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Commodifying learning? Ethical communication violations and professional boundaries of Indonesian influencer lecturers on social media

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study explores the phenomenon of the commodification of learning by influencer lecturers in Indonesia using social media. The main objective of this study is to analyze how lecturers' practices in sharing content on social media can trigger ethical communication violations, blur professional boundaries, and affect students' learning experiences as well as the protection of their rights in the digital era.

Method – This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the phenomenon of influencer lecturers in Indonesia, focusing on the commodification of learning, ethical communication violations, and professional boundaries on social media. Data was collected through a literature review and digital observation of lecturers' activities on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube during the period from 2022 to 2025. A purposive sampling technique was used to select lecturers who actively produce educational content and demonstrate significant audience engagement. The research data consists of publicly available posts, videos, captions, and interactions, which were analyzed using iterative thematic analysis. The main themes identified include the commodification of learning, ethical communication violations and the blurring of professional boundaries. Ethical considerations were maintained by anonymizing all observed accounts. The analysis of this study is based on the Source Credibility Model, Kantian communication ethics, and professional Stephen J. Ball's concept of performance.

Findings – The findings reveal that the commodification practices of influencer lecturers are concretely manifested through packaging students' expressions, emotions, and interactions as digital content oriented toward attention. This condition reduces the fundamental values of education. As a result, the use of social media by influencer lecturers not only has the potential, but clearly leads to violations of communication ethics, blurred professional boundaries, and a decline in academic credibility. This study emphasizes the urgent need for a clear separation between the role of lecturers as educators and as public figures. Influencer lecturers are required to consciously establish, internalize, and maintain clear ethical boundaries to uphold professionalism and academic integrity.

Keywords: Influencer lecturers; Ethical communication; Professional boundaries; Social media in education; Commodification of learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars such as Lengel and Daft (2021), Liu (2010), and Fuchs (2021) agree that the development of digital technology and social media has brought significant changes across various aspects of life. These transformations have had a substantial impact on the field of education. Social media is no longer merely a medium of entertainment; rather, it has evolved into a strategic platform for personal and institutional branding, the accumulation of social currency, and the mobilization of followers. Consequently, all sectors, including education, are required to continuously adapt to the dynamic presence and ongoing evolution of social media.

Erçetin and Menteşe emphasize the importance of educators (teachers and lecturers) using social media in a positive, wise, and constructive manner for the new generation often referred to as digital natives (Erçetin & Menteşe, 2012). In the practice of becoming influencers, lecturers attempt to align themselves with the characteristics of students belonging to Generation Z, Generation Y, and Generation Alpha. However, according to Dwisuardinata, this does not mean that lecturers who become social media influencers should be completely immersed or overly involved in the digital sphere (Dwisuardinata & Darma, 2023). Many influencer lecturers experience FOMO (fear of missing out), constantly trying to follow trends by continuously sharing content without being able to properly manage their time between teaching responsibilities and mobile phone usage. This is a common phenomenon observed in practice. Unfortunately, the studies conducted by Erçetin and Menteşe, as well as Dwisuardinata, do not clearly elaborate on the ethical and professional boundaries that lecturers who also function as influencers should observe.

Furthermore, financial benefits have contributed to the increasing number of lecturers who are active on social media and become influencers. Carpenter, J. P., Shelton, C. C., Curcio, R., and Schroeder, S. found that many educators use social media platforms to grow followers, develop personal branding, and monetize their content for financial gain (J. Carpenter, n.d.). Later, in 2022, Carpenter, J. P., Shelton, C. C., and Schroeder, S. E. also found that educational influencers can influence the practices, philosophies, and professional identities of other educators. This dual role presents both opportunities and challenges for academics (C. Shelton et al., 2020). However, these two studies by Carpenter do not address the ethical boundaries that influencer lecturers should establish to balance what is ethically appropriate to share and what should remain private.

Moreover, the activity of influencer lecturers on social media can become increasingly uncontrolled over time. Some lecturers may become deeply immersed in this cycle. Erişir also emphasizes this lack of control among educator influencers. Influencer educators often share videos or photos that are unauthorized or uncontrolled (Küçükali & Serçemeli, 2019). On the other hand, the mediating role of social media in making individuals famous within a short period of time, combined with its ability to reach mass audiences, often undermines the objectives of learning (Schroeder et al., 2021). Although Erişir explains in detail the impacts that may blur educational objectives, the study does

not clearly discuss the academic challenges that educators who also act as influencers should face.

This phenomenon indicates that influencer lecturers are transforming academic learning activities into commodities. When academic learning becomes commodified, it signifies that academic life has become part of popular culture. Popular culture (pop culture) refers to mass culture designed for consumption by a broad audience. It is rooted in the cultural industry scheme that is oriented toward profit and capital (Y. A. Piliang, 2021). Popular culture began to grow rapidly in the postmodern era. Previously, it was often considered low culture because it was a cultural product of ordinary society intended for mass consumption (Ornstein & Levine, 2005). In the modern era, there was a clear distinction between high culture and low culture; however, this boundary has gradually faded. Popular culture is now more attractive because it is easily understood by all segments of society without requiring deep intellectual reflection, regardless of their social, cultural, or economic backgrounds.

Popular culture often produces banality, superficiality, and trivialities that lack profound meaning. When religiosity becomes part of popular culture, it may also be perceived in the same way: as a phenomenon that is popular and widely consumed by society but serves merely as a channel for shallow intellectuality and surface-level understanding. Easy access to popular culture is driven by the presence of media that presents simulations of religiosity in various forms. In a consumerist society, religion is often packaged as a commodity designed to attract consumers (Tari, 2023). By utilizing the appeal of religious symbols, the media creates imaginations that encourage people to consume such objects. Commodification in the academic world ultimately produces pseudo and superficial intellectuality (Argenti, 2019).

Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the study conducted by Kızıltaş (A. Piliang et al., 2023). He states that several young and less experienced lecturers working in rural and underdeveloped areas in Turkey frequently produce digital content and continuously share virtual videos in classrooms or schools. As a result, students become objects of virtual trade. Most lecturers who participated in this research believed that becoming an influential lecturer could harm students and potentially violate children's rights. Shelton, Curcio, and Schroeder also studied 18 educator influencers and concluded that many of them uploaded content on Instagram in an unwise manner and showed a lack of sensitivity toward social issues. However, both the studies of Kızıltaş and Shelton do not clearly explain the professional boundaries and challenges that should be addressed (C. Shelton et al., 2020).

The phenomenon of influencer lecturers in Indonesia has continued to grow alongside the widespread penetration of social media. Many lecturers not only carry out their traditional roles as educators and researchers but are also active on digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter to build personal branding, share knowledge, and interact with broader audiences. As respected figures within the academic environment, lecturers are responsible not only for delivering knowledge to students but

also for maintaining their professional image. When lecturers choose to become influencers, their communication style, the content they share, and their interactions with audiences on social media become significant points of attention.

Immanuel Kant's ethical theory, known as deontology, emphasizes the importance of universal moral principles and the obligation to act according to generally accepted ethical values (Johnson, 2022). In the context of influencer lecturers, this approach can serve as a guide to maintain professionalism, integrity, and responsibility as both educators and public figures. When a lecturer chooses to become an influencer, maintaining professionalism is fundamental, as it not only reflects individual quality but also influences the credibility of academic institutions at both local and international levels. Influencer lecturers must ensure that the content they share reflects their academic integrity (Smith & Bowers, 2012).This means that they should only share information based on scientific research or credible sources. Academic integrity is a foundation recognized globally by universities and educational institutions, as outlined in the Global Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

Unfortunately, research on ethical boundaries, professionalism, and challenges to academic credibility remains very limited. Previous studies have primarily focused on the phenomenon of influencer lecturers themselves and their impact on children's education. Therefore, there is a clear research gap. This study aims to analyze the ethical boundaries and academic credibility challenges of the influencer lecturer phenomenon in Indonesia. This information is crucial to understanding and contributing to discussions about the ethical limits of lecturers' professionalism as both educators and public figures, so that they can perform both roles without creating conflicts of values, while maintaining academic credibility and generating positive impacts through digital media.

First, it is important to state that this research does not aim to prohibit lecturers from becoming influencers. Rather, this role needs to be positioned proportionally. In the current disruptive era, the role of educators (lecturers) is no longer limited to the implementation of the Tridharma of Higher Education, which includes education and teaching, research, and community service. There is another strategic role that must be undertaken: increasing the contribution of universities to national development while strengthening their global competitiveness. This role is certainly not easy for lecturers, but it can be realized through social media (Serin, 2019). Rapid developments in information technology must be balanced with increased lecturer competence in utilizing these technologies so that there is no gap between theoretical knowledge and the realities and demands of the times (Asmar, 2020). Therefore, lecturers are expected to play an additional role as influencers who inspire, motivate, and initiate positive changes among students and the wider community through social media. Of course, this must be done proportionally. Defining this proportion is one of the academic contributions that this study seeks to design.

Several previous studies relevant to this research include the following. First, the study by Erçetin and Menteşe emphasizes the importance of educators using social media

positively, wisely, and constructively for new generations of students known as digital natives. In this influencer practice, lecturers attempt to align themselves with the characteristics of Generation Z and Generation Y students (Erçetin & Menteşe, 2012). However, Dwisuardinata argues that this does not mean lecturers should be completely immersed in social media (Dwisuardinata & Darma, 2023). In reality, many influencer lecturers experience FOMO and constantly attempt to follow trends by continuously sharing content without being able to manage their time between teaching responsibilities and mobile phone usage. Unfortunately, these studies do not clearly explain the professional boundaries that lecturers who are also influencers should observe.

Second, Carpenter, Shelton, Curcio, and Schroeder found that many educators use social media platforms to grow followers, develop personal branding, and monetize their content for financial gain (C. Shelton et al., 2020). In 2022, Carpenter, Shelton, and Schroeder also found that educational influencers can influence the practices, philosophies, and professional identities of other educators. This dual role presents both opportunities and challenges for academics. However, these studies do not discuss the ethical boundaries that influencer lecturers should observe to balance what is appropriate to share and what should remain private.

Third, Erişir highlights the lack of control among educator influencers. Influencer educators often share unauthorized or uncontrolled photos and videos (Küçükali & Serçemeli, 2019). Meanwhile, the role of social media in rapidly making individuals famous and reaching large audiences often undermines educational objectives (Shelton et al., 2020). Although these studies explain the potential impacts, they do not clearly discuss the academic challenges that educators who also function as influencers should address.

The phenomenon of lecturer influencers in Indonesia has continued to grow alongside the increasing penetration of social media in recent years. The Digital 2024: Indonesia report published by We Are Social and Meltwater indicates that the number of social media users in Indonesia has exceeded 139 million, reflecting a high level of digital engagement within society (Hootsuite dan We Are Social, 2021). This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Jeffrey P. Carpenter and Catharyn C. Shelton in their study entitled "The Education Influencer: A New Player in the Educator Professional Landscape." (J. P. Carpenter et al., 2023). The study introduces the concept of the education influencer, referring to educators who utilize social media to produce and disseminate educational content while simultaneously constructing their professional identity in the digital sphere. The findings reveal that lecturers' presence on social media can enhance academic visibility, expand professional networks, and strengthen communication between academics and the public. However, the study also highlights a potential shift in roles, from traditional academic authority toward becoming public figures who are increasingly oriented towards audience engagement and the dynamics of popularity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the phenomenon of influencer lecturers in Indonesia, particularly in relation to the commodification of learning practices, ethical communication violations, and professional boundaries on social media. Data was obtained through a combination of in-depth literature analysis and digital observation of lecturers' activities on social media platforms, aiming to capture both discursive representations and naturally occurring communication practices in digital spaces.

Data collection was conducted in stages through social media platform observation of influencer lecturers between 2022 and 2025, allowing for an iterative exploration of emerging themes such as communication ethics, professionalism, and the logic of popularity in influencer lecturers' practices. Meanwhile, digital observation across various social media platforms provided contextual insights into communication patterns, personal branding strategies, and interaction dynamics between lecturers and students within the social media ecosystem.

A purposive sampling technique was used to identify data sources directly relevant to the phenomenon of influencer lecturers in Indonesia. Within this library research and digital observation approach, participants were not understood as individuals interviewed directly, but rather as social actors represented through digital traces and academic publications.

The main data sources in this study include Indonesian lecturers who actively use social media as a medium for sharing educational content while simultaneously constructing their professional identity as influencers. The selection criteria include: (1) lecturers who have active social media accounts (such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, or other platforms), (2) those who consistently produce content related to education, academic motivation, or self-development, and (3) those who demonstrate significant audience engagement, indicated by follower counts, interactions, and content reach. The data were further supported by scholarly literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and research reports discussing education influencers, digital communication ethics, and professionalism in higher education. Additional data was obtained from policy documents related to academic ethics and guidelines on lecturers' use of social media.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher does not explicitly disclose the identities of individuals or accounts analyzed. This is done to protect privacy and avoid potential negative consequences for the subjects under study. This principle aligns with ethical research guidelines outlined in Principles of Biomedical Ethics (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019) Particularly the principles of respect for persons and confidentiality and is further reinforced by the American Psychological Association (APA) research ethics guidelines emphasizing anonymity and confidentiality in social research (Association, 2020).

Data collection was conducted using two main techniques, which is literature study and digital observation. The literature study was conducted to establish a conceptual and

empirical foundation regarding influencer lecturers, commodification of learning, communication ethics, and professional boundaries in higher education. Sources were collected from reputable academic journals, scholarly books, policy documents, and trusted research institution reports published between 2022 and 2026.

Digital observation was conducted to complement the literature data by systematically documenting lecturers' communication practices on social media. This observation included content analysis of influencer lecturers' posts across platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, including message forms, communication styles, personal branding strategies, and audience interaction patterns.

The data consisted of posts, videos, captions, comments, and other forms of interaction reflecting communication dynamics in digital spaces. All analyzed data were publicly available content and therefore did not violate individual privacy. To maintain research ethics, account identities were anonymized using specific codes. This approach enables the study to capture both discursive constructions in literature and real communication practices on social media, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the influencer lecturer phenomenon in the digital era.

Data from literature studies and digital observations were analyzed using iterative thematic analysis grounded in theoretical frameworks. Coding was conducted on textual literature and social media content (posts, captions, videos), which were then categorized into main themes such as commodification of learning, communication ethics violations, personal branding, and lecturers' professional boundaries in digital spaces. The analysis also highlighted communication patterns, lecturers' self-representation as influencers, and the influence of the attention economy in educational practices on social media. Validity was strengthened through constant comparison across data sources.

The coding and analysis were further informed by the Source Credibility Model proposed by Nailya Erdogan, which includes three dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. The findings indicate that trustworthiness becomes problematic when content does not reflect academic ethics, expertise is undermined by distractions from digital audiences, and attractiveness tends to dominate through engaging communication styles that risk shifting the educational function. The analysis is further extended using Kantian communication ethics by Immanuel Kant, (Johnson, 2022) particularly the principles of universality, humanity, and moral autonomy, which indicate potential ethical violations when students are used as content objects without consent. The analysis of professionalism draws on the work of Stephen J. Ball, (Ball, 2020) which highlights that influencer lecturers reflect a tension between academic professionalism and the logic of social media.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Communication ethics in this study is analyzed through the perspective of Kantian ethics. Kantian ethics, developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, is a

deontological ethical theory that emphasizes that the moral value of an action is not determined by its consequences, but by the intention and moral duty underlying it. (Wood, 1999) Kant argues that the only thing that is good without qualification is good will, which refers to actions performed purely out of moral obligation. The use of Kantian ethics in this study is based on its relevance in evaluating communication practices in the digital era that involve power relations, exploitation, and moral responsibility. Recent studies show that digital communication ethics require respect for individuals as subjects with dignity, rather than merely as objects in content production (Ess, 2022). Couldry and Mejias argue that in the context of data capitalism, individuals are often reduced to sources of economic value, highlighting the need for an ethical framework that reaffirms human dignity (Couldry & Mejias, 2021) This perspective aligns with the Kantian principle that humans must be treated as ends in themselves (end in itself). Therefore, Kantian ethics provides a relevant framework for analyzing the practices of influence lecturers, particularly when students are positioned as content objects. This approach allows for an evaluation that focuses not only on the consequences but also on the moral principles underlying communication practices, especially in safeguarding dignity, autonomy, and individual rights in digital spaces.

The history of moral philosophy has consistently generated ongoing debates about what makes an action right or wrong. Since ancient Greece, humans have sought universal standards to evaluate actions. Within this historical trajectory, Immanuel Kant, an 18th-century German philosopher, made a radical and fundamental contribution. Unlike the utilitarian tradition, which evaluates morality based on consequences or outcomes, Kant argued that good will is the only thing that can be called good unconditionally. He articulated this in Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, where he asserted that intelligence, courage, and even happiness can be used for good or bad purposes and therefore cannot be considered intrinsically good. Only goodwill, i.e., the will that acts out of moral duty, has intrinsic value (Johnson, 2022).

Kant called his theory deontological ethics (Wood, 1999). The word deon means duty, so the core of this theory is that the morality of an action is determined not by its consequences but by the underlying motives and principles. An action is considered moral only if it is performed out of moral duty, not due to emotion, fear, or expectation of personal gain. In this framework, an honest merchant who acts truthfully merely to avoid losing customers is only coincidentally fulfilling duty, whereas a merchant who acts honestly because they recognize honesty as a moral obligation is genuinely moral.

To test whether an action can be called moral, Kant introduced the concept of the categorical imperative. This imperative differs from hypothetical imperatives, which take the form: "If you want X, then do Y." For example, if someone wants to be healthy, they must exercise (Johnson, 2022). Such imperatives are always conditional and dependent on individual goals. In contrast, the categorical imperative is unconditional. It commands without qualification: act because it is a moral duty, not because of any desired outcome. Kant developed the categorical imperative in several formulations. One of the most famous is the principle of universality. Kant wrote: "Act only according to that maxim

whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1949). This principle means that before acting, one must ask: can the maxim of my action be made a universal rule without contradiction? If not, the action is immoral. A classic example is lying. If everyone lied, the concept of truth would collapse, as there would be no basis for trusting others' words. Therefore, lying cannot be made a universal law, and is thus morally wrong.

The second influential formulation is the principle of humanity. Kant emphasizes that humans must not be treated merely as means, but always also as ends in themselves (Kant, 1997). This is the essence of respecting human dignity. Humans possess an irreplaceable and invaluable worth. Using humans merely as tools for personal ends constitutes a serious moral violation.

Kant also speaks of autonomy. Morality is not blind obedience to external rules but adherence to moral law formulated through practical reasons. In other words, rational humans are autonomous beings because they bind themselves to universal moral law. True freedom for Kant is not the freedom to do anything, but the freedom to obey moral laws derived from reason. Kant envisioned an ideal moral community, which he called the Kingdom of Ends. In this community, each individual acts as if the principle of their action could become a universal law, and everyone treats others as ends, not as means (Johnson, 2022). The Kingdom of Ends represents a normative horizon: a vision of a world governed by universal moral law.

Kantian ethics is often praised for its consistency and universality, though it has also faced criticism. Some philosophers argue that Kantian ethics is too rigid. For instance, in the case of a murderer asking the whereabouts of a victim, Kant would still prohibit lying. For many, this seems unrealistic or even dangerous. Allen Wood, in Kant's Ethical Thought, notes that such rigidity gives the impression that Kantian ethics cannot adapt to real-world contexts. Another critique is that Kant overly emphasizes rationality while neglecting empathy or social relationships. However, philosophers such as Christine Korsgaard in Creating the Kingdom of Ends defend Kant, arguing that the principle of humanity sufficiently protects human dignity in social contexts.

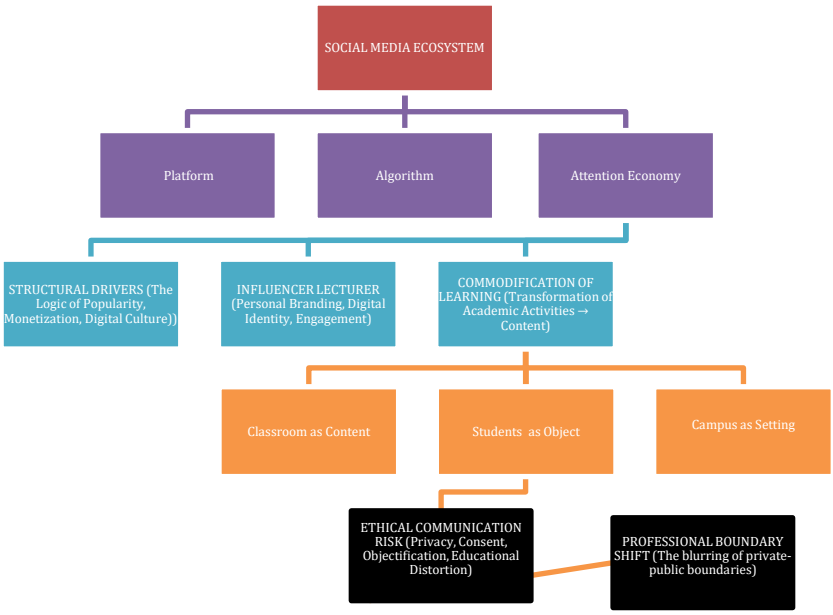
Regarding digital privacy, Kantian ethics rejects treating humans merely as data or advertising targets. Humans must always be respected as ends. Therefore, practices by technology companies that exploit users' personal data without consent clearly violate Kantian humanity principles. In terms of digital autonomy, Kant emphasizes that true freedom is freedom determined by rational law, not external manipulation. Today's algorithm-driven environments often restrict user freedom by presenting information designed to influence decisions. From a Kantian perspective, this is a serious threat to moral autonomy (Kant, 1989). Kantian ethics also teaches that moral actions must be universalizable. If the actions of an influencer lecturer were made universal law, education would turn into a commercialized arena. This is not only contradictory but also destroys trust between lecturers and students. Such practices fail the test of the categorical imperative.

The reflection from all this is that Kantian ethics still provides a very strong framework. The principle of universality demands consistency and rational logic in every action. The principle of humanity affirms respect for human dignity, which today is relevant to issues of privacy and digital exploitation. The principle of autonomy emphasizes true freedom, not the pseudo-freedom dictated by algorithms or market interests. And the Kingdom of Ends inspires a vision of an ideal society in which humans live respecting one another as dignified beings.

Thus, the researcher then constructs an ethical communication violation map from the Kantian perspective and the lens of commodification.

Figure 1.

Conceptual Chart Ethical Communication Violation of Influencer Lecturers



The Conceptual chart above illustrates a framework in which social media influencer lecturers can be categorized as committing ethical communication violations. From a Kantian ethical perspective, human beings should never be treated merely as means but must always also be regarded as ends. Kant's categorical imperative demands that every action we take should be able to serve as a universal law applicable to all. If a lecturer uses the classroom, students, or even the dynamics of academic guidance as material for digital content to enhance personal image or support commercial promotion, they are effectively treating students not as educational ends but as tools for achieving popularity and financial gain.

This is where the problem of commodification arises. Students are no longer seen as dignified subjects of learning but are reduced to objects whose value can be exchanged in the digital marketplace. Academic interactions, which should serve as sacred spaces for the exchange of knowledge, are transformed into stages for public consumption. This commodification not only erodes the lecturer's professionalism as an educator but also undermines the trust that underpins the lecturer-student relationship.

Within this context, Kant's legacy is not only an abstract ethical system but also a practical guide for assessing real-world issues in the digital era. The academic, business, and political spheres all require consistent moral standards. Kantianism, with its strengths and limitations, remains one of the most robust moral compasses for maintaining human integrity amid the rapid currents of commodification and relativism.

Kantian ethics reminds us that true morality cannot be sacrificed for convenience, profit, or popularity. True morality is the courage to act according to duty, even when it conflicts with personal interests or social pressures. This is the essence of goodwill, which is why Kantian ethics, more than two centuries after Kant wrote, remains vibrant and relevant. According to Freidson, professionalism is built through mastery of various competencies, including subject-matter expertise, communication skills, interpersonal relations, and public service (Freidson, 2021; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2021). Professionalism encompasses several essential aspects, including work ethics that reflect integrity in every action and decision, competence that demonstrates knowledge and skills to perform tasks effectively, respect for colleagues, superiors, and subordinates, and responsibility in completing tasks punctually and with dedication.

A profession is a type of work that requires expertise, utilizes scientific techniques, and demands high dedication. Expertise is acquired from specialized educational institutions through clear and accountable curricula. The greater the demands for a lecturer's professionalism, the more a lecturer as a professional must understand what constitutes a professional educator. Generally, a lecturer's professional attitude is observed from external factors; however, this does not fully reflect the potential they possess as an educator, instructor, and trainer. A professional can refer to an individual who holds a profession or the way someone performs their work according to that profession. Professionalism refers to the commitment of members of a profession to perform their work professionally, including the strategies used to achieve optimal results. Professionalism also denotes the quality of attitude a professional exhibit toward their profession, as well as the level of knowledge and skills they possess to carry out their duties.

Professionalization, on the other hand, refers to the process of improving the qualifications and competencies of members of a profession to achieve a standard of performance as a professional (C. C. Shelton et al., 2020). Professionalism refers to attitudes and behaviors that reflect high standards in carrying out a profession. In the academic profession, professionalism involves commitment to student development, continuously updated knowledge, and ethical behavior in interactions with students, parents, and society. Lecturers play a key role in developing students' potential. In the Society 5.0 era, students are guided to acquire 21st-century skills.

According to Law No. 14 of 2005 on teachers and lecturers, professionalism (Article 1, Paragraph 4) refers to an occupation performed professionally with certain competencies, such as professional expertise, skills, knowledge, and adherence to relevant norms. In line with this, lecturers must undergo competency tests, which serve as a

government measure to ensure the quality of education in Indonesia is maximized. These tests indicate the extent to which a lecturer masters their field of expertise (Manca & Ranieri, 2021).

Professionalization should be viewed as a continuous process. This process includes pre-service education, in-service training, professional organization guidance, public recognition of the academic profession, enforcement of professional codes of ethics, certification, improvement of prospective lecturers' quality, and collective well-being, all contributing to professional development. A lecturer in the Society 5.0 era is one who is aware of the digital economy, artificial intelligence, big data, and robotics, without neglecting the noble task of cultivating students' character. They are lecturers who are familiar with innovation and excel in educational creation and instruction (Rugaiyah & al., 2025).

Based on the Source Credibility Model (SCM) formulated by Ohanian, three primary elements form the foundation of an influencer's impact: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990a). Trustworthiness reflects the extent to which an audience can rely on the influencer to provide accurate information or opinions, closely tied to their integrity, honesty, and reputation. Expertise encompasses the level of knowledge or skill the influencer possesses in a specific field, indicating their ability to deliver credible and relevant information. Attractiveness refers to physical appearance, style, or personal characteristics that can capture attention and create an emotional connection with the audience.

In communication, credibility is a key determinant of how one is perceived by others. Etymologically, credibility comes from the Latin word credibly, meaning "worthy of belief." This origin highlights that credibility is the foundation of social, academic, and professional relationships. Without credibility, healthy relationships between individuals and the public, teachers and students, or leaders and their communities cannot be established.

Hornby (2005), in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, defines credibility as the quality that makes someone or something believable and trustworthy. This definition emphasizes that credibility is not merely a matter of knowledge or technical skill but also how this quality is perceived by the public. An expert may possess extensive knowledge, but if they cannot convince their audience, their credibility is questioned. In other words, credibility represents the interaction between objective competence and subjective perception.

In the context of communication, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) state that source credibility is determined by two main dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise refers to the extent to which someone is perceived to have knowledge and skills in a specific field, while trustworthiness relates to the moral integrity and honesty of the source. These two dimensions are inseparable, as expertise without trustworthiness breeds doubt, while trustworthiness without expertise feels hollow.

Credibility has been widely discussed in communication and media studies as a fundamental factor influencing audience trust. Hovland and Weis define credibility as the

extent to which a source is perceived as trustworthy and competent in delivering information. (Hovland & Weiss, 1951)This perspective highlights that credibility is not merely an inherent attribute, but a perception formed by the audience based on the source's expertise and reliability. McCroskey emphasizes that credibility is closely related to ethos, which includes dimensions such as competence, character, and goodwill (Metzger et al., 2010). These elements determine how audiences evaluate whether a communicator is worthy of trust. In contemporary digital contexts, credibility extends beyond individuals to include institutions and media platforms. Metzger et al. (2010) argue that credibility in online environments is shaped by both content quality and source reputation, as audiences rely on heuristic and social cues to assess information.

From another perspective, Aristotle in Rhetoric emphasizes that credibility is closely tied to ethos, the character and morality of the speaker. Ethos, along with logos (logic) and pathos (emotion), forms a primary pillar of persuasion. Since classical times, credibility has been understood not merely as a personal attribute but as a communication strategy grounded in morality and honesty. In the Aristotelian framework, credibility emerges from consistent character demonstrated in practice, not just verbal claims.

In contemporary contexts, O'Keefeadds that credibility is the audience's perception of the source, and this perception is dynamic (O'Keefe, 1990). Credibility is not permanent; it can change based on interaction, experience, and behavioral consistency. This is highly relevant in the digital era, where an individual's credibility can rise or collapse in seconds due to a single social media post. Credibility is not only about what is said but also how one manages their image, information, and interaction with the public.

In this section, the researcher interprets the results of thematic coding by classifying the data into three main categories: credibility, communication ethics, and professionalism. For instance, content that displays lecturers' expressions of anger toward students, the practice of live streaming during classroom sessions, and the use of academic interactions as part of commercial promotion are categorized as forms of digital self-representation that intersect with issues of communication ethics and professionalism. From the perspective of communication ethics, this phenomenon relates to how messages are conveyed, the power relations between communicators and audiences, and the impact of communication on the dignity of others. This classification serves as the foundation for determining the analytical approach employed in this study.

The data were analyzed using the Source Credibility Model developed by Nailya Erdogan in her work "Construction and Validation of a Scale to Measure Celebrity Endorsers' Perceived Expertise, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness" (Ohanian, 1990b). In this context, lecturers' practices of displaying academic activities on social media indicate efforts to build credibility through three main dimensions: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. However, the findings reveal that the trustworthiness dimension becomes problematic when the content presented does not fully reflect academic values and communication ethics, such as the use of excessive emotional expressions in public digital spaces or the blending of academic interactions with commercial interests. In terms of

expertise, although lecturers continue to demonstrate their academic competence through teaching activities, its effectiveness may be diminished when the learning process is disrupted by engagement with digital audiences, resulting in less effective delivery of educational messages. Meanwhile, the attractiveness dimension appears dominant through engaging communication styles, dramatization of classroom situations, and the integration of entertainment elements, which, from a communication ethics perspective, may shift the function of educational communication into mere public consumption.

The findings based on credibility analysis are further evaluated using a Kantian ethical framework as proposed by Immanuel Kant in "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals" (Johnson, 2022; Kant, 1997). Based on the principle of universality, the practice of recording and disseminating classroom interactions must be questioned in terms of whether it is appropriate to be adopted as a general norm in educational communication. From the principle of humanity, the findings indicate potential ethical violations when students are no longer positioned as equal subjects of communication but rather as objects of representation in digital content. The principle of moral autonomy is also relevant in assessing whether lecturers consciously consider the ethical implications of communication before publishing such content. Furthermore, within the framework of the kingdom of ends, communication practices that neglect students' consent and comfort risk violating respect for individual dignity in academic interactions.

Furthermore, the findings are analyzed through the lens of professionalism to assess the extent to which lecturers' practices align with academic professional standards. Drawing on the work of Stephen J. Ball in "The Education Debate", (Ball, 2020) professionalism encompasses not only academic competence but also communication ethics, professional relationships, and social responsibility. In this context, the integration of teaching activities with digital content production reflects a tension between the demands of professionalism and the logic of social media. Pedagogical communication may be compromised when classroom interactions are no longer oriented toward students' learning needs but instead toward external audiences. Moreover, professional relationships between lecturers and students may become problematic when academic communication is publicly disseminated without clear boundaries, thereby blurring the distinction between private and public spheres in education. Thus, communication ethics emerges as a crucial aspect in evaluating the practices of influencer lecturers, as it involves moral responsibility in message delivery, the maintenance of equitable relationships, and the protection of students' dignity in all academic communication processes.

In one piece of documented content, a lecturer uploaded a recording of academic guidance with students. In this recording, the lecturer displays expressions of anger toward students perceived as not taking the guidance seriously. The students' expressions are also visible in the content, creating a hierarchical impression between lecturer and students. Although there is a possibility that this scene was dramatized for content purposes, the interaction is no longer part of internal academic processes and has been published to the public via social media.

Interestingly, the content also included commercial product promotion that appeared after the emotional moment between the lecturer and students. Thus, academic interactions that should have been private became part of a communication strategy intertwined with commercial interests. The combination of academic guidance, emotional expression, and commercial promotion illustrates the blurring of boundaries between the professional role of an educator and that of a digital influencer. Students, whose dignity and privacy should be protected, potentially become part of a commodification strategy in branding efforts.

From a Kantian ethical perspective, this situation raises moral concerns because students may be treated to achieve other ends, namely popularity or commercial profit. Such practices not only pose ethical issues but also demonstrate the mixing of educational functions with commercial interests, potentially affecting the lecturer's professionalism as an educator.

In another documented case, a lecturer was observed delivering lecture material while live-streaming the learning process on a social media platform. In this context, the lecturer not only interacts with students in the classroom but also occasionally diverts attention to the camera to greet digital audiences and read incoming comments. This situation can disrupt the learning focus, as students are aware that their activities are being observed by the public in real time.

In one moment during the live session, when a student provided an incorrect answer, the lecturer displayed signs of displeasure and raised their voice. What should have been a private academic interaction transformed into public viewing in a digital space. This phenomenon illustrates a blending of roles between teaching activities and digital content production. Even though students' identities are not always fully revealed, these academic interactions still become part of public consumption. Within the scope of this study, such situations indicate the potential commodification of the lecturer-student relationship for personal branding purposes on social media. Students, who should be in a safe learning environment, may become part of digital content without full control over how their representation is distributed publicly.

Other documentation shows classroom activities being recorded and published on social media, where some students' faces are clearly visible. In one instance, a student asked a question about why students were required to publish scholarly articles. The concern is not only with the question itself but also with the presence of other students in the frame who appear unprepared to be recorded. This situation demonstrates the potential commodification of students as part of digital content without clear consent.

These phenomena raise important questions regarding the position of students in lecturers' content production practices. Are students genuinely engaged as part of an open learning process, or are they unknowingly becoming part of a personal branding strategy on social media? From the perspective of academic ethics and professionalism, these questions are crucial because they involve the protection of student dignity, privacy, and rights within the educational environment.

Causes of Ethical Communication Violations by Influencer Lecturers

The phenomenon of ethical communication violations by lecturers who also act as influencers cannot be understood merely as individual misconduct, but rather as the result of the interaction between structural, cultural, and digital factors. This finding is consistent with the study of Jeffrey P. Carpenter and Catharyn C. Shelton, which demonstrates that the emergence of education influencers has led to a shift in academic roles, from traditional scientific authority to public figures increasingly shaped by social media logic (J. P. Carpenter et al., 2022).This shift not only transforms how lecturers interact with students but also reorients academic communication from knowledge-based practices toward visibility and digital performance.

First, role conflict between lecturers and influencers constitutes a fundamental source of ethical dilemmas. Drawing on the work of Neil Postman in Amusing Ourselves to Death , modern media tend to transform all forms of communication, including education, into entertainment (Selwyn, 2021). In this context, academic activities that should be reflective, critical, and grounded in scholarly values are instead repackaged into dramatic, emotional, and engaging content to attract audiences. This is evident in the practices of influencer lecturers who showcase classroom interactions, expressions of anger, or dynamics as part of digital narratives. This condition reinforces the findings of George Veletsianos, who argues that educators' presence in digital spaces often blurs the boundary between professional roles and public performativity (Veletsianos, 2021). Consequently, lecturers are no longer solely facilitators of learning but also performers who "play roles" for digital audiences, thereby placing academic ethical standards at risk of negotiation.

Second, the structural pressure of social media logic, particularly the attention economy, serves as a key driving force. According to Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck, public attention is a highly valuable economic resource. Within social media ecosystems, platform algorithms actively promote content that generates high engagement, especially content that evokes emotions, controversy, or sensationalism (Davenport & Beck, 2001). As a result, lecturers are incentivized to produce content that is not only informative but also emotionally appealing and potentially viral, even at the expense of ethical communication standards. Practices such as recording classroom interactions without consent or displaying exaggerated emotional expressions become strategies to increase engagement. This finding aligns with Shoshana Zuboff, who emphasizes that attention-based digital economies exploit human experiences as commodities (Zuboff, 2020). In this context, students' academic experiences risk being reduced to objects of public consumption.

Third, the drive for personal branding and social currency also plays a significant role in shaping influencer lecturers' behavior. Drawing on the concept proposed by Jonah Berger, individuals tend to share content that enhances their self-image in the eyes of others (Berger, 2013). In practice, lecturers construct digital identities through distinctive communication styles, such as being assertive, humorous, relaxed, or even confrontational, which become part of their personal branding. These identities are often built through interactions with students in classroom settings, thereby risking the transformation of

academic relationships into tools of self-presentation. This is consistent with the findings of Crystal Abidin, who highlights that self-branding practices in social media environments prioritize performance and visibility over substantive value. In educational contexts, this shift may redirect focus from the quality of learning to the attractiveness of content (Abidin, 2021).

Fourth, the lack of digital communication ethics literacy further exacerbates the risk of ethical violations. According to Marshall McLuhan in Understanding Media, media extend human experience while simultaneously blurring the boundaries between private and public spheres. In the digital era, these boundaries become increasingly fragile, allowing activities that were once private, such as academic mentoring, classroom discussions, or personal interactions between lecturers and students to be easily publicized without careful ethical consideration. Many lecturers have not fully developed awareness of the ethical implications of such practices, particularly regarding issues of consent, privacy, and power relations. This condition is reinforced by the findings of Neil Selwyn, who points out that the digital transformation of education is often not accompanied by adequate ethical preparedness among educators (Selwyn, 2021).

Fifth, the commodification of education within digital spaces represents a structural factor that further intensifies ethical violations. Drawing on the work of Vincent Mosco, commodification occurs when something with social value is transformed into economic value (Mosco, 2009). In the case of influencer lecturers, students, classrooms, and academic interactions can be converted into digital content with commercial value. Learning activities that should prioritize knowledge transfer and character development are instead repurposed as content production aimed at generating financial gain, whether through platform monetization or brand collaborations. This finding is consistent with Christian Fuchs, who argues that digital capitalism drives the commodification of nearly all aspects of life, including education (Fuchs, 2021). In such conditions, core academic values, such as integrity, responsibility, and respect for students, are at risk of being subordinated to market-driven logics.

Ethical communication violations by influencer lecturers result from a complex interplay of role conflict, digital economic pressures, identity-driven motivations, insufficient ethical literacy, and the commodification of education. These factors do not operate in isolation but are deeply interconnected, forming an ecosystem that not only enables but, in many cases, actively encourages ethical violations in academic communication practices on social media. This indicates that ethical issues in the context of influencer lecturers are not merely individual concerns but structural problems that require serious attention from educational institutions, policymakers, and the broader academic community.

The Relationship Between Influencer Lecturer Ethical Communuication Violations and Educator Professionalism in the Social Media Era

Lecturer professionalism in higher education is a normative construct grounded in moral integrity, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to protecting student dignity.

Within the framework of contemporary educational ethics, lecturers function as guardians of intellectual and moral values in the academic sphere (Veletsianos, 2021). Therefore, any form of deviation in professional practice, particularly in communication, must be understood as a serious violation of the very foundations of the profession. In the era of social media, such professional violations have undergone significant transformation because they occur in digital public spaces that are permanent, reproducible, and far-reaching in scope.

The development of social media has created conditions in which the boundary between personal and professional identity has become increasingly blurred. Lecturers who act as influencers face a dilemma between maintaining academic integrity and meeting the demands of digital visibility. In many cases, the pressure to produce engaging and viral content encourages the violation of professional boundaries. Interactions that should remain private, such as reprimands or academic conflicts with students, are instead published as content. This practice not only obscures the line between private and public spheres but also places students in a vulnerable position as objects of digital exposure without adequate protection. Recent literature emphasizes that failure to maintain professional boundaries in digital spaces can damage pedagogical relationships and diminish trust in the teaching profession (Selwyn, 2021).

Another crucial dimension is the violation of communicative integrity. Communication in educational contexts has a strong ethical dimension, requiring respect, empathy, and responsibility for its consequences. However, in the practices of lecturer influencers, communication is often reduced to a public performance oriented toward audience attention. Expressions of anger, sarcasm, or even humiliation directed at students are no longer understood as part of pedagogical dynamics that must be managed professionally, but rather as dramatic elements that enhance the appeal of content. This phenomenon reflects a shift from reflective pedagogical communication to performative communication governed by the logic of the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001) The ethical value of communication is diminished by the need to attract attention and increase audience engagement, as explained in theories of content virality (Berger, 2013).

Professional violations by lecturers in the social media era became even more complex through the commodification of pedagogical relationships. Lecture student relationships, which should be grounded in trust, respect, and educational purpose, are instead exploited as sources of content and even economic gain. In this practice, academic interactions are transformed into narratives for public consumption, often with additional commercial elements such as product promotion. Critical perspectives on digital media indicate that this phenomenon cannot be separated from the logic of digital capitalism, which monetizes attention and social interaction (Zuboff, 2020). Relationshipspedagogical relationships are no longer viewed as ethical spaces, but as assets that can be exploited within the digital economy.

In this study, the researcher conducted observations of three lecturer influencers Indonesia who met the criteria of being active producers of educational content on social

media, having a minimum of 100,000 followers, and directly involving students in their content. The empirical findings reveal a consistent pattern of professional violations across all three subjects. Academic interactions, including situations of conflict and reprimands directed at students, were recorded and published as part of content production strategies. Negative emotional expressions, particularly anger, were no longer managed as part of pedagogical responsibility, but were openly displayed to increase audience appeal. This phenomenon reflects the transformation of academic communication into a performative practice governed by the logic of digital visibility.

These practices may be analyzed through the framework of digital professionalism, which emphasizes the importance of integrating professional ethics with behavior in digital spaces (J. Carpenter, 2019) Contemporary literature demonstrates that social media has blurred the boundaries between the personal and professional identities of educators, thereby increasing the risk of ethical violations in communication. In this context, lecturers do not act merely as individuals, but also as representatives of their institutions and of the profession itself; consequently, every action in digital public spaces carries broad ethical implications (Fuchs, 2021).

The tendency to use emotion as a performative strategy for increasing audience engagement constitutes an important finding of this observation. Content displaying interpersonal conflict has been shown to attract greater public attention, in line with studies on virality dynamics demonstrating that high-intensity emotions, especially anger, are more likely to be disseminated (Brady, 2021). However, in educational contexts, such emotional exploitation creates tension between the need for digital visibility and the demands of professional ethics. When pedagogical communication is reduced to an emotional commodity, the educational function itself becomes distorted.

The findings concerning the blending of educational functions and commercialization indicate a process of commodifying pedagogical relationships. In several cases, content featuring lecturer-student interactions was accompanied by product promotions or endorsements, suggesting that academic relationships had been converted into sources of economic value. This phenomenon is consistent with analyses within the framework of platform capitalism, where social interaction is monetized through digital mechanisms (Srnicek, 2021). In this context, students are no longer positioned as subjects of learning, but as part of a content production ecosystem that generates economic value. This constitutes a serious violation of the principle of professionalism, which places the interests of learners as the highest priority (Freidson, 2021).

A further aspect of the relationship between ethical communication violations and breaches of professionalism is the neglect of student privacy and dignity. Although identities are not always explicitly disclosed, the visual and narrative representations within such content may enable audiences to identify the individuals involved. From the perspective of digital ethics, this practice violates the principles of informed consent and the protection of individuals in subordinate positions (Markham, 2021). Students, as parties situated within an unequal power relationship, face limitations in providing consent

that is truly free from pressure. Therefore, the publication of academic interactions without adequate safeguards may be considered a form of structural exploitation (Floridi, 2021).

Further observational findings indicate that professional violations by lecturers in the social media era are not incidental, but rather reflect systemic patterns associated with the logic of digital platforms. Social media platforms are designed to maximize user engagement through algorithms that prioritize emotional and controversial content (Kaye, 2022). Under these conditions, lecturer influencers are pressured to adapt their communicative practices to such algorithmic logic (Cinelli, 2021). As a consequence, the values of professionalism that emphasize reflection, prudence, and ethical responsibility become marginalized by the need to maintain digital relevance.

This phenomenon signals a redefinition of educator professionalism in the digital era. Professionalism is no longer assessed solely based on academic competence, but also on the ability to manage one's digital identity ethically (Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2021). However, when the management of digital identity is driven more by the logic of popularity than by ethical principles, professionalism deteriorates. This is reinforced by recent studies showing that educators' use of social media without clear ethical guidelines can generate role conflict and moral dilemmas.

The observational findings regarding the three lecturer influencers in this study indicate that professional violations result from a complex interaction between individual, structural, and technological factors. At the individual level, there is a tendency to pursue visibility and economic gain. At the structural level, there is a lack of specific regulations and ethical guidelines governing lecturers' use of social media. At the technological level, digital platforms encourage the reproduction of emotional and controversial content. The combination of these factors creates conditions that enable professional violations to occur systematically.

The implications of these findings are highly significant for higher education. Lecturer professionalism can no longer be understood conventionally but must instead be examined within the context of an ever-evolving digital ecosystem. Accordingly, a more comprehensive approach is required to build educator professionalism, one that includes strengthening digital literacy, internalizing communication ethics, and developing institutional regulations that are adaptive to the dynamics of social media. Without such efforts, there is a risk that educator professionalism will continue to be eroded by the logic of digital platforms, which does not always align with educational values.

To understand lecturer professionalism violations in the social media era, this study employs Stephen J. Ball's theoretical framework of performativity, which is particularly relevant in explaining the fundamental transformation of professional practice in higher education (Ball, 2020). Ball argues that under neoliberal regimes, professionalism is no longer governed by the profession's internal values, such as ethics, critical reflection, and intellectual responsibility, but by external mechanisms that emphasize measurement, visibility, and displayable performance. In contemporary developments, this logic appears

not only in the form of audits or institutional evaluations, but also in digital ecosystems shaped by algorithms and the attention economy.

These performative pressures become even more intense because they operate in highly competitive and open environments. Social media is not merely a communication medium, but also a space of real-time public evaluation. Recent studies show that the professional identities of academics are increasingly shaped by digital expectations that demand public engagement, visibility, and the capacity to build a personal brand (Lupton, 2021). Under these conditions, lecturers are no longer assessed solely on the basis of scholarly contributions or teaching quality, but also on their ability to be "present" and "recognized" in digital space.

The dominance of the logic of performativity has produced a redefinition of the indicators of professionalism. Whereas professionalism was once measured in terms of depth of knowledge, academic integrity, and contribution to the development of knowledge, these indicators have now shifted toward easily measurable quantitative metrics such as follower counts, interaction rates, and content reach. This phenomenon is consistent with studies on the quantified self in academia, which show that academics are increasingly encouraged to measure and publicly display their performance through digital platforms (Moore & Robinson, 2021). In this context, professionalism becomes something that is "performed" rather than "practiced."

This transformation has serious implications for professional ethical practice. When lecturers operate within the logic of performativity, there is a tendency to prioritize attention-grabbing content over content that is ethical and reflective. Manca and Ranieri (2021) show that academics' use of social media is often influenced by the pressure to increase visibility, which may encourage compromise in professional standards (Manca & Ranieri, 2021). In this situation, the boundary between academic communication and entertainment communication becomes blurred, thereby increasing the risk of professional violations, particularly in interactions with students.

From the perspective of neoliberal subjectivity, lecturers are positioned as agents who must actively manage and market themselves in digital spaces (Gill & Orgad, 2022). This creates pressure to continuously produce relevant and engaging content, even when doing so comes at the expense of ethical principles. In the case of lecturer influencers, this pressure manifests in the need to package academic experiences, including interactions with students, as narratives suitable for public consumption. As a result, pedagogical relationships are no longer regarded as ethical spaces that must be protected, but as symbolic resources that can be utilized to enhance visibility.

The logic of performativity is further reinforced by the algorithmic infrastructure that governs content distribution on social media. Bucher demonstrates that algorithms are not neutral but actively shape user behavior by prioritizing certain forms of content (Bucher, 2021). In this case, emotional, controversial, and personal content tends to receive greater exposure. Lecturer influencers seeking to maintain their digital relevance are thus indirectly encouraged to align their communicative practices with these algorithmic preferences.

This creates a cycle in which conduct that deviates from professional standards is in fact reinforced by the system.

Within this framework, lecturer professionalism violations are no longer merely individual acts of deviance, but rather the result of a complex interaction among structural pressures, platform logic, and the construction of new professional identities. Professionalism no longer stands as a stable normative principle, but as a practice continuously negotiated under conditions of pressure and ambiguity. Raaper and Olssen demonstrate that within the context of neoliberal higher education, academics often experience conflict between professional values and performance demands, which may lead to practices that are not entirely ethical (Raaper & Olssen, 2020).

The dominance of performativity also has the potential to produce what is termed ethical drift, namely a gradual shift in the ethical standards considered acceptable (Shore & Wright, 2021). When practices that were once considered unprofessional, such as exposing interactions with students or displaying excessive emotion, become common and even publicly rewarded, the normalization of ethical violations takes place. In the long term, this condition may lead to the collective erosion of professional standards.

Through Stephen J. Ball's lens, lecturer professionalism violations in the social media era may therefore be understood because of the dominance of the logic of performativity, which shifts the orientation of professionalism from values to visibility, from ethics to performance, and from moral responsibility to audience response. Lecturers no longer function solely as academic actors, but also as subjects who are continuously displayed and who continuously perform in digital spaces. Under such conditions, maintaining professionalism is not merely a matter of compliance with ethical codes, but also of the ability to negotiate the structural pressures that shaped professional practice in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The practice of influencer lecturers enters a realm filled with ethical dilemmas when students, classrooms, and academic facilities are treated as commodities for social media content. This commodification violates the principles of professionalism because the teaching and learning process, which should be grounded in trust and dignity, is transformed into a public spectacle. The results of the analysis show that influencer lecturers' use of social media not only has the potential but in fact leads to violations of communication ethics, blurred professional boundaries, and a decline in academic credibility, which directly affects the quality of students' learning experiences and the protection of their rights in the digital era.

The findings also reveal an increasing trend of commodification, where influencer lecturers actively package students' expressions, emotions, and interactions as digital content oriented toward attention, visibility, and audience engagement. This condition reflects a shift in the function of educational communication from an ethical and reflective space into a performative practice that risks undermining the fundamental values of

education. This study emphasizes the urgent need for a clear separation between the role of lecturers as educators and as public figures in digital spaces. Influencer lecturers must consciously establish, internalize, and maintain clear ethical boundaries to preserve professionalism, academic integrity, and to protect students' dignity and privacy as subjects of education.

Regardless of whether the content is intended for academic purposes or merely entertainment, students must not be exploited as objects without their consent. Privacy, a sense of security, and the right to be respected are fundamental rights of students. If lecturers disregard such consent, they not only violate academic communication ethics but also damage their credibility and professionalism. While social media can be used to expand the impact of education, it must not come at the expense of moral values, professional ethics, and student trust. Only in this way can educator professionalism be sustained in the open digital era.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution

Putra, R.A, Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization, Project Administration. **Konggoro, D,** Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing – Review & Editing, Supervision. **Fitri**, **M**., Investigation, Data Curation, Writing – Review & Editing, Validation. **Koroglu, O,** Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

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