

Identity Categorization in Taiwanese Gay Users' Pride Parade IG Posts

Ting-Yu Liu, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan
Chin-Hui Chen, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

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Abstract

Following the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan, LGBTQ+ issues have become more visible in public discourse. This study explores how Taiwanese gay men construct sexual identity through Instagram posts during the Taiwan Pride Parade. Grounded in social identity theory, the research analyzes 125 posts collected via snowball sampling, using a grounded theory approach to uncover identity-construction strategies. Two main textual strategies emerged. First, hashtag framing (e.g., #LoveWins, #同志驕傲 [#GayPride]) functions as a clear form of self-identification and community affiliation. Second, the use of community-specific jargon (e.g., “女神” [goddess], “熊” [bear], “姊妹” [sister]) reflects subcultural belonging and sexual orientation through implicit, coded language. These strategies illustrate how users negotiate visibility, express solidarity, and perform identity within digital queer spaces. The findings emphasize the fluid, performative nature of LGBTQ+ identity on social media and offer insights into queer self-representation and community practices in contemporary Taiwan.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ identity construction, Instagram, sociolinguistics

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Introduction and Context

Preface

On the global stage of RuPaul's Drag Race, when Taiwanese performer Nymphia Wind raised the crown in 2024 and shouted, "And Taiwan, this is for you!", it marked more than an individual triumph—it was a declaration of national queer visibility. In an era where social media serves as both platform and archive for identity performance, such public affirmations reflect a deeper sociolinguistic phenomenon: the digital construction of queer identity in specific cultural contexts like Taiwan.

Background and Rationale

Despite being the first Asian nation to legalize same-sex marriage in 2019, Taiwan continues to grapple with tensions between legal progress and social acceptance. Structural issues such as limited LGBTQ+ education, workplace discrimination, and familial stigma persist (Tsai & Liu, 2022; Rainbow Equality Platform, 2023). In this evolving environment, social media platforms have emerged as vital arenas where LGBTQ+ individuals construct, express, and negotiate their identities.

Among various queer cultural expressions, the Taiwan Pride Parade—Asia's largest LGBTQ+ public event—has evolved from a marginal protest into a mainstream celebration. With annual participation exceeding 150,000, the parade has become not only a political platform but also a site for embodied self-performance. Increasingly, these performances are documented and extended via Instagram, where users use both images and text to articulate who they are and what they stand for.

While prior research has examined media representations of LGBTQ+ communities (Martin, 2003; Sullivan, 2003), fewer studies have addressed how queer individuals themselves actively construct identity on digital platforms, especially within non-Western contexts. In Taiwan, sociolinguistic scholarship has largely focused on policy or offline activism, leaving digital identity performance underexplored (Cheng, 2013; Shiau, 2008).

Research Focus

This study explores how Taiwanese gay men construct and categorize sexual identity through Instagram posts during the 2024 Taiwan Pride Parade. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the study focuses on three key textual strategies: public labeling, hashtag framing, and community-specific language. These are understood not only as expressions of individuality, but also as acts of community alignment and discursive positioning.

Rather than viewing Instagram captions and hashtags as merely decorative, this research treats them as linguistic artifacts embedded with social meaning. Through their discursive choices, users engage in identity categorization—labeling themselves, signaling affiliation, and negotiating visibility in a digitally mediated queer space.

Research Aim

This paper aims to:

1. Analyze the textual strategies by which Taiwanese gay users construct sexual identity on Instagram during Pride;
2. Examine how these strategies reflect broader themes of social categorization, cultural belonging, and queer visibility;
3. Contribute to queer sociolinguistics by foregrounding Taiwan-specific digital data and discourse practices.

The Taiwan Pride Parade serves as a particularly rich site for investigating identity work in action. As a temporally compressed and emotionally charged event, amplified by social media, it provides a unique lens through which to observe how queer digital performances articulate individuality, solidarity, and resistance.

The following chapter provides a literature review on identity construction in LGBTQ+ digital contexts, with specific attention to sociolinguistic approaches and the role of social media in mediating queer self-representation.

Literature Review

LGBTQ+ Identity Construction in Taiwan

While Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage in 2019, LGBTQ+ visibility remains shaped by persistent social, cultural, and political tensions. As Zhou and Hu (2019) argue, public tolerance has grown, but deep-seated stigmas in family and educational systems continue to constrain full social inclusion. Within this context, the Taiwan Pride Parade has become more than a celebratory event—it is a performative site where queer identities are enacted, affirmed, and made visible through symbolic participation (Ayoub et al., 2021).

Luo (2004) further suggests that Pride functions as a medium through which private desires are transformed into political expression. These moments of public performance gain new layers of meaning when mediated through social platforms such as Instagram, where queer identity is constructed through the convergence of visual and textual resources. During Pride, such digital acts blur boundaries between personal expression and collective representation.

Taiwan's LGBTQ+ communities have long used coded language and subcultural terms to negotiate visibility. Social media now extends the reach of these practices, enabling users to craft identity narratives that are both contextually grounded and broadly legible—especially during high-visibility moments like Pride.

Social Identity Theory and Identity Categorization

This study adopts Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as its central theoretical framework. SIT posits that individuals define themselves in relation to social groups through three sequential stages: categorization, identification, and comparison. The first stage—categorization—is particularly relevant here, as it involves linguistic and symbolic acts of labeling that situate the self within a group.

In the context of LGBTQ+ discourse on Instagram, identity categorization occurs when users deploy visible textual markers that signal group affiliation. Hashtags such as #同志驕傲 (#GayPride) or #LoveWins serve as overt declarations of in-group membership, while culturally coded expressions like “姊妹” (sister) or “女神” (goddess) activate shared subcultural knowledge. These choices are not neutral—they are performative acts that construct and reaffirm belonging within a specific queer sociocultural space.

SIT thus provides a valuable lens for analyzing how individual discursive acts (e.g., hashtagging, slang use) participate in larger processes of group alignment, recognition, and boundary work.

Queer Self-Representation and Platform Affordances

Previous studies on queer digital expression have shown how social media enables identity construction through curated posts, captions, hashtags, and affective narratives (Cover, 2017; Marwick, 2015). On Instagram, LGBTQ+ users often engage in identity signaling by selecting linguistic and symbolic codes intelligible to in-group audiences while navigating broader public exposure.

Morgan (2022) and Duguay (2016) highlight that such platforms serve as tools for both empowerment and negotiation. Through hashtagging, community jargon, and subtle linguistic choices, users engage in selective visibility—choosing how to present themselves and which aspects of identity to foreground. These affordances are especially important during collective events like Pride, where the platform acts as a stage for digital performance.

Unlike traditional media representations where LGBTQ+ identities were often framed through voyeurism, othering, or pathologization (Martin, 2003; Sullivan, 2003), social media platforms allow queer individuals to reclaim authorship of their identities. This shift from being seen to self-representing marks a fundamental epistemological and discursive transformation.

Linguistic Strategies and Identity Signaling on Instagram

Emerging literature has identified Instagram as a site where identity is co-constructed through both visual and textual discourse (Pandey, 2016; Winston, 2013). Of particular interest to this study is how textual strategies—especially hashtags and queer-coded language—serve as tools of identity categorization.

For example, use of hashtags like #LoveWins or #GayTaiwan not only reflects affiliation but also signals alignment with global and local queer narratives. Similarly, insider terms such as “姊妹” or “女神” activate shared subcultural knowledge, creating a sense of “we-ness” among readers who understand the context. These expressions operate as boundary markers between in-group and out-group members (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Goffman, 1981).

Research Gap and Contribution

Although studies such as McConnell et al. (2017) and Wargo (2017) have analyzed queer youth identity construction on Western social media platforms, limited attention has been

paid to Taiwan. Even fewer studies focus specifically on identity categorization and how it unfolds through textual strategies in local digital contexts like Instagram during Pride.

This study addresses that gap by offering a Taiwan-specific, sociolinguistically informed analysis of identity categorization among gay men. By focusing on discursive practices such as hashtagging and coded language, the research highlights how individuals construct social identities that are contextually meaningful and politically resonant

Research Questions (RQ)

To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following research question:

RQ1: How do Taiwanese gay men utilize textual strategies on Instagram during the Pride Parade to construct and categorize their sexual identity?

The next chapter outlines the methodological approach used to answer this question, including data collection, sampling criteria, and the analytical framework based on Social Identity Theory and qualitative discourse analysis.

Methodology

Overview of Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive netnographic approach to examine how Taiwanese gay men construct and categorize sexual identity through Instagram posts during the 2024 Taiwan Pride Parade. Guided by Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and supported by discourse analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), the research explores identity as a performative and contextually situated act enacted through linguistic and semiotic strategies.

The analysis centers on identity categorization—the first and foundational stage of SIT—in which individuals linguistically label themselves to signal group affiliation. This chapter details the data collection process, sampling criteria, analytical framework, and coding strategy.

Data Collection and Sampling Criteria

A total of 123 public Instagram posts were selected using targeted hashtags related to the 2024 Taiwan Pride Parade (e.g., #台灣同志遊行, #taiwanpride2024, #同志驕傲). Posts were collected between October 26 and November 26, 2024, capturing identity expressions before, during, and after the event.

The selection process followed a manual screening protocol and adhered to the following criteria:

Table 1*Data Inclusion Criteria*

| Criterion | Requirement & Explanation |
|--------------------|---|
| Language | Post caption must be $\geq 80\%$ in Mandarin; hashtags in English are allowed |
| Posting Period | Posts must be published between October 26 and November 26, 2024 |
| Identity Relevance | Posts must reflect gay identity; verified via user profile or textual/visual content |
| Content Type | Only posts with human images and captions were included; memes or depersonalized visuals excluded |
| User Contribution | Max. two posts per user per week to avoid data skew and overrepresentation |
| Hashtag Relevance | Must contain at least one LGBTQ+ or Pride-related hashtag (e.g., #gay, #同志, #TaiwanPride) |

This process ensured cultural relevance, linguistic coherence, and ethical rigor. Posts were anonymized and no private accounts or involuntary disclosures were included.

Study 1: Textual Analysis of Identity Categorization*Methodological Approach: Interpretive Netnography*

To examine RQ1, this study employed interpretive netnography (Kozinets, 2015; Soini & Eräranta, 2021), a qualitative method well-suited for analyzing discursive and identity practices in digital communities. Its unobtrusive nature allows researchers to observe identity signaling and categorization within naturally occurring online interactions. Given the emotionally and politically charged nature of the Taiwan Pride Parade, netnography was particularly effective in capturing authentic, situated expressions of queer identity.

By analyzing Instagram posts in their original form, this approach enabled the researcher to interpret how users discursively construct self-categorization through hashtags, linguistic style, and queer-coded expressions embedded in platform vernaculars.

Analytical Framework: Social Identity Theory and Discourse Analysis

This study draws on Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and discourse analysis (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) to examine how gay men construct social identity through language on Instagram. SIT outlines key mechanisms—categorization, identification, and comparison—that guide how individuals define themselves within social groups. Among these, identity categorization serves as the entry point for self-definition and group alignment.

On Instagram, such categorization often appears through hashtags, queer-coded expressions, and symbolic language that signal in-group belonging. These elements not only express personal identity but also perform social roles in shared digital spaces.

Discourse analysis further enables close reading of how such identity markers function as performative acts—language choices that do more than describe, but actively construct

identity in context. By viewing Instagram posts as sites of discursive identity work, this study highlights how queer users signal who they are and where they belong, particularly during culturally significant events like Taiwan Pride.

This framework thus positions digital identity construction as a contextual, symbolic, and dynamic process enacted through everyday language.

Coding Process and Analytical Tools

The 123 selected Instagram posts were manually screened through multiple rounds of evaluation to ensure they met all inclusion criteria. After validation, all posts were systematically coded using an Excel spreadsheet, where each entry was classified according to identified identity strategies.

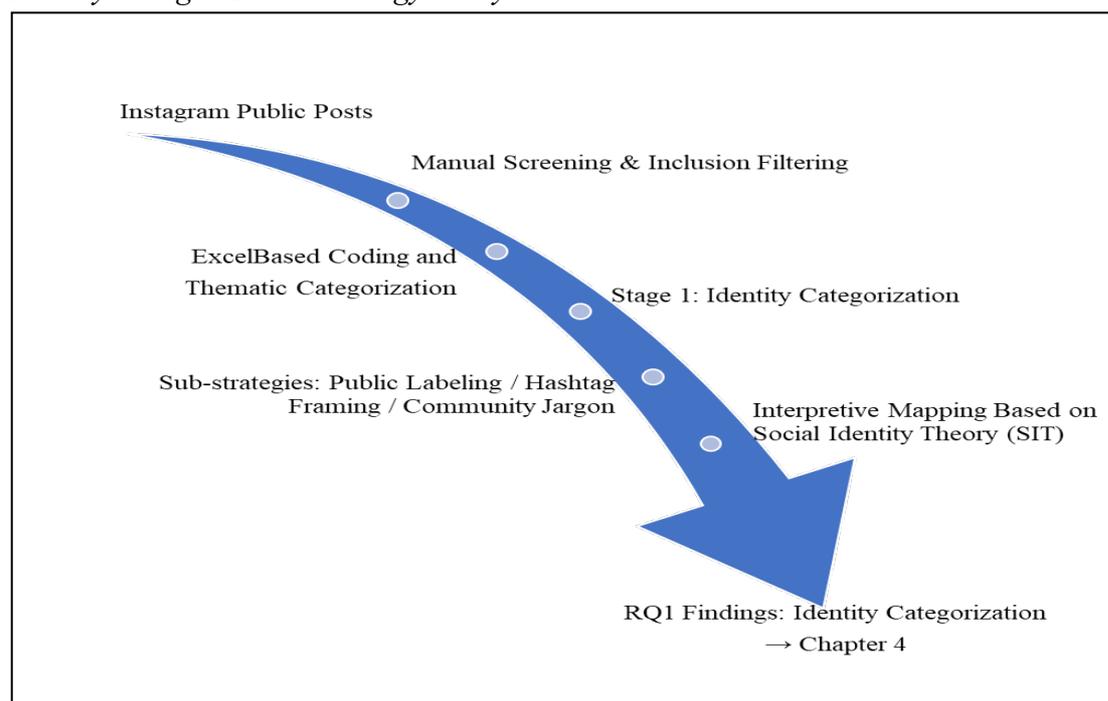
A thematic analysis approach was adopted to inductively identify patterns of identity-related discourse. Based on the data, three core sub-strategies under Identity Categorization emerged:

- **Public Labeling:** Use of explicit hashtags such as #同志驕傲 (#GayPride) or #LoveWins to directly assert LGBTQ+ identity.
- **Hashtag Framing:** Strategic bundling of hashtags to embed oneself within Pride discourse, reinforcing community visibility and collective belonging.
- **Community Jargon:** Use of queer vernacular (e.g., “姊妹” [sister], “熊” [bear]) to signify in-group affiliation and cultural fluency within the gay community.

These discursive strategies correspond to SIT’s first stage—categorization—which lays the foundation for identity recognition and group positioning. Rather than representing fixed identity labels, these expressions function as performative acts embedded in broader sociocultural narratives. They reflect how individuals negotiate visibility, solidarity, and self-definition within queer digital spaces.

The following diagram visually summarizes the analytical flow of this study’s textual strategy analysis. Figure 1 outlines the process from data screening to identity categorization, highlighting how each step aligns with Social Identity Theory.

Figure 1
Identity Categorization Strategy Analysis Process



Ethical Considerations

All posts analyzed were publicly accessible and contained no personally identifying information. No private, deleted, or restricted accounts were used. In line with ethical netnographic practice (Kozinets, 2015), Instagram content is treated as public cultural text, but due care was taken to protect individual anonymity, especially given the sensitivity of sexual identity in online spaces.

Summary

This chapter introduced the methodological design used to explore how Taiwanese gay men construct sexual identity through textual strategies during the 2024 Taiwan Pride Parade. By integrating interpretive netnography, Social Identity Theory, and discourse analysis, the study offers a focused, culturally grounded examination of identity categorization in a real-world queer digital context.

The following chapter presents the findings from this analysis, highlighting key linguistic patterns and identity-signaling practices observed in Instagram posts.

Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents findings in response to Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do Taiwanese gay men construct and express sexual identity through textual strategies on Instagram during the Taiwan Pride Parade?

Drawing from the interpretive netnography and the Social Identity Theory (SIT) framework outlined in Chapter Three, this chapter focuses exclusively on Identity Categorization. A total

of 123 Instagram posts were analyzed, from which three key identity construction strategies emerged: Public Labeling, Hashtag Framing, and Community Jargon.

Public Labeling: Overt Declarations of Identity

The most frequently used strategy was Public Labeling, characterized by the explicit declaration of LGBTQ+ identity through hashtags such as #同志驕傲, #LoveWins, and #ProudToBeGay. These hashtags often appeared at the beginning or end of captions and functioned as unambiguous statements of self-identification.

Post Example (ID#062):

Caption: “Love wins every time 🌈 #同志驕傲 #TaiwanPride2024”

→ Combines a global slogan with localized hashtags to assert both personal pride and national queer visibility.

According to Social Identity Theory, this aligns with the categorization stage, where individuals use linguistic markers to identify with a specific social group. Public Labeling is thus a performative act of visibility, reinforcing both personal and collective identity in the digital public sphere.

Hashtag Framing: Positioning Within Pride Discourse

The second strategy, Hashtag Framing, involves the intentional clustering of multiple hashtags to locate oneself within a broader socio-political discourse. Users often bundle national, cultural, and affective tags like #TaiwanPride2024, #第 22 屆台灣同志遊行, #LoveIsLove, and #ProudToBeGay.

This discursive strategy achieves two functions:

1. Contextual anchoring within a national event
2. Collective positioning within LGBTQ+ global narratives

Post Example (ID#077):

Caption: “第一次和家人一起參加同志遊行，感謝有你們 💕 #台灣同志遊行 #LoveIsLove #同志家庭”

→ Combines national, emotional, and familial tags to frame the personal within a broader Pride discourse.

This strategy situates the user not only within a specific event but also within a shared symbolic community, reflecting SIT’s concept of group alignment. Hashtag Framing emphasizes the user’s participation in both local and global queer movements, constructing identity as contextually embedded and socially resonant.

Community Jargon: Coded Belonging and In-Group Solidarity

The third strategy is the use of Community Jargon—coded language and insider references specific to queer subcultures. Common examples include words like “姊妹” (sister), “女神” (goddess), “熊” (bear), and “女王” (queen). These culturally embedded expressions convey both identity and belonging through shared knowledge.

Post Example (ID#031):

Caption: “姊妹們集合！今晚就是我們的夜晚 🌈👯”

→ “姊妹” signals shared cultural intimacy and community-specific relational dynamics.

This strategy aligns with SIT’s social identification process, wherein individuals internalize and reproduce group-specific symbols to demonstrate belonging. Unlike Public Labeling, which addresses a broader audience, Community Jargon activates subcultural recognition, fostering solidarity through coded discourse intelligible primarily to in-group members.

Distribution of Identity Categorization Strategies

The relative frequency of each strategy provides insight into the layering and accessibility of identity discourse.

Table 2

Distribution of Identity Categorization Strategies (N = 123)

| Strategy | Frequency | Percentage | Description |
|------------------|-----------|------------|---|
| Public Labeling | 85 | 69.1% | Use of LGBTQ+ hashtags to signal identity and increase visibility |
| Hashtag Framing | 66 | 53.7% | Strategic bundling of hashtags to embed the post within Pride discourse |
| Community Jargon | 48 | 39.0% | Use of queer-coded terms to signal in-group belonging and fluency |

These figures show that Public Labeling is the most accessible and widely used, while Community Jargon represents a more culturally embedded, insider-oriented practice. Many posts combined two or more strategies, highlighting the multimodal and strategic nature of queer identity expression.

Synthesis: Performing Identity Categorization in Queer Digital Space

Together, these three strategies demonstrate that identity categorization on Instagram is a performative, multi-layered, and culturally situated process. Taiwanese gay men engage in dynamic self-positioning—oscillating between visibility and intimacy, public solidarity and in-group familiarity—based on the platform’s affordances and social context.

This chapter affirms SIT’s relevance by illustrating how digital language practices function as symbolic acts of categorization, identification, and boundary work. At the same time, the findings emphasize the importance of context-specific discourse: these strategies are not universal but reflect localized forms of queer expression shaped by the Taiwan Pride context.

In essence, these posts are not merely self-descriptions—they are identity performances, crafted through stylistic, strategic, and symbolic choices that co-produce both personal narratives and collective queer visibility.

These findings underscore that digital identity is not static but an evolving performance that depends on discursive choices and social positioning. The chapter reaffirms the relevance of

Social Identity Theory in explaining how individuals form and display identities within digitally mediated, culturally rich environments like Taiwan Pride.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study set out to examine how Taiwanese gay men construct and express their sexual identity on Instagram during the Taiwan Pride Parade. By focusing specifically on identity categorization strategies, the analysis revealed how digital discourse—particularly hashtags and community-specific language—serves as a vehicle for both self-identification and in-group solidarity. The findings contribute to broader conversations in queer media studies, digital sociolinguistics, and identity theory.

Theoretical Implications

This study affirms the utility of Social Identity Theory (SIT) for understanding digital queer identity practices. The three textual strategies identified—Public Labeling, Hashtag Framing, and Community Jargon—correspond to the mechanisms outlined in SIT, particularly the categorization phase, where individuals signal group affiliation through discursive choices.

Public Labeling functions as a direct declaration of identity and group membership. Hashtag Framing facilitates symbolic alignment across cultural, emotional, and political discourses. Community Jargon operates as a boundary-marking discourse, activating shared knowledge through playful or intimate language. Together, these practices highlight how digital identity is not fixed but performative, strategic, and context-dependent.

Furthermore, the use of coded language (e.g., “姊妹”, “熊”) reflects the ways in which digital queer communities construct meaning through subcultural semiotics. These linguistic choices do more than signal group membership—they perform belonging, negotiate visibility, and foster cultural intimacy. In this way, digital identity is not static but performative, fluid, and situational.

Empirical Contributions

This research contributes to queer sociolinguistics and digital identity studies in several key ways.

Taiwan-Specific Focus

By centering Taiwanese gay users during Taiwan Pride, the study provides a localized account of LGBTQ+ identity construction in a democratic Asian context marked by progressive legislation and ongoing social negotiation.

User-Centered Data

The dataset comprises 123 user-generated Instagram posts, offering an authentic glimpse into how identity is performed in real-time. This addresses scholarly calls for non-Western, community-grounded research on queer digital life.

Qualitative Rigor

Through interpretive netnography and discourse analysis, the study presents a fine-grained understanding of identity work through hashtag sequences, word choices, and symbolic cues—moving beyond quantitative hashtag analysis to highlight discursive intentionality.

Strategic Visibility

The findings demonstrate how users balance visibility and self-protection through layered textual practices—especially in a semi-public space like Instagram, where audience perception is shaped by both platform affordances and cultural context.

Limitations

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged.

Scope

The analysis focuses solely on textual strategies, excluding visual elements such as photos, emojis, or layout design. Given Instagram's inherently multimodal nature, this is a necessary but limiting decision.

Sampling Bias

Only public posts were included. Private accounts and users who self-censor are excluded, potentially skewing representations of identity toward more visible or self-assured users.

Interpretive Boundaries

The analysis of community-specific jargon depends on the researcher's linguistic and cultural fluency. Although coding was theory-informed and reviewed across multiple passes, ethnographic triangulation (e.g., interviews or participant feedback) could enhance interpretive accuracy.

Future Directions

This study opens several avenues for future research.

Multimodal Expansion

Incorporating image analysis, emoji use, and layout design would deepen understanding of visual and semiotic identity strategies on social media.

Intersectional Inquiry

Further studies could explore how age, gender non-conformity, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status intersect with gay identity in digital Pride expressions.

Longitudinal and Comparative Work

Tracking identity discourse across multiple years of Taiwan Pride would reveal evolving linguistic norms and community shifts. Comparative analyses with LGBTQ+ communities in Japan, Hong Kong, or South Korea would provide broader regional insight.

Platform and Audience Analysis

Future work could examine how users design content for imagined audiences, and how algorithmic visibility mediates identity performance and queer community dynamics online.

Final Reflections

The 2024 Taiwan Pride Parade, as reflected on Instagram, became more than a physical event—it functioned as a discursive stage for performing identity, asserting belonging, and negotiating visibility. In a time when queer expression is both increasingly empowered and persistently surveilled, the identity strategies observed in this study embody a form of symbolic resistance and cultural creativity.

By unpacking how Taiwanese gay men construct sexual identity through textual strategies during Pride, this research contributes to a more localized and culturally grounded understanding of queer digital life in East Asia. It demonstrates that identity categorization is not a passive reflection of group status, but a dynamic process of social negotiation, shaped by platform features, cultural codes, and the desire to be seen—on one's own terms.

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