explore contemporary digital media practices beyond traditional newsroom settings. Table 1 summarizes the research design, data sources, and analytical framework of the study.

Table 1. Research Method Overview

Component	Description
Research approach	Qualitative research with an interpretive orientation, focusing on digital media discourse and participatory communication
Object of analysis	Official Instagram account of USSFeeds, a youth-oriented digital media platform in Indonesia
Platform context	Instagram as a visual, narrative, and participatory digital media environment
Data source	Instagram posts published on the USSFeeds account
Time frame	March – September 2025



Component	Description
Sampling technique	Purposive sampling
Selection criteria	(1) Visual symbolism and aesthetic consistency, (2) narrative framing related to youth culture and social commentary, (3) participatory features enabling audience interaction
Unit of analysis	Individual Instagram posts, including visual content, captions, and visible interaction features
Analytical technique	Qualitative content analysis
Analytical dimensions	(1) Visual discourse, (2) Narrative framing, (3) Participatory circulation
Conceptual orientation	Media discourse and participatory communication perspectives
Research focus	How media discourse, cultural meaning, and visibility are constructed through visual, narrative, and participatory practices on Instagram

This study follows a systematic qualitative research process consisting of three interrelated stages: data selection, analytical categorization, and interpretive synthesis. *First*, data were collected through purposive sampling of Instagram posts published by USSFeeds between March and September 2025, with selection criteria based on visual symbolism, narrative relevance to youth culture, and participatory affordances, consistent with qualitative content analysis procedures for social media research (Gardam et al., 2025). *Second*, the selected posts were coded and analyzed across three analytical dimensions visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation to identify recurring patterns of meaning and media practices, following discourse-oriented and participatory communication approaches (Muhammad et al., 2024). *Third*, the findings were interpreted in relation to platform dynamics and algorithmic visibility mechanisms, acknowledging that engagement-driven algorithms shape content circulation through interaction signals rather than deterministic control (Kozinets, 2022). Through these stages, qualitative content analysis functions not merely as a descriptive technique but as an interpretive solution that enables the study to examine how visibility emerges from the interaction between symbolic representation, audience participation, and platform-mediated infrastructures.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the qualitative content analysis by examining how USSFeeds constructs media discourse and visibility on Instagram. The results are organized around three analytical dimensions derived from the research framework: visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation. Together, these dimensions illustrate how media identity, cultural meaning, and audience engagement are produced and negotiated within a youth-oriented digital media environment.

The qualitative content analysis applied in this study demonstrates how visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation operate as interconnected mechanisms in producing digital media visibility on Instagram. Through systematic coding of selected USSFeeds posts across the three analytical dimensions, the analysis reveals that visual coherence functions as a semiotic anchor that facilitates rapid recognition within algorithmically curated feeds. Narrative framing grounded in youth culture further stabilizes interpretive alignment by embedding content within shared cultural references and everyday experiences. Participatory circulation, manifested through comments, reposts, and interactive responses, extends visibility by enabling relational meaning-making and sustained engagement. These findings indicate that the applied qualitative method effectively captures visibility not as an outcome of isolated exposure but as a process emerging from patterned interaction between symbolic representation, audience participation, and platform-mediated circulation.

The robustness of the analytical framework is reflected in the consistency of patterns identified across multiple posts and interaction contexts, indicating that the qualitative content analysis provides reliable interpretive insight into youth-oriented digital media practices. Compared with previous studies that emphasize engagement metrics or computational analytics as primary indicators of visibility (Khalil et al., 2025), the findings of this study demonstrate that recognition and relevance are sustained through communicative processes rather than numerical performance alone. This aligns with research highlighting the importance of visual symbolism and participatory meaning-making in social media environments (Gurung et al., 2025), while extending these perspectives by showing how visual, narrative, and participatory elements function jointly within a single media actor's everyday practices. Thus, the results support the argument that qualitative, discourse-oriented analysis offers a complementary and necessary approach for understanding digital visibility in platform-driven media ecosystems.

3.1 Visual Discourse and the Construction of Media Identity

The analysis reveals that USSFeeds employs a highly consistent visual discourse to construct a recognizable media identity on Instagram. Visual elements such as color palettes, typography, meme-based imagery, and recurring graphic layouts function as symbolic markers that enable immediate recognition among audiences (Naeem et al., 2025). Rather than prioritizing photographic realism or journalistic objectivity, USSFeeds adopts a stylized and playful visual language that resonates with youth-oriented digital culture.

This visual consistency contributes to the formation of familiarity and recognition not as a result of repetitive exposure alone but through the accumulation of symbolic cues that audiences learn to associate with the platform over



time. Visual discourse thus operates as a semiotic system through which media identity is stabilized and reproduced within a highly competitive and algorithm-driven environment. In this sense, visibility emerges from the alignment between aesthetic coherence and platform-specific affordances that privilege visually distinctive content (Eka Putra & Afrilian, 2025)

Beyond functioning as a marker of recognition, visual discourse also shapes how meaning is framed and interpreted by audiences. The stylized visual language employed by USSFeeds does not merely attract attention but guides users' interpretive expectations regarding tone, intent, and cultural positioning. Meme-based imagery, simplified iconography, and exaggerated visual expressions invite audiences to engage with content in a light, informal, and culturally embedded manner. This framing positions USSFeeds as a media actor that communicates from within youth culture rather than adopting a distant or institutional stance, reinforcing its identity as a relatable and participatory digital media platform (Sani, 2025).

Visual discourse further interacts with narrative and participatory elements by establishing a visual entry point that precedes textual interpretation and audience interaction. In the Instagram environment, where users encounter content primarily through rapid visual scanning, visual cues function as the first layer of engagement that determines whether a post will be paused, read, or interacted with (Rogers, 2021). The recognizable visual identity of USSFeeds thus facilitates smoother transitions from visual exposure to narrative consumption and participatory response. This process illustrates how visual discourse operates not in isolation, but as an infrastructural component that enables subsequent layers of meaning-making and interaction within platform-mediated communication.

From a platform-oriented perspective, the role of visual discourse must also be understood in relation to algorithmic visibility mechanisms. Instagram's feed system privileges content that generates early engagement signals, such as likes, comments, and shares, which are often triggered by immediate visual appeal (Gurung et al., 2025). USSFeeds' consistent and distinctive visual patterns increase the likelihood of rapid audience recognition and engagement, thereby enhancing content circulation within algorithmically curated feeds. In this context, visual discourse functions as a strategic resource that aligns symbolic identity with platform logics, allowing youth-oriented digital media to negotiate visibility through the combined effects of aesthetic coherence, audience familiarity, and algorithmic amplification.

visual discourse contributes directly to algorithmic visibility by shaping how content is evaluated and circulated within Instagram's engagement-driven system. Algorithmic ranking mechanisms tend to prioritize posts that attract rapid attention and early interaction, both of which are strongly influenced by visual salience and recognizability (Eka Putra & Afrilian, 2025). The consistent visual patterns employed by USSFeeds increase the probability that content is immediately identified and engaged with by users, thereby generating signals that support further algorithmic distribution. As a result, visibility is not solely the outcome of audience preference or content frequency, but emerges from the interaction between visual semiotic coherence, user recognition, and platform-level algorithmic selection processes.

3.2 Narrative Framing of Youth Culture and Social Commentary

Beyond visual aesthetics, USSFeeds constructs meaning through narrative framing that draws heavily on youth culture, humor, and socio-cultural commentary. Captions frequently employ informal language, satire, and locally resonant expressions to frame everyday issues, popular trends, and social phenomena in ways that are accessible and relatable to young audiences (Maza et al., 2024). This narrative style positions USSFeeds not as an authoritative news source but as a cultural participant that speaks from within youth discourse rather than about it.

The findings indicate that narrative framing plays a crucial role in shaping how content is interpreted and circulated. Rather than delivering fixed messages, USSFeeds' narratives invite interpretation, recognition, and shared understanding among followers. This aligns with participatory communication perspectives that view meaning as co-constructed through discourse rather than transmitted unidirectionally (Muhammad et al., 2024) As a result, recognition is closely tied to narrative authenticity and cultural resonance, reinforcing visibility through shared interpretive frameworks rather than overt informational persuasion.

Narrative framing also functions as a mechanism for situating media content within the everyday experiences and sensibilities of youth audiences (Zhang, 2025). By referencing familiar social situations, popular culture, and locally grounded expressions, USSFeeds embeds its narratives within shared cultural contexts that audiences can easily recognize and relate to. This contextualization reduces interpretive distance and encourages audiences to engage with content not only as information but as part of their lived social reality. In this way, narrative framing enhances affective proximity and strengthens the relational bond between the media platform and its followers, supporting sustained attention and recognition. Narrative framing shapes the circulation of content by enabling stories to remain open-ended and dialogic. Captions that employ humor, irony, or implicit critique often leave interpretive space for audiences to contribute additional meanings through comments and interactions (Zaklama, 2025). This openness transforms narrative content into a catalyst for discussion rather than a closed statement, allowing visibility to be extended through participatory engagement. As narratives are reinterpreted, commented on, and shared, their social relevance is continuously renewed, reinforcing the processual nature of visibility in participatory and platform-mediated media environments.



3.3 Participatory Circulation and the Negotiation of Visibility

A central finding of the study concerns the role of audience participation in sustaining the circulation and visibility of USSFeeds’ content (Latuputty et al., n.d.). Interaction features such as comments, reposts, and engagement-driven responses are not merely indicators of popularity but function as mechanisms through which media discourse is extended and reinterpreted. User comments often add contextual meanings, humor, or critical reflections that amplify the original content and contribute to its continued circulation within networked publics.

This participatory circulation demonstrates that visibility on Instagram is not solely produced by the media actor but negotiated through ongoing interaction between content, audiences, and platform algorithms. Engagement becomes both a social and technical process, shaping which posts gain prominence and how they are framed within users’ feeds. In this environment, recognition is sustained through relational dynamics rather than linear exposure, reflecting a shift from traditional awareness models toward participatory and algorithmically mediated forms of visibility (Foschvillaronga et al., 2025).

The findings of this study demonstrate that visibility and recognition on Instagram are not produced through linear exposure or promotional intensity but emerge from the interaction between visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation. Consistent with participatory communication perspectives, media discourse in digital environments is constituted through interaction rather than transmission (Alvian & Sumarlan, 2025). USSFeeds’ sustained presence on Instagram thus reflects a processual form of awareness that is continuously negotiated among media actors, audiences, and platform infrastructures.

The analysis of visual discourse shows that recognition is closely tied to symbolic coherence rather than informational completeness. Consistent visual elements such as stylized layouts, meme-based imagery, and recurring graphic patterns function as semiotic anchors that allow audiences to identify content rapidly within dense and competitive media feeds. This finding supports previous studies that conceptualize Instagram as a platform where aesthetic familiarity and visual distinction play a central role in shaping visibility (Bulmer et al., 2024). Visual discourse, therefore, operates not as a decorative layer but as a communicative resource that stabilizes media identity under algorithmic conditions.

Narrative framing further extends this process by situating content within culturally resonant interpretive frameworks. The use of humor, informal language, and youth-oriented expressions positions USSFeeds as a cultural participant rather than an external commentator (Kiss et al., 2025). This narrative alignment enables audiences to recognize content as meaningful and relatable, reinforcing visibility through shared cultural references. Such findings align with scholarship emphasizing that meaning in participatory media environments is co-constructed through discourse and narrative familiarity rather than imposed through authoritative messaging (Gardam et al., 2025)

Audience participation plays a crucial role in sustaining the circulation and visibility of content. Interaction features such as comments, reposts, and engagement-driven responses do not merely amplify posts but actively reshape their meaning and social relevance. Participation functions simultaneously as a social practice and a platform-mediated mechanism influencing algorithmic visibility (Kozinets, 2022). In this environment, awareness is maintained through relational dynamics and ongoing interaction, challenging traditional models that conceptualize awareness as a unidirectional cognitive outcome.

To clarify the interpretive relationships between empirical patterns and their broader implications, Table 2 synthesizes the key findings of this study by linking analytical dimensions to their conceptual meanings and theoretical contributions.

Table 2. Interpretive Synthesis of Digital Media Practices and Visibility

Analytical dimension	Empirical pattern (Results)	Interpretive meaning (Discussion)	Theoretical implication
Visual discourse	Consistent use of stylized visuals, meme-based imagery, and recognizable graphic layouts	Visual coherence operates as a semiotic anchor that enables rapid recognition and stabilizes media identity	Visibility is shaped by symbolic familiarity rather than repetitive exposure
Narrative framing	Informal language, humor, and culturally resonant storytelling	Meaning is co-constructed through narrative alignment with youth cultural experiences	Awareness emerges from cultural resonance and shared interpretive frames
Participatory circulation	Audience comments, reposts, and interactive engagement	Visibility is negotiated relationally through interaction between media actors, audiences, and platform algorithms	Awareness functions as a relational and processual phenomenon
Platform dynamics	Engagement-driven circulation within Instagram feeds	Algorithmic visibility amplifies participatory practices rather than controlling them unilaterally	Classical awareness models require reinterpretation in platform-mediated environments



As shown in Table 2, visibility and awareness in digital media environments cannot be reduced to exposure-based metrics. Instead, they emerge from the interplay of symbolic coherence, cultural narration, and participatory interaction within platform-specific infrastructures. These findings invite a reinterpretation of classical brand awareness frameworks, particularly Aaker's hierarchical model of recognition and recall (Afacan et al., 2024). While such models remain useful for conceptualizing familiarity, they require adaptation to account for participatory and algorithmic conditions in which recognition is inseparable from interaction and cultural resonance.

From a media and journalism studies perspective, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the transformation of media practices beyond traditional newsroom settings. USSFeeds exemplifies how youth-oriented digital media actors adopt journalistic sensibilities such as agenda framing and cultural commentary while operating within participatory and platform-driven ecosystems. Instagram thus functions as a hybrid media space where discourse, visibility, and engagement are continuously negotiated rather than institutionally controlled

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that youth-oriented digital media visibility on Instagram is not produced through linear exposure or promotional intensity but emerges from a relational and processual interaction between visual discourse, narrative framing, and participatory circulation within platform-mediated environments. The findings show that visual coherence operates as a semiotic anchor that stabilizes media identity and facilitates rapid recognition in algorithmically curated feeds, while narrative framing grounded in youth culture enhances cultural resonance and interpretive alignment with audiences. Participation further sustains visibility by enabling audiences to actively contribute to the circulation, reinterpretation, and social validation of content through interaction features such as comments and reposts. Together, these practices demonstrate that awareness in contemporary digital media functions as an ongoing communicative process shaped by symbolic familiarity, cultural narration, audience engagement, and platform logics rather than as a static cognitive outcome of repeated exposure. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends existing awareness and visibility frameworks by reinterpreting them through participatory and discourse-oriented lenses, emphasizing the central role of interaction and meaning-making in platform-based media ecosystems. Nevertheless, this research is limited by its focus on a single youth-oriented digital media account and a specific temporal and platform context, which restricts broader generalization and calls for future studies to examine comparative cases across different platforms, cultural settings, or methodological approaches in order to further elaborate how digital visibility, participation, and media discourse intersect in diverse contemporary media environments.

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