



Impression Management of Freelance Domestic Workers: A Case Study of Instagram Account @reni_goclean

Nuria Astagini

Master of Communication Science Program, Faculty of Communication, Universitas Multimedia Nusantara, UMN Campus, Kompas Tower 9th Floor, Jl. Palmerah Selatan No. 21, Jakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: nuria.astagini@umn.ac.id

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ABSTRACT: Social media has evolved into a digital platform through which domestic workers can express and construct their identities. Many freelance domestic workers have used Instagram to offer their services independently, as exemplified by the account @reni_goclean. This study aimed to examine and describe the impression management strategies employed by a female freelance domestic worker through this account. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory was used as the theoretical framework for analyzing the content posted on the @reni_goclean Instagram account. The findings showed that, on the front stage, the subject presented herself as versatile, professional, and grateful for her work. This self-image was conveyed through various reels that highlighted her diverse skills and ability to perform tasks requiring specialized expertise, such as childcare and assisting children with anxiety disorders. Several reels also portrayed her confidence in rejecting job offers that did not match her competencies or offered excessively low wages. In addition, many reels expressed gratitude for the employment opportunities she received. Interestingly, no clear boundary was observed between the front stage and the back stage. Instead, the subject deliberately merged these two stages, presenting personal and professional aspects of her life in ways that aligned with societal expectations of women working as domestic workers. Her impression management strategy was directed not only toward her audience but also toward social media algorithms that curated and distributed content to a wider range of users. Therefore, social media served as an important platform through which domestic workers could pursue economic independence, demonstrate professionalism, and challenge the negative stigma associated with domestic work.

KEYWORDS: Impression management; domestic workers; women; freelance; social media

1. Introduction

Domestic work has existed as a profession for centuries in many countries. However, it has often been associated with negative stigma because domestic work has frequently been perceived as an extension of women's traditional household responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, and caring for children and older people. As a result, women

employed as domestic workers have often lacked adequate recognition and protection of their rights as workers [1–5]. Furthermore, because domestic workers typically performed their duties in private households, they were particularly vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse [6–8]. In Indonesia, the ratification of the Domestic Worker Protection Law did not automatically ensure adequate protection and guarantees for domestic workers. Despite this progress, the employment status of domestic workers had not automatically become equal to that of workers in other sectors and continued to generate considerable public debate. Some members of society still believed that domestic workers should not be categorized in the same way as other workers and, consequently, did not deserve equivalent wages and employment rights [9, 10].

The advancement of information technology provided a new and relatively safe space for domestic workers, particularly through social media. Increasingly, domestic workers shared and created content about their lives, work, and experiences on digital platforms [11–14]. They openly presented their identities and experiences as domestic workers through social media content. For example, Ida Nurida and Ernie Djebell, domestic workers in Taiwan, documented their daily routines on YouTube and TikTok, attracting a combined following of 11,300 and 717,200, respectively. Another example was Nabila Kristiani, who had previously worked as a domestic worker in Jakarta and had more than 9,000 followers. Similarly, the well-known influencer Farida Nurhan openly shared on social media that she had previously worked as a domestic worker abroad. The presence of domestic workers on social media gradually constructed a counter-narrative to mainstream representations that often devalued their profession [11, 14]. On Instagram, a freelance domestic worker named Reni operated the account @reni_goclean, through which she shared video reels documenting her activities and experiences as a domestic worker. Her account attracted approximately 54,000 followers, indicating substantial public interest in her activities as a freelance domestic worker. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate and describe the impression management strategies employed by a freelance domestic worker through the Instagram account @reni_goclean.

Impression management was conceptualized in this study through the framework of dramaturgical theory. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1956) conceptualized social interaction as analogous to a theatrical performance, in which individuals acted as performers who engaged in impression management to influence how others perceived them. Two key areas were identified in this process: the front stage and the backstage. The front stage represented the public arena in which individuals performed before an audience to construct a particular image. In contrast, the backstage represented a more private space in which individuals could temporarily withdraw from public performance, express themselves more freely, and prepare for subsequent interactions with their audience [15]. When individuals entered public spaces, they were aware that they were being observed and therefore adapted their behavior to conform to prevailing social norms and expectations. Accordingly, actors tended to present themselves in ways that were consistent with audience expectations to create a favorable impression. Failure to manage this presentation effectively could undermine the desired persona and potentially damage the individual's reputation [16].

Impression management was understood as a deliberate process through which individuals controlled the personal information presented to others by employing particular behaviors and communication strategies. The primary motivations for impression management included meeting audience expectations and constructing, maintaining, or enhancing a desired

image in the minds of others [17]. This concept became particularly important within the social media environment, where users extensively shared curated representations of themselves with broader audiences. Validation and acceptance within digital environments were achieved through consistent self-presentation, which subsequently contributed to the development of social relationships and trust [18]. On social media, successful impression management depended partly on users' ability to present themselves as trustworthy and authentic to participating audiences. Consistent self-presentation could facilitate the development of emotional connections based on perceived trust and authenticity [19]. Within digital environments, social media users tended to modify their self-presentation to appear more ideal when interacting with unfamiliar audiences, while displaying less controlled self-presentation when communicating with close acquaintances who already understood their backgrounds [18]. Hogan [20] explained that self-presentation in digital environments increasingly operated as an exhibition. Within this space, individuals presented themselves through digital artifacts stored in databases, while algorithms functioned as third-party curators that filtered and distributed these artifacts to other users. This conceptualization of social media as an exhibition space suggested that digital impression management involved not only interactions between actors and audiences but also the role of algorithms in determining the visibility and circulation of content.

Social media also provided domestic workers with a space to present themselves and construct alternative narratives about their profession [21]. These narratives differed from mainstream media representations that frequently stereotyped domestic workers as poor, ignorant, and uneducated women [22]. Through social media, domestic workers shifted from being represented merely as objects of public discourse to becoming active subjects capable of expressing their experiences and challenging dominant representations. Previous studies demonstrated that domestic workers' ownership and use of social media could function as a form of resistance in their everyday lives [8, 11, 14]. Social media also facilitated domestic workers' agency and provided opportunities to exercise greater independence [13, 23]. Social media further served as a direct communication channel between domestic workers and potential employers. Before the widespread adoption of digital platforms, domestic workers often depended on third parties who acted as intermediaries between workers and employers, and such arrangements could disadvantage workers [1, 24]. Through social media, domestic workers gained more independent channels to access employment opportunities, communicate directly with potential employers, negotiate working arrangements, and select preferred working environments [5, 8, 14, 25, 26]. These developments demonstrated how social media could function as an instrument of economic empowerment and greater occupational autonomy for women working in domestic services.

Although previous studies demonstrated that social media provided informal workers with greater visibility and opportunities for social resistance [11, 14], much of the existing literature approached these platforms primarily as communication tools or spaces for self-presentation. Although concepts of impression management derived from Goffman's dramaturgical theory had been widely applied to digital content creators, their application to marginalized informal workers remained relatively underexplored. Existing frameworks generally distinguished between front-stage and backstage performances [18, 19]. This study addressed this research gap by extending Goffman's dramaturgical framework to the context of digital labor. Specifically, it introduced the concept of the "leaky backstage" to examine

how deliberate disclosures of private vulnerabilities, including physical fatigue and class-related struggles, were transformed into elements of authentic self-presentation. Furthermore, rather than conceptualizing social media interaction solely as a relationship between the worker and the audience, this study examined the interaction among the domestic worker, the audience, and Instagram's algorithm in shaping digital impression management.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design.

This study employed a qualitative content analysis approach to describe and interpret the impression management strategies presented by a freelance domestic worker through the Instagram account @reni_goclean. Qualitative content analysis was considered appropriate because it enabled systematic interpretation of textual and audiovisual digital content, with the researcher serving as the primary analytical instrument for identifying recurring patterns, themes, and meanings within social media content [27]. The analysis was theoretically informed by Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework, particularly the concepts of front stage and backstage performance. These concepts provided the initial analytical categories for examining how the subject constructed and negotiated her professional identity on Instagram. The analysis was subsequently expanded inductively when patterns emerged from the data that were not fully captured by the conventional distinction between front-stage and backstage performances.

2.2. Data Source and Unit of Analysis.

The primary data consisted of Instagram Reels uploaded to the @reni_goclean account between March and June 2026. This period was selected purposively because March 2026 marked the subject's return to Jakarta from her hometown, after which she resumed offering services as a freelance domestic worker. This transition provided a relevant period for examining how impression management was constructed while the subject attempted to rebuild her client base and professional visibility. A total of 105 Reels posted during the four-month study period were included as units of analysis. The analysis focused on content related to the subject's work and professional identity as a freelance domestic worker. Particular attention was given to video text overlays, captions and narratives presented within the Reels, visible actions, representations of domestic and care work, interactions with clients, discussions of wages and employment opportunities, and expressions of personal experiences related to work.

2.3. Data Collection.

The data were collected through systematic observation and documentation of the selected Instagram Reels. Each Reel was examined for its audiovisual content and embedded textual information. Relevant information was documented according to the date of upload, type of work represented, self-presentation strategy, interaction with clients, expressions of professional boundaries, disclosure of personal experiences, and other recurring elements associated with impression management. The documented content was then organized into a dataset for thematic analysis. This procedure enabled the study to examine not only what the subject communicated explicitly but also how particular activities, experiences, and narratives were selectively presented to construct a professional identity in a public digital environment.

2.4. Coding and Thematic Analysis.

The 105 Reels were analyzed using thematic analysis. The coding process combined deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive codes were initially derived from Goffman's dramaturgical concepts, particularly front-stage and backstage performances. Inductive codes were subsequently developed from recurring textual, visual, and narrative patterns identified within the Reels. The coding process involved repeated examination and comparison of the selected content. Initial codes were grouped according to conceptual similarities and subsequently synthesized into subthemes and broader thematic categories. This process resulted in three major analytical dimensions: front-stage performance, the leaky backstage, and negotiation with the social media algorithm. Within the front-stage category, three recurring themes were identified: multi-talented skills, professionalism through digital agency, and gratitude as a form of economic value positioning. The leaky-backstage category captured disclosures of physical exhaustion, traumatic experiences, and class-based vulnerability. The final category examined how self-presentation was negotiated not only with audiences but also with Instagram's algorithm.

2.5. Analytical Rigor and Interpretation.

To strengthen the credibility of the qualitative interpretation, theoretical triangulation was applied [27]. The identified patterns and themes were compared with the impression management framework and relevant literature. Constant comparison between individual Reels, emerging themes, and theoretical concepts was used throughout the analytical process to maintain consistency in interpretation. Rather than treating each Reel as an isolated digital artifact, the analysis considered how repeated patterns across the 105 Reels collectively constructed the subject's professional identity.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Profile of the Instagram Account and Overall Content Characteristics.

The Instagram account @reni_goclean was owned and managed by Reni, a freelance domestic worker. She initially worked as a cleaning-service provider through the Go-Clean digital platform, formerly part of the GoJek service ecosystem. After the service ceased operations, she transitioned to independent freelance work and presented herself as an all-round domestic worker. The first post on the account was uploaded on May 22, 2022. By June 2026, the account contained 1,026 posts and had attracted approximately 54,000 followers. The profile also included a direct link to the subject's WhatsApp account, enabling prospective clients to contact her without intermediaries such as brokers or employment agencies. Analysis of the 105 Reels posted between March and June 2026 indicated that the Instagram account functioned as both a digital portfolio and a channel for accessing employment opportunities. The Reels documented a wide range of activities, including residential cleaning, childcare, elderly care, pet care, assistance with finding rental accommodation, discussions of wages, and accounts of completed work. Rather than functioning merely as personal documentation, these posts collectively constructed a public representation of the subject's skills, professional values, working conditions, and economic agency. Three major dimensions emerged from the

thematic analysis: front-stage professional identity, the leaky backstage, and negotiation with the platform algorithm.

3.2. Front-Stage Impression Management.

The first major theme represented the subject's front-stage performance. Across the analyzed Reels, she repeatedly presented herself as versatile, professional, independent, and grateful for employment opportunities. Three interconnected subthemes emerged: the presentation of multi-talented skills, professionalism through digital agency, and gratitude as a form of economic value positioning.

3.2.1. Presentation of Multi-Talented Skills.

The first front-stage strategy involved presenting herself as a worker capable of performing responsibilities beyond conventional household cleaning. Figure 1 illustrates this strategy through a Reel in which the subject described assisting a client who needed to visit a hospital. She not only cleaned the apartment but also cared for the client's seven-year-old child, prepared food, fed the child, and delivered food to the client at the hospital.

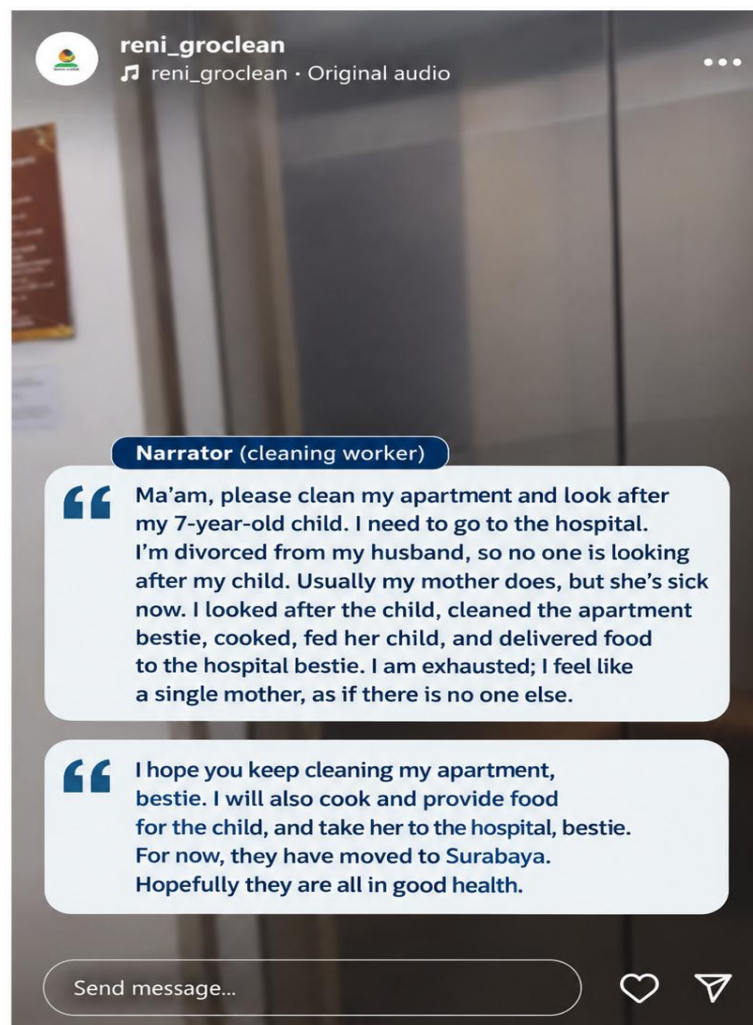


Figure 1. Front-Stage Performance Illustrating Multi-Talented Skills and Care Work Versatility in Freelance Domestic Labor.

Figure 1 therefore illustrated how the subject expanded the representation of domestic work beyond routine cleaning activities. The combination of cleaning, cooking, childcare, and additional assistance presented her as adaptable and capable of responding to changing client needs. Within the dramaturgical framework, the Reel functioned as a front-stage performance through which multiple competencies were selectively displayed to potential clients. Rather than merely documenting completed tasks, the content contributed to the construction of a professional identity based on versatility, reliability, and care.

A more specialized form of this self-presentation appeared in Figure 2. In this Reel, the subject was asked to accompany a client's child who had experienced panic attacks following bullying. She monitored the child from a distance while the child completed a school assignment with friends and reported the child's condition to the client every 15 minutes.

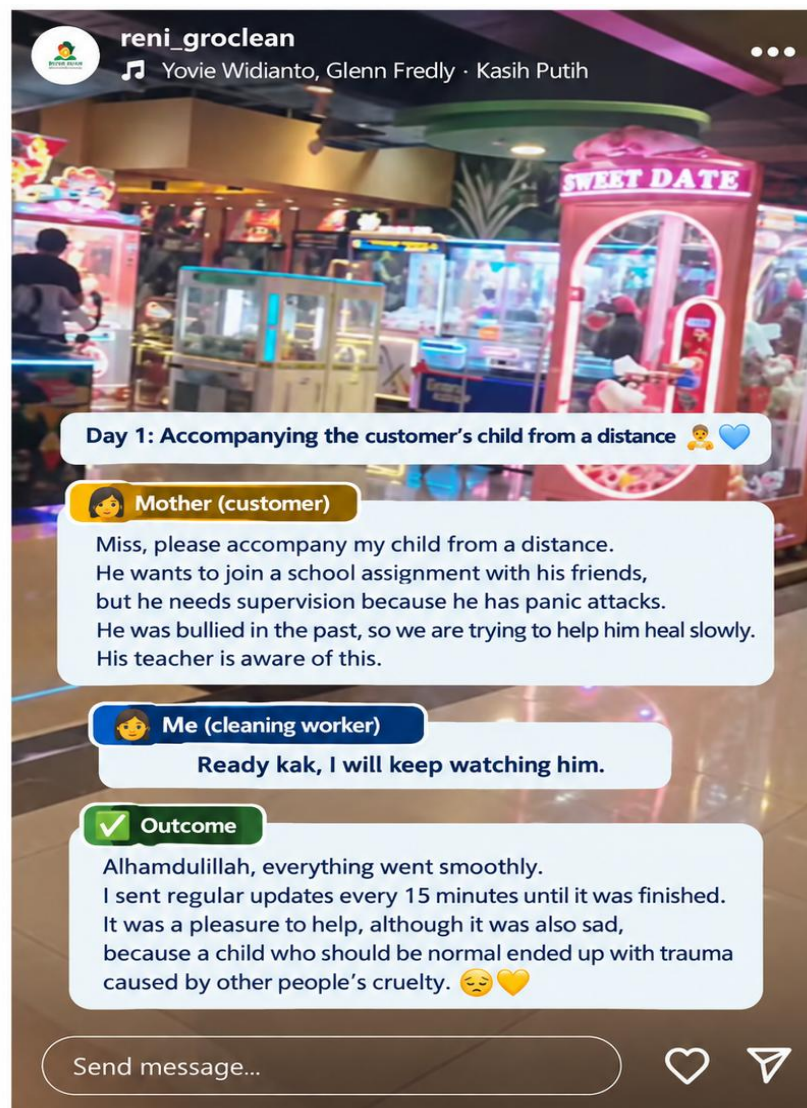


Figure 2. Strategic Impression Management Illustrating Premium Competencies, Emotional Intelligence, and Specialized Psychological Care Work in Domestic Labor.

As shown in Figure 2, the task required more than physical domestic labor. The Reel emphasized responsibility, discretion, communication, situational awareness, and sensitivity toward the child's psychological condition. By making this experience visible on Instagram, the subject presented herself as capable of undertaking care-related responsibilities requiring trust and attentiveness. Figures 1 and 2 therefore collectively demonstrated how the subject

used examples of diverse and specialized work to challenge the representation of domestic work as exclusively low-skilled physical labor.

3.2.2. Professionalism Through Digital Agency.

The second front-stage strategy involved the presentation of professional agency, particularly through the subject's willingness to establish boundaries with prospective clients. The analyzed content showed that she publicly discussed rejecting work that fell outside her professional role, created safety concerns, or offered compensation that she considered inadequate. Figure 3 provides an example of this boundary-setting behavior. The subject described receiving an invitation from a content creator who wanted her to pretend to be in a romantic relationship for online content. She rejected the proposal and instead offered to provide her regular cleaning service. The Reel therefore presented refusal not as a lack of employment opportunity but as an expression of professional choice. Through the public presentation of this decision, the subject positioned herself as an independent worker who defined the boundaries of acceptable employment. In this sense, Instagram functioned as more than a promotional platform; it also became a space in which professional boundaries could be publicly communicated to prospective clients.

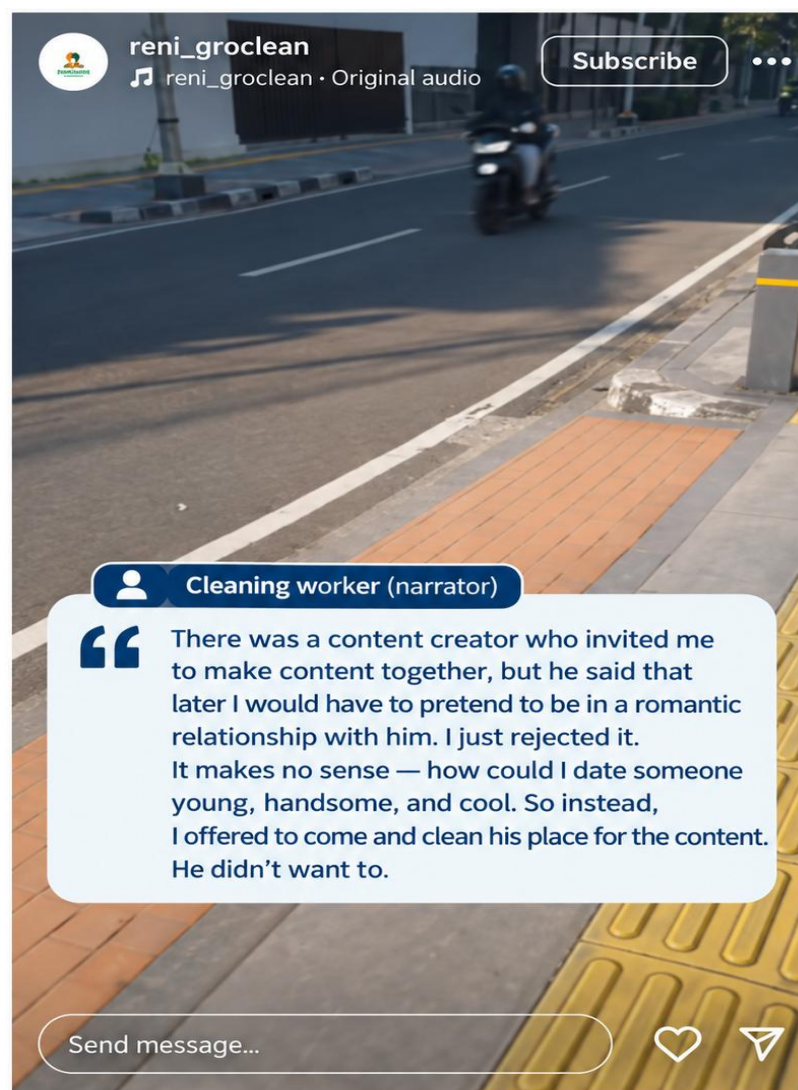


Figure 3. Professional Agency and Boundary Setting Through the Rejection of Non-Standard Client Demands to Enforce Digital Shield and Work Integrity.

Economic agency was similarly evident in Figure 4, which showed the subject's response to a proposed payment of Rp 100,000 for cleaning a two-story house affected by hoarding. Rather than directly confronting the prospective client, she described her response as simply smiling and withdrawing from the negotiation. Figure 4 demonstrated a subtler form of professional refusal. By publicly disclosing the proposed payment while avoiding direct confrontation, the subject communicated the economic value she assigned to her labor. The Reel also allowed followers to evaluate the relationship between the workload and the compensation offered. Figures 3 and 4 thus showed two complementary forms of agency: establishing boundaries regarding the type of work accepted and establishing boundaries regarding acceptable compensation.



Figure 4. Asserting Economic Agency and Face-Saving Rejection Tactics Against Sub-Standard Wage Offers in Unregulated Domestic Labor.

3.2.3. Gratitude and Economic Value Positioning.

The third front-stage theme involved repeated expressions of gratitude for income and employment opportunities. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate this pattern through Reels in which the subject openly stated the income she had earned while simultaneously expressing gratitude and motivation to continue working. Figure 5 showed the subject reporting net earnings of Rp 250,000 after earning Rp 200,000 on the previous day, while also discussing her intention to increase her future daily income despite recently experiencing illness. Figure 6 similarly combined disclosure of earnings with expressions of gratitude, saving behavior, motivation, and appreciation toward followers. These income disclosures could be interpreted as serving more than one function. At the explicit level, they communicated gratitude for employment opportunities. At the level of impression management, however, the repeated disclosure of specific earnings also communicated information about the economic value and marketability of the subject's services. The combination of income disclosure and gratitude allowed economic self-positioning to be presented through a culturally familiar narrative of humility and appreciation.

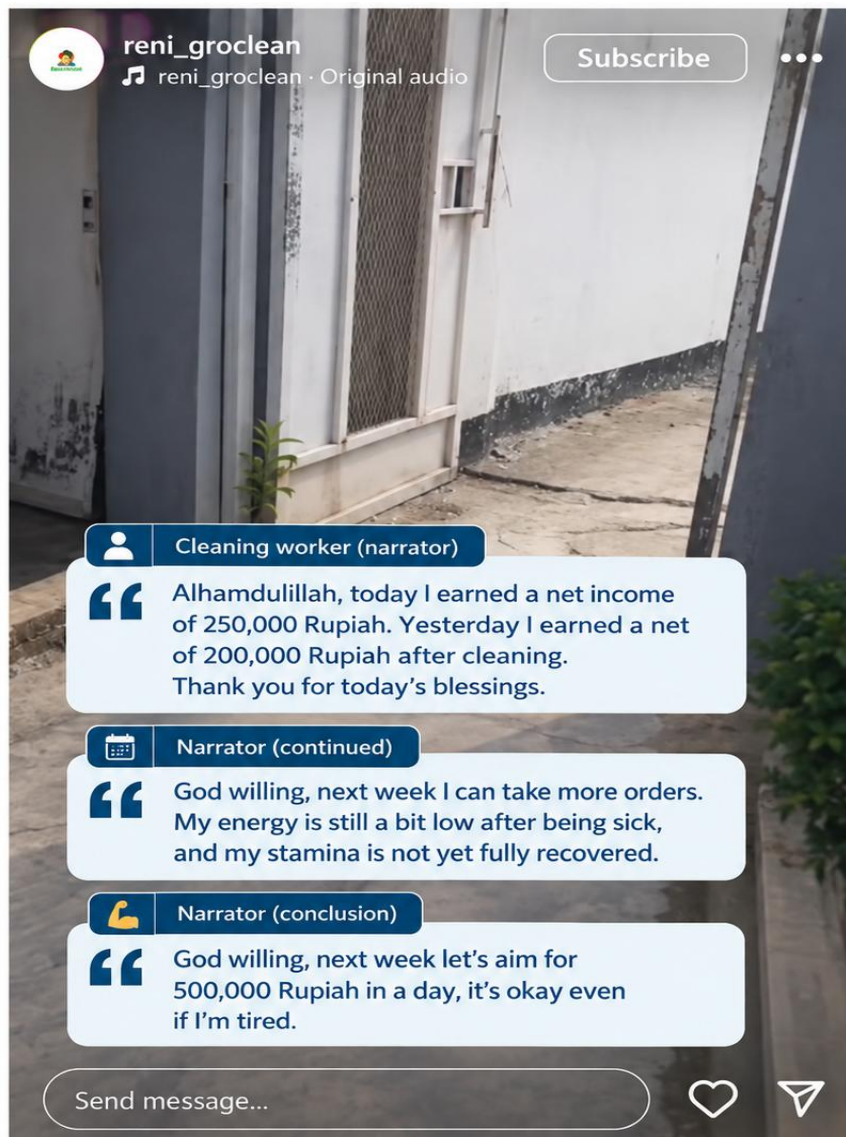


Figure 5. Tactical Front-Stage Performance Utilizing Gratitude Narratives and Explicit Price-Signaling to Validate Economic Value and Exhibit Work Resilience.



Figure 6. Framing Domestic Labor Through Socio-Cultural Humility and Price-Signaling to Reinforce Marketability and Maintain Professional Authenticity.

3.3. *The Leaky Backstage: Vulnerability as Public Performance.*

The second major analytical dimension differed from the conventional dramaturgical distinction between front stage and backstage. In Goffman’s framework, the backstage generally represents a private space in which actors can withdraw from public performance. However, the analysis of @reni_groclean showed that experiences normally associated with the backstage—including exhaustion, trauma, insecurity, and experiences of social inequality—were deliberately disclosed to the public. This study conceptualized this pattern as a “leaky backstage.”

3.3.1. *Physical Exhaustion and Invisible Labor.*

One form of backstage disclosure involved physical exhaustion. Although the front-stage content frequently portrayed the subject as energetic and capable of completing several jobs in a single day, other Reels openly documented fatigue and frustration. In some posts, she expressed a desire to stop offering her services because of physical exhaustion while

simultaneously explaining that economic needs required her to continue working. These disclosures complicated the consistently productive identity presented on the front stage. Rather than necessarily undermining her professional image, however, they made visible the physical demands of domestic labor. Within the leaky-backstage interpretation, exhaustion became part of the public narrative through which the subject communicated the physical costs associated with work that was often socially undervalued.

3.3.2. Disclosure of Trauma and Occupational Vulnerability.

A more explicit example of backstage disclosure appeared in Figure 7. The Reel described several traumatic experiences, including an attempted kidnapping, sexual harassment, a dangerous work-related incident, and another situation from which the subject reported escaping. Figure 7 demonstrated that the subject did not restrict her Instagram identity to positive professional achievements. Instead, she incorporated highly personal experiences of vulnerability into her public self-presentation. Such disclosure made occupational risks visible and provided followers with a broader understanding of the insecurity that could accompany informal and freelance domestic work. Within the proposed leaky-backstage framework, the disclosure of trauma therefore functioned simultaneously as personal testimony, occupational risk communication, and a component of impression management.



Figure 7. Tactical Disclosure of Traumatic Experiences to Deconstruct Gendered Societal Stigmas and Educate on Occupational Risks in Freelance Domestic Labor.

3.3.3. Challenging Class-Based Stigma.

The leaky backstage also became visible when the subject disclosed experiences of class-based suspicion and stigmatization. Figure 8 presented her response to an incident in which she reported being accused of stealing a client's watch. The content questioned why cleaners could be readily suspected while individuals from wealthier social groups could avoid similar scrutiny.

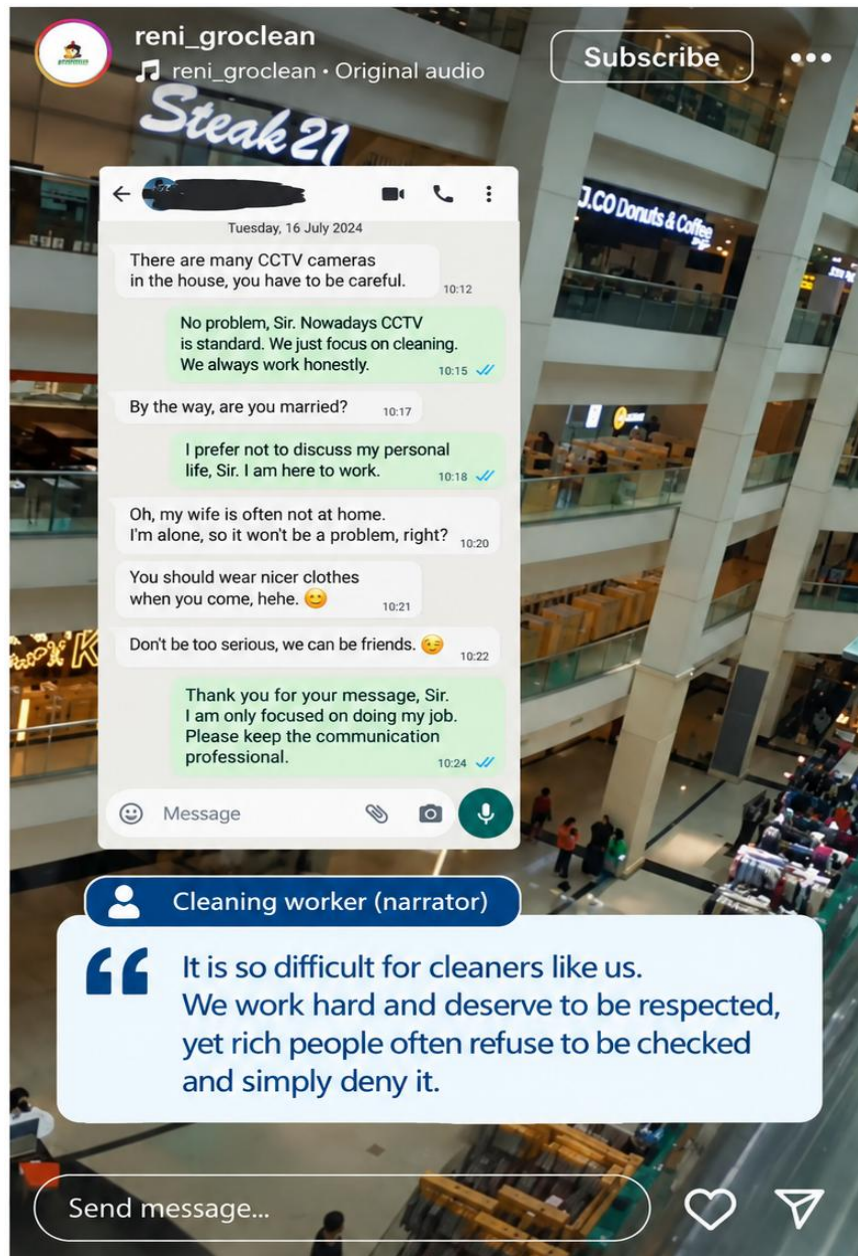


Figure 8. Disclosure Challenging Class Asymmetry, Immediate Criminalization, and Structural Oppression in Domestic Labor.

As illustrated in Figure 8, the subject transformed an experience that could have remained private into a public critique of class inequality and occupational stigma. This disclosure challenged representations of domestic workers as inherently suspicious or socially inferior. Accordingly, the backstage did not simply “leak” because the subject failed to maintain her public performance. Instead, selected vulnerabilities were deliberately incorporated into the public narrative to generate authenticity, invite empathy, and challenge unequal relationships

between domestic workers and clients. Taken together, these findings suggested that the distinction between front stage and backstage became less rigid within the social media environment. Personal vulnerability could itself become part of a managed public performance. The “leaky backstage” therefore described a situation in which selected backstage experiences were intentionally made visible and incorporated into the construction of authenticity and professional identity.

3.4. Negotiating Impression Management with the Algorithm.

The third major theme extended impression management beyond the conventional actor–audience relationship. Within Instagram, the visibility of a performance depended not only on how audiences responded to the content but also on how the platform selected and distributed that content. Consequently, the subject’s digital performance occurred within a three-way relationship involving the worker, the audience, and the platform algorithm.

Analysis of the 105 Reels indicated a tension between professional agency and the need to maintain audience visibility. On the one hand, the subject presented herself as independent, professionally capable, and willing to reject inappropriate work and inadequate compensation. On the other hand, her content repeatedly incorporated narratives of hard work, humility, gratitude, struggle, and resilience that were likely to be recognizable and relatable to a broader Indonesian audience.

This pattern suggested that digital impression management could not be understood solely as the intentional presentation of identity to human audiences. The subject also operated within a platform environment in which content visibility was mediated algorithmically. However, because this study analyzed publicly available Reels rather than Instagram’s proprietary recommendation data, it could not directly establish how the algorithm ranked or distributed individual posts. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence of the subject’s apparent adaptation to the platform environment rather than direct evidence of algorithmic causation.

Overall, the results showed that impression management on @reni_goclean operated through three interconnected processes: the construction of a professional front-stage identity, the selective public disclosure of backstage vulnerability, and the negotiation of visibility within a platform-mediated environment. This expanded dramaturgical interpretation demonstrated how a freelance domestic worker used social media not only to display work but also to negotiate professional identity, economic agency, vulnerability, and occupational stigma.

3.5. Discussion.

In the digital era, impression management no longer operated solely as a two-way interaction between an actor and an audience. Social media introduced an additional intermediary: the platform algorithm, which functioned as a curator by selecting, organizing, and distributing digital content to audiences [20]. Consequently, social media users did not have complete control over the visibility or reach of their self-presentations. Their performances had to address two interconnected audiences: human audiences, including followers and other social media users, and algorithmic systems that influenced content distribution [20]. Therefore, effective digital impression management required content that resonated with audiences while

simultaneously adapting to platform mechanisms that shaped visibility, interaction, trust, and social relationships [18, 19].

The analysis of 105 Reels from the @reni_goclean account showed that the subject constructed a digital identity characterized by professional agency, occupational competence, and bargaining power. As illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, she presented herself as a versatile worker capable of undertaking responsibilities beyond conventional household cleaning, including childcare and other forms of care work. Figures 3 and 4 further demonstrated her professional agency through the establishment of employment boundaries and the rejection of inappropriate work or inadequate compensation. These findings were consistent with previous studies showing that digital platforms could provide domestic workers with greater access to employment opportunities, direct communication with clients, and increased control over working arrangements [5, 8, 14, 25, 26].

However, professional competence was not the only identity presented through the account. Figures 5 and 6 showed that economic achievement was frequently framed through narratives of gratitude, humility, perseverance, and hard work. Although the subject openly disclosed her earnings and professional ambitions, these disclosures were presented through culturally recognizable expressions of gratitude. This combination enabled her to communicate the economic value of her labor without abandoning the socially familiar image of a hardworking and humble domestic worker. Such a strategy was particularly relevant within a social context in which domestic work continued to be associated with lower social status, limited occupational prestige, and unequal recognition of workers' rights [1, 5, 9, 10, 22].

More importantly, the findings indicated that the conventional distinction between front stage and backstage became increasingly blurred within the social media environment. Figures 7 and 8 demonstrated how experiences that might traditionally have remained backstage—including trauma, occupational vulnerability, accusations, and class-based discrimination—were intentionally brought into public view. Rather than necessarily representing a breakdown in impression management, these disclosures functioned as what this study conceptualized as a “leaky backstage.” The subject selectively transformed private vulnerabilities into public narratives that could generate authenticity, empathy, and awareness of the structural challenges faced by domestic workers. In this way, professional competence and personal vulnerability were not contradictory performances; instead, they operated together in constructing a more complex and relatable digital identity.

The findings also suggested that this combination of professionalism and vulnerability occurred within a platform-mediated environment. Content had to remain sufficiently engaging and relatable to attract audience attention while operating within algorithmically curated systems [19, 20]. However, the present study did not directly examine Instagram's proprietary recommendation algorithm. Therefore, it could not establish that particular forms of content were algorithmically favored or that the subject deliberately optimized individual posts for specific algorithmic mechanisms. Rather, the findings indicated that the subject's impression management occurred within an environment in which algorithmic curation influenced the potential visibility and circulation of her content.

This interaction between self-presentation, audience response, and platform mediation formed the basis of the conceptual framework presented in Figure 9. The framework synthesized the findings into five interconnected stages of digital empowerment. The process began with digital self-presentation, through which the worker established an independent

social media presence and reduced reliance on traditional employment intermediaries [1, 24]. This was followed by dialectical impression management, in which front-stage professionalism interacted with the leaky backstage. Professional competence, boundary setting, and economic agency were presented alongside selected disclosures of vulnerability and structural disadvantage, contributing to a more multidimensional construction of authenticity [15, 18, 19].

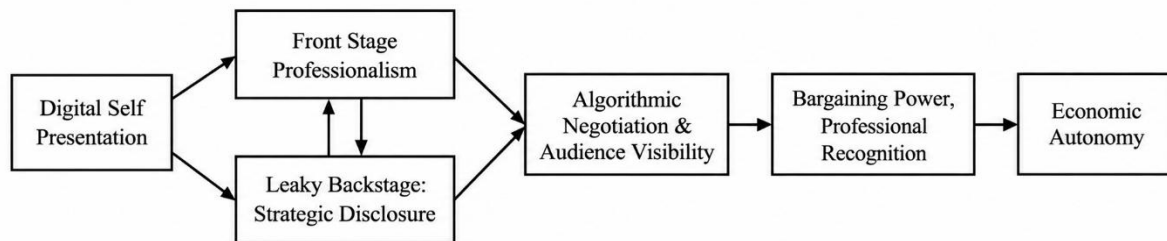


Figure 9. Conceptual Framework of Digital Empowerment and Economic Autonomy Progression in Freelance Domestic Labor.

As shown in Figure 9, these forms of self-presentation subsequently operated within a process of algorithmic negotiation and audience visibility. Increased visibility could provide greater opportunities for public engagement, recognition, and direct contact with prospective clients. This visibility could then contribute to stronger bargaining power and professional recognition by enabling the worker to communicate the value of her labor, reject unsuitable employment conditions, and challenge stigmatizing representations of domestic workers [11, 14, 22]. The final stage of the framework was economic autonomy, represented by greater independence in accessing employment opportunities, negotiating working arrangements, and determining the economic value of services [5, 13, 23, 25, 26].

Thus, Figure 9 conceptualized digital empowerment not as an automatic consequence of social media participation but as a negotiated process involving professional self-presentation, selective disclosure of vulnerability, audience engagement, and platform-mediated visibility. The framework extended the conventional dramaturgical distinction between front stage and backstage by incorporating both the “leaky backstage” and algorithmic mediation. In the context of freelance domestic work, these interconnected processes provided a framework for understanding how marginalized workers could use digital platforms to negotiate professional recognition, bargaining power, and greater economic autonomy.

4. Conclusions

This study demonstrated how social media, particularly Instagram, functioned as a digital space through which freelance domestic workers could construct professional identities, negotiate employment conditions, and pursue greater economic autonomy. Analysis of the @reni_goclean account showed that impression management in the digital environment extended beyond the conventional two-way relationship between actor and audience to involve a third element: platform-mediated algorithmic curation. Within this environment, the subject strategically combined professional self-presentation with culturally recognizable narratives of gratitude, hard work, and resilience. On the front stage, the subject presented herself as a versatile and professional domestic worker who possessed diverse skills, established clear employment boundaries, and negotiated the economic value of her labor. At the same time, the

findings revealed a less rigid distinction between front-stage and backstage performances. Through what this study conceptualized as the “leaky backstage,” experiences of physical exhaustion, personal trauma, occupational vulnerability, and class-based discrimination were selectively disclosed to the public. These disclosures did not necessarily weaken her professional image; rather, they contributed to the construction of authenticity, generated audience empathy, and made the often-invisible challenges of domestic work more visible. The findings further indicated that digital impression management occurred within a platform environment in which content visibility was mediated by both audience engagement and algorithmic curation. Although this study did not directly examine Instagram’s proprietary algorithm, the findings suggested that professional self-presentation, selective vulnerability, and platform-mediated visibility interacted to support professional recognition and bargaining power. Consequently, social media provided opportunities for freelance domestic workers to reduce their dependence on traditional employment intermediaries, communicate directly with prospective clients, negotiate working conditions, challenge occupational stigma, and strengthen their economic autonomy. This study was limited by its single-case design and its focus on one Indonesian Instagram account during a specific observation period. The findings therefore should not be generalized to all domestic workers or social media platforms. Future research should compare multiple domestic-worker accounts across different digital platforms and geographical contexts and incorporate interviews with content creators, audiences, and employers. Further investigation of platform governance and algorithmic visibility would also help clarify how digital infrastructures shape the opportunities and constraints experienced by domestic workers in developing professional recognition and economic autonomy.

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Author Contribution

Nuria Astagini is the sole author of this manuscript and was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing, and supervision of the study.

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Competing Interest

The author declares no competing financial, personal, or professional interest.

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