

Lifestyle Commodification: A Netnographic Analysis of the Digital Matcha Subculture on Instagram and TikTok

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Abstract

The trend of matcha consumption has grown not only as a culinary preference but also as a significant component of social media popular culture. This study uses reflective-projective and subculture theories to examine how matcha is portrayed as a lifestyle symbol and consumption trend. Leovinger's reflective-projective theory describes how social media portrays aspirational images of health, beauty, and social standing while reflecting the reality of matcha drinking culture. Subculture theory is used to understand how digital communities create collective identities based on symbols associated with matcha. By observing content on the Instagram and TikTok platforms and applying thematic analysis, a qualitative ethnography technique is employed. The findings demonstrate that matcha is marketed not only as a beverage but also as a symbol of a particular socioeconomic class, a healthy lifestyle, and an aesthetic consumption trend. In addition to establishing a trend-based digital subculture, matcha is portrayed on social media as a representation of self-balance, modernity, and cultural connectivity. As a result, matcha culture transcends the culinary realm and becomes a social phenomena that serves as a means of constructing one's identity and a symbolic representation of consumption in the digital sphere.

Keywords: *Subculture, Digital Subculture, Reflective-Projective Theory, Social Media Trend, Matcha, Overconsumption Culture*

INTRODUCTION

Viral content on social media fosters new communication patterns and collective identities. According to Lewis (2010) social media is a digital instrument for communication, creation, and sharing, where nowadays it has evolved into a powerful instrument that facilitates communication while also changing consumer preferences and cultural trends by offering additional information. Viral phenomena such as parodies, challenges, and informational content develop consumer identities and reflect shared interests. Thus, Solomon (2018) explains that a subculture is a collection of people with distinct tastes who update existing concepts. According to Hebdige (1979), subcultures emerge to counteract the dominant culture. In this context, social media becomes a crucial arena where new subcultures such as the contemporary matcha craze can emerge and spread rapidly.

Subculture could explain the current matcha craze, in which millennials and Gen Z drink matcha to express their identity, values for a healthy lifestyle, and preference for Japanese aesthetics. In 2024, the Global Wellness Institute found that nowadays customers prefer

enjoyable, long-lasting health goods. Due to its stronger antioxidant content and steadier caffeine levels than coffee, matcha is connected with self-care practices like thoughtful breaks and peaceful mornings. These benefits make matcha not only as a drink but also a part of a modern lifestyle that balances productivity with relaxation. Statista (2024) found that by 2025, Indonesia's tea market is expected to reach US\$2.84 billion, a 6.95% CAGR. This economic expansion is evident in Jakarta's premium matcha cafes, reflecting the trend's local urgency. These developments highlight how the matcha phenomenon in Indonesia is not only a lifestyle trend but also a cultural expression that is deeply intertwined with digital media.

The media has made matcha a trendy beverage, as if it's vital for modernity and mindfulness. What individuals buy defines Matcha's social identity. Nowadays, matcha has become a cultural and economic phenomenon in Jakarta, attracting Millennials and Gen Z with Matcha's cafes like Uji Matcha, Matchaman, and Matchaya serve as community hubs. This local commercial and cultural explosion reveals that the rise in matcha use makes it perfect for a digital subculture, whose symbols and meanings deserve research.

Nevertheless, the cost they have to pay for having Matcha's lifestyle can be classified as pricey if it's compared to Jakarta's minimum pay IDR 5.3 million (\$330) with a living cost that is not cheap either. For example, to have ceremony-grade matcha you have to spend IDR 250,000–345,000 (\$15–21) for only 30–50 grams and with the sets like bamboo whisks and ceramic bowls that costs IDR 550,000–600,000 (\$33–36). Also, cafe cups cost IDR 55,000 (\$3) to IDR 150,000 (\$9). Its status as a status symbol connected to purchasing power rather than tradition shows how subcultures may be turned into goods. Matcha culture is shaped by consumer trends, which are amplified and curated by social media algorithms, unlike punk. Therefore, understanding how social media algorithms influence the commodification of matcha culture becomes essential in analyzing its digital subcultural dynamics.

Schiffman & Wisenblit (2015) studied demographic and ethnic subcultures. Social media's widespread distribution of information supports subcultures, making viral trends more relevant. This subject covers media and digital communication. Social media influences identities and consumption patterns as an engagement tool, trade medium, and agent of virality. Digital communication promotes online subcultures that threaten traditional communication, says Fuchs (2015). These studies acknowledge the shift to digital platforms, yet a major gap remains. Social media algorithms and user projections turn consumer goods into subcultural identities, but the exact mechanism is unknown. To address this theoretical and empirical gap, a focused qualitative approach is required to explore how these mechanisms operate within specific cases like the matcha digital subculture.

Matcha has transcended its role as a traditional beverage to represent modern lifestyle, aspirational aesthetics, and wellbeing worldwide. Academic research has explored digital subcultures and social media usage trends. Two significant gaps remain. Many studies discuss aesthetic consumption online, but few apply a solid theoretical framework to investigate the substantial cultural consequences of digitally consuming a product like matcha. By using reflective-projective theory to study how aspirational health and social status images are created and reflected online and subculture theory to understand collective identity and "subcultural capital," this study can close this gap. Few qualitative, in-depth studies have examined how young people in Indonesian metropolitan regions interpret, symbolise, and use matcha to construct a digital identity. Indonesia's sociocultural dynamics and worldwide trends are significant but understudied for this research. Hence, this research situates itself at the intersection of digital communication, consumer culture, and subcultural identity formation.

The study examines how Instagram and TikTok content reflects aspirational images of a modern, balanced lifestyle, in line with Leovinger's Reflective-Projective Theory; how shared matcha content helps create a collective identity and boundaries of a distinct digital subculture; and how matcha consumptions has symbolic meanings (e.g., health, aesthetic, status). This paper analyses how social media constructs and commodifies matcha culture to meet this gap where it addresses how urban Indonesian youth use Instagram and TikTok to symbolise matcha as a subcultural identity marker? Also how do the internet themes of consumer culture and lifestyle makes a traditional beverage a status symbol?

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Classic to Digital Subcultures

Historically, studies of young subcultures mostly concentrated on musical preferences and related styles (Bennett, 1999; Hebdige, 1979; Muggleton, 2000). Participation was frequently defined by wearing particular clothes, listening to particular music, and participating in local, in-person music scenes (Hebdige, 1979). In this classic model, subcultural identity was often formed through symbolic resistance to a perceived dominant culture.

However, as information and communication technologies like the internet have developed, and possibilities for people to engage with subcultures have increased, even those who might not have ordinarily done so can now do so (Fine and Kleinman, 1979; Fernback, 1979; Williams, 2003). As Williams (2003) notes, the internet has become the primary stage for them to express their identity and connect with one another, unhindered by geographical distance. Subcultural individuals can engage and create significant collective identities in online settings, which act as virtual communities and social spaces. In the digital environment, the tangible styles and physical engagement of conventional subcultures give way to new forms of interaction, where connectivity replaces proximity and style itself becomes digitized (McArthur, 2008). Williams & Copes (2005) pointed out that the online straightedge community forces us to rethink the need for physical interaction in creating a collective identity. They found members forging authentic selves based entirely on their engagement in discussion forums, indicating that a genuine sense of community can thrive completely independent of in-person contact. This study reinforces the argument that the internet facilitates connections and creates a negotiation space for the meaning of dynamic subcultural identities. The internet has become a dynamic space where subcultural members express identity and negotiate belonging, much like music scenes once did in physical spaces (Williams, 2003; Thornton, 1995).

It is necessary to analyze the economic components of social media and engage with the individual and collective meanings users associate with platforms (Fuchs, 2015). Cultural transmission is a centuries-old function of communication, and the development of the internet has made it easier for online communities or virtual worlds with cultural traits to develop (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014). Fuchs's (2015) argument—that viral content's primary economic function is to turn cultural values into commercial appeal—is clearly illustrated by the findings of Satrio et al. (2020). In their study of a culture-based batik campaign, they showed a direct link between viral marketing and a greater intent to purchase, demonstrating that the appeal was tied to the cultural content itself, not an emotional response. In this light, digital subcultures look less like the sites of resistance described by Hebdige (1979) and more like commercial ecosystems where social media algorithms constantly reproduce and commodify culture. Social media platforms such as X (Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and many others have become central to communication. Through the content they share, social media users create a feedback loop that makes it difficult to separate online trends from offline reality (Tobin & Baziel, 2008; Baran, 2021). In nature, these platforms function as the primary engines driving the spread of popular culture (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014).

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Reflective-Projective Theory and Cultural Commodification

Subcultures on social media cannot be understood through one theoretical lens. To complete its framework, this study employs Reflective-Projective Theory and cultural commodification in the social media economy. Social media accelerates a feedback loop between these two methods. According to Lee Leovinger's Reflective-Projective Theory (1968), society "echoes" the media's goals while the media "mirrors" its ideals. Although originally for mainstream media, the principle extends to social media. This theory holds that social media posts reflect people's ideas on society and reality and influence their real-life behaviour (Ohiagu & Okorie, 2014).

Fuchs (2015) added to the reflective–projective loop by demonstrating how social media algorithms commodify user involvement. Subculture provides the context for studying content's social effects. It is used to understand how the widespread use of these media symbols promotes the development of a digital subculture in which urban youth forge a shared identity and build "subcultural capital"—cultural knowledge, artifacts, and behaviors (like drinking a specific matcha whisk or going to a specific cafe) that confer status within the group. The conceptual "bridge" linking these ideas is shared aesthetics and symbolic consumption as social membership. Leovinger says matcha-related social media content—including green-themed lattes, cafe check-ins, and wellness stories—is healthy, modern, and luxurious. Audiences employ symbolism as subcultural capital. Under subculture theory, consuming and reproducing the projected aesthetic (like filtering and hashtagging a matcha latte selfie) becomes a non-material good that confers social status and approval. Subculture defines a young group with the sign, whereas reflective-projective theory explains its significance (matcha content). The integrated theories allow the research to assess a trend's role in social identity development beyond just describing it.

Together, these two ideas explain how digital subcultures evolve. Matcha culture on TikTok and Instagram shows this dynamic. When consumers perceive it, they produce and distribute trend-related content combining their identities, lives, and goals. Then, the platform's algorithm recognizes the increase in engagement, which spreads the trend virally and distributes it to other people in a feedback cycle. However, a substantial trend creates a business opportunity where subcultural expression becomes a product. As Satrio et al. (2020) demonstrate, culture-based viral marketing uses cultural values to engage consumers. Subculture is now a space to make and sell culture, not only protest. These theories demonstrate that digital subcultures arise from platform capitalism's cycle of reflection and projection, not opposition.

Past research have explored the interplay between conventional and digital subcultures, but we don't know how social media algorithms and reflective-projective theories turn subcultures into products. This study fills gaps by examining matcha culture from subculture and reflective-projective theory perspectives. It analyzes TikTok and Instagram content.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the meanings individuals assign to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than aiming for generalization, qualitative research is concerned with rich, contextualized understanding. In the context of this study, the goal is to explore how urban Indonesian youth construct identities and assign symbolic value to matcha consumption as a subcultural expression. This approach is especially appropriate given the highly visual and performative nature of matcha consumption on social media platforms, where aesthetics and lifestyle are interwoven with personal

branding and community belonging. The interpretivist paradigm supports an emic perspective, wherein meaning is derived from participants' subjective experiences. It enables the researcher to investigate how young consumers understand and articulate their identity through consumption practices, especially in relation to the visual and symbolic appeal of matcha in online spaces.

In this study, there were 18 content samples, with 9 contents from Instagram and 9 contents from TikTok. Contents were identified using popular hashtags related to matcha, chosen based on their high usage volume on Instagram and TikTok. From the search results, the researcher applied inclusion criteria such as high view counts, strong engagement rates, and clear relevance to the predetermined thematic categories. Conversely, content with low engagement, lack of thematic relevance, or duplication was excluded. The researcher's positionality as an active social media user who personally enjoys matcha and follows matcha-related trends is also acknowledged. This awareness is important, as it may influence the interpretation of data, while at the same time providing deeper cultural insight into the digital matcha trend.

To further elaborate this study, netnography is used as the qualitative method. Netnography is an ethnographic method adapted for online communication which involves active participation in digital communities by influencing data interpretation. By following standardized guidelines and practices, netnography equips researchers with effective tools to explore and understand digital cultures with methodological consistency. This method involves observing digital behavior in natural contexts without direct interaction (Kozinets, 2010). According to Bakry (2017), netnography encompasses various online disciplines; such as content analysis, "text mining" of anonymous, unexplored knowledge, creating stories by "word of mouth", ethnography and observational research. The netnography method uses and combines different methods in a single approach that focuses on the study of communities and cultures in the internet world. Qualitative online research such as netnography is very important in shaping our understanding of the internet: the impact of the internet on culture, and the influence of culture on the internet (Baym, 1995).

Using the netnography approach, researchers will interpret the data collected with thematic analysis. The curated social media content was rigorously examined using thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning related to identity construction and symbolic consumption among urban Indonesian youth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The methodology aligns naturally with the interpretivism paradigm studies by prioritizing the participant's subjective expression in online content rather than assessing external categories. The analysis is bound to Braun and Clarke's six-phase iterative process as follows: familiarization, the researchers immersed themselves repeatedly in the entire dataset (viewing posts/videos, reading captions, noting contextual elements) to gain deep familiarity and identify initial potential patterns; initial coding: meaningful segments of data relevant to identity and symbolic consumption were systematically identified and labelled with descriptive codes; theme development: these initial codes were then grouped based on conceptual similarities to form candidate themes representing broader patterns of meaning; reviewing themes: the candidate themes were rigorously reviewed and refined against the entire dataset. They are considered, together with engagement metrics such as likes and views, to ensure that they accurately reflect prominent discourse and practices by leaving weak themes and consolidating others; defining themes: the final core themes were precisely defined, named, and articulated, capturing the essence of matcha's subcultural significance as manifested in the data; reporting: the finalized themes were interpreted and contextualized within the theoretical frameworks guiding the study – namely, subcultural theory and reflective-projective theory – to explain how

matcha consumption functions as identity expression and symbolic practice within this digital community.

Having established this rigorous analytical framework for interpreting meaning, the study proceeded to data collection guided by netnographic principles. To ensure thematic analysis could effectively uncover identity construction and symbolic consumption patterns, content curation required strategic alignment with the interpretivist commitment to capturing genuine participant expressions. Thus, the data gathered was through non-participant observation of naturally occurring social media content by prioritizing platforms and metrics that reflect youth-driven engagement and cultural resonance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As part of the netnographic approach in this study, researchers will analyze content from social media platforms such as Instagram & TikTok. As part of the netnographic approach in this study, researchers will analyze content from social media platforms such as Instagram & TikTok. The reason why this study chose Instagram & TikTok are because those two are two major platforms that enable their users to upload visual and textual contents and disseminate rapidly. Furthermore, people from all over the world could interact with each other despite the space limitations and time difference. Social media platforms, in this context are Instagram & TikTok, are also the main factors of why matcha has become absolutely popular. People see and get influenced, thus creating a major FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) sensation to be part of the buzzing viral trends on social media.

The content selection will be based on the topic discussion and social media engagement metrics, including number of views and likes, to identify content that has resonated widely with online audiences. This method also enables the researcher to focus on material that reflects dominant aesthetic trends, discourses, and symbolic practices associated with matcha based on content views and likes numbers. These platforms are selected due to their significant popularity and cultural influence among Millennials and Generation Z. These generations frequently engage with lifestyle content and participate in visual culture, making these platforms ideal for exploring identity expression and subcultural affiliation through matcha consumption. Non-participant observational netnography (passive netnography) was used to collect content, which means the researcher did not interact or intervene in the creation or discussion of the content. The contents will be curated from these five following hashtag; #matcha, #matcharecipe, #matchacafe, #matchalover, and #matchalatte.

Under the direction of netnographic principles, the obtained content was examined through thematic analysis. These hashtags are then processed into a specific category to find trends in symbolic activities (matcha being used to symbolize lifestyle identity), wellness, peacefulness, minimalism, or trendiness discourses, and aesthetic practices (matcha DIY at home and cafe aesthetics). The pattern then resulted into three main categories that can be identified are homemade matcha recipe, matcha cafe recommendation, and matcha education. Subculture theory and reflective-projective theory serve as the foundation for this work, providing context for how digital consumers use symbolic consumption to reflect and create aspirational identities.

Thematic Analysis

Below is a table with information on how many posts appeared on Instagram and TikTok using the following hashtags.

Table 1. Number of posts on Instagram and TikTok based on hashtags





Keyword	Total Post	
	Instagram	TikTok
#matcha	8.9M	2.1M
#matcharecipe	32.8K	47.5K
#matchacaferecommendation	70.9K	10.5K
#matchalover	1.3M	478.6K
#matchalatte	1.9M	603K

This study analyses matcha consumption based on four key codes, each representing the cultural and social meanings associated with matcha itself. Those four codes do not appear randomly, but rather result from a thematic categorization that reflects societal consumption and perception patterns towards matcha. First, matcha as a symbol of wellness and self-care, where consumers not only associate matcha with heart benefits, such as antioxidants and its focus-enhancing properties, but also connect it with self-care routines like mindfulness or detox diets. It is not only seen as a beverage but also as a commitment to a balanced and healthier lifestyle. Second, matcha reflects a certain social class status, often consumed in upscale cafes or purchased as an organic product, which is usually associated with the middle to upper classes who have the financial and cultural capital to access such a lifestyle. Third, trend-driven behaviour is evident in matcha consumption, where matcha has become a part of global food and lifestyle trends, popularised through social media platforms, and it is evident in the form of matcha lattes, desserts, or even skincare products, as matcha is widely consumed because it is in vogue. Finally, the fourth code is matcha plays a significant role in the construction of aesthetic beauty, whereas its colour which is natural green, it is frothy texture, and minimalist presentation make it photogenic and aesthetically eyes pleasing that consumers often share images of matcha based on social media, curating it into mindful, trendy, and visually refined appearances.

Through those four codes, it becomes clear that matcha has transcended its traditional functions as a beverage, now operating as a multilayer symbol of health, class, trendiness, and aesthetics, all of which are deeply relevant in the context of modern consumer cultures. While codes focus on describing how matcha is represented, the thematic analysis further explains how these codes may converge into shared themes or diverge into distinct thematic dimensions. Thematic analysis uses themes to organize codes with related meanings into deeper, more abstract ideas. It is simpler for academics to understand how particular situations are shaped and portrayed on social media because each theme offers a thorough summary of the patterns of meaning that are represented from the data. The resulting themes in this study reflect the identities, beliefs, and social symbols created by Instagram posts in addition to explaining user behavior. Digital performance of wellness demonstrates how social media users present themselves through narrative content and images as people who value their health and well-being. In this context, "wellness" refers to both physical and mental health. health and an organized aesthetically pleasing way of living. Digital performances that match audience expectations of a "well-groomed" and "healthy" image while affirming personal identity include publishing recipes for healthy drinks, doing yoga, or engaging in self-care routines. Frequently, the items, places, or activities highlighted are linked to the upper

middle class or the "affluent lifestyle." In addition to expressing their own preferences, creators who show premium consumption choices also position themselves as a part of a social group that has access to exclusive trends and purchasing power. Constructed online persona emphasizes a consistent and well-planned visual curation strategy for developing an engaging and recognizable self-image on social media. The feed's general tone, photo style, and color composition are all kept consistent to reflect the individuality they want to convey. This approach turns the account into a kind of personal branding, where the main instrument for attracting in, retaining on to, and influencing audience perception is visual aesthetics. Consumption culture illustrates how digital trends and popular culture impact the purchasing patterns seen on social media. Adoption of trendy goods or lifestyles occurs not only for practical reasons but also because of their symbolic worth. Social media serves as both a platform for showcasing products and a place where people create, share, and adopt trends.

Table 2. Instagram Content Analysis

N o.	Content Category	Instagram Post	Engagement	Context	Code	Theme
1.	Homemade matcha recipe	 (Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DJKAZZyJ7a2/	Username: @misheru Likes: 9,940 Comments: 30	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona
2.	Homemade matcha recipe	 (Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DIOk8Avsjuz/	Username: @matchawithvi Likes: 1,454 Comments: 10	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona
3.	Homemade matcha recipe	 (Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DJOkuoRoWr2/	Username: thedrinkablefeed Likes: 4,320 Comments: 63	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona
4.	Matcha education	 (Retrieved June 16, 2025)	Username: @nibble.idn Likes: 8,913 Comments: 100	Sharing information about ceremonial grade matcha powder	Social class status / Trend- driven consump- tion	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumptio- n culture




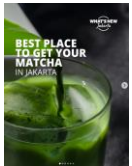





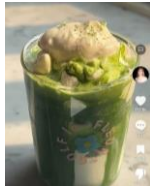
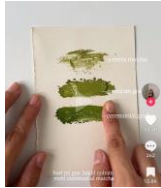
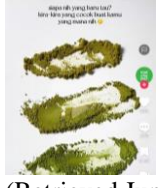
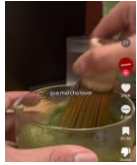

		https://www.instagram.com/p/DJiQ9oXStmN/				
5.	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DJ3OJqJPLNr/</p>	Username: taubatters Likes: 19,888 Comments: 576	Sharing information about matcha overdose	Trend-driven consumption	Consumption culture
6.	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DH39LhMihM/</p>	Username: nio_japanese_grien_tea Likes: 2,839 Comments: 18	Sharing information about matcha shortage in Japan	Trend-driven consumption	Consumption culture
7.	Matcha cafe recommendation	 <p>(Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DJOEB1Dp-R0/</p>	Username: @matcha_baddie Likes: 6,339 Comments: 58	Sharing matcha specialty cafe recommendations in Jakarta	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture
8.	Matcha cafe recommendation	 <p>(Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/DJdTBixe/</p>	Username: @whatsnewjakarta Likes: 1,460 Comments: 8	Sharing matcha specialty cafe recommendations in Jakarta	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture
9.	Matcha cafe recommendation	 <p>(Retrieved June 16, 2025) https://www.instagram.com/p/C5KcmMP6kA/</p>	Username: @nibble.idn Likes: 5,523 Comments: 64	Sharing matcha specialty cafe recommendations in Jakarta	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture

Table 3. TikTok Content Analysis

No.	Content Category	TikTok Post	Engagement	Context	Code	Theme
1	Matcha cafe recommendation	 <p>(Retrieved June 18, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkp9eKB8/</p>	Username: @foodirectory Views : 1.1M Like: 94.9K Comment : 1.350 Share : 24.1K Save : 18.5K	Sharing matcha specialty cafe recommendations in Jakarta	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Consumption culture
2	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 18, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkpQNxAD/</p>	Username: @glowap62 Views : 11.2M Like: 727.1K Comment : 9.575 Share : 140.8K Save : 111K	Compare between coffee consumption and matcha consumption	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture
3	Homemade matcha recipe	 <p>(Retrieved June 18, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkpKjwth/</p>	Username: @jeniferliuu Views : 1.1M Like: 76.7K Comment : 580 Share : 7.567 Save : 27.3K	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona
4	Homemade matcha recipe	 <p>(Retrieved June 18, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkpwTU4B/</p>	Username: @febsfebsfebs Views : 158,4K Like: 7.375 Comment : 104 Share : 863 Save : 3.993	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona
5	Homemade matcha recipe	 <p>(Retrieved June 18, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkpw795S/</p>	Username: @cheekykiddo Views : 1.3M Like: 117.1K Comment : 351 Share : 4.367 Save : 351	Sharing homemade matcha drink recipes	Aesthetic identity	Constructed online persona

6	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 19, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSKsXVkaL/</p>	Username: @nomnomjess Views : 868K Like: 33.5K Comment : 262 Share : 1.703 Save : 13.8K	Sharing information about ceremonial grade matcha powder	Trend-driven consumption	Constructed online persona
7	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 19, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkGyaVSm/</p>	Username: @matchamu-tea Views : 1.1M Like: 28K Comment : 379 Share : 2.119 Save : 11.5K	Sharing information about ceremonial grade matcha powder	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture
8	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 19, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSA75uE7u/</p>	Username: @kokyurma Views : 5.3M Like: 276K Comment : 4.451 Share : 10.1K Save : 20.3K	Stating that 'matcha lovers' nowadays only like it for the additional sweet taste, not for the pure matcha	Social class status / Trend-driven consumption	Class and lifestyle signaling / Consumption culture
9	Matcha education	 <p>(Retrieved June 19, 2025) https://vt.tiktok.com/ZSkGaH9AT/</p>	Username: @matchamu_tea Views : 1441.1K Like: 599 Comment : 21 Share : 81 Save : 128	Sharing information on the benefits of matcha consumption	Wellness and self-care symbol	Class and lifestyle signaling

The thematic analysis revealed four primary themes: digital performance of wellness, class and lifestyle signaling, constructed online persona, and consumption culture. These topics were generated from code groups, content categories, and the context of Instagram postings. These topics show how people use social media to reflect ideals and goals in line with digital culture, signal social positions, and create identities.

Activities like yoga, organic beverages, and self-care routines presented in beautiful images are common in content that promotes wellness and self-care. Social media becomes a platform for presenting a healthy, well-groomed self-image in line with contemporary lifestyle values when the wellness and self-care symbol codes are combined to create the topic of Digital Performance of Wellness in the framework of thematic analysis. According to Subculture Theory, this practice sets apart its participants from other groups by fostering a subculture of healthy living with unique symbols, beliefs, and customs. According to Lee Leovinger Reflective-Projective Theory, this information

encourages viewers to internalize wellness standards by projecting an attractive and aspirational image of wellness ideals in addition to reflecting new health trends in society. Social class status codes are used to identify content that includes exclusive settings, high-end products, or expensive activities. These codes then constitute the theme of Class and Lifestyle Signaling. This theme demonstrates how social media is used to convey social standing and access to a sophisticated way of life. According to Subculture Theory, this depiction creates a subculture of rich living, where participation is gauged by symbolic consumption of renowned establishments and brands. According to Reflective-Projective Theory, this type of content reinforces ideal narratives of prosperity and status by reflecting the reality of some people's economic privilege while also projecting lifestyle goals that many audiences seek.

The practice of conforming to popular fashion, lifestyle, or product trends on digital platforms is referred to as trend-driven consumption. The theme of consumption culture that emerged from this code highlights how social media consumption culture not only satisfies practical requirements but also acts as a sign of affiliation with communities that are significant to trends. According to Subculture Theory, this phenomena suggests that there is a transient and fluid digital subculture that is created by the similarity of the patterns that are followed. Reflective-Projective Theory, on the other hand, claims that this content projects the narrative that following trends is a means of social interaction and self-actualization while reflecting the quick cycle of trends in the digital age.

Aesthetic identity reflects a deliberate effort to build a structured self-image through curated visuals such as color schemes, photography, and feed consistency. This forms a constructed online persona, where social media accounts act as personal branding by marketing identities through consistent aesthetics. Subculture Theory explains this as part of the digital artist subculture, in which visual style functions as symbolic language among users. Meanwhile, Reflective-Projective Theory highlights how clean, conceptual aesthetic signals control over self-image, projecting an idealized version that may differ from offline reality.

Visual Analysis

The visual layer embedded in matcha content carries a strong symbolic weight. In the Constructed Online Persona theme, for instance, creators often rely on minimalist tones, soft natural lighting, and carefully arranged props such as ceramic cups, wooden trays, and clean backgrounds. These choices are intentional aesthetic strategies designed to project a calm, elegant, and wellness-oriented image. Through the lens of Reflective-Projective Theory, these visuals not only reflect existing social ideals about health and balance but also push those ideals forward as something desirable for audiences to emulate. In turn, Subculture Theory helps explain how consistent visual language builds subtle boundaries within the digital matcha community, where shared aesthetic codes become markers of belonging.

Similar patterns are visible in the Digital Performance of Wellness and Class and Lifestyle Signaling themes, where matcha cafés are often showcased through polished, cinematic imagery. Pastel color palettes, soft focus, and branded merchandise turn these spaces into visual performances of taste and privilege. Matcha, therefore, operates not just as a beverage but as a cultural commodity, with its meaning amplified through aesthetic presentation. Rather than existing outside the consumption process, visuals are central to how symbolic values are produced, circulated, and reproduced on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. By embedding cultural references and lifestyle aspirations in every frame, these creators blur the line between personal expression and consumer signaling, reinforcing the reflection–projection cycle that underpins contemporary digital consumer culture.

Matcha as Consumption Culture

The Japanese matcha consumption tradition was transferred from the practice of Zen Buddhist monks in the 12th century. The monks adopted the habit of drinking powdered tea from China as part of their meditation. The monk Eisai was instrumental in introducing the green powder to Japan after studying it in China, and wrote the *Kissa Yojoki* (Book of Tea Drinking for Maintaining Health), which emphasized the health benefits of tea. Over time, this custom developed into part of Japanese spiritual and aesthetic culture through the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*) which emphasizes the principles of harmony, respect, purity, and serenity (Cartwright, 2022).

In this century, matcha has shifted from a traditional Japanese drink to a lifestyle trend embraced by younger generations, especially in Indonesia. On TikTok and Instagram, it is framed as part of health aesthetic and a tool for personal branding. These visually driven platforms reinforce matcha's role as both a lifestyle symbol and identity marker. As Firat and Venkatesh (1995) note, consumer culture allows identities to be expressed through products, making matcha a medium to project health, aesthetic, and eco-conscious values. In addition to being associated with a healthy lifestyle, matcha is also used as a form of self-identity expression for its lovers who called themselves as a "matcha lover". This phenomenon has created a strong community of matcha lovers on social media, but has also raised pros and cons, especially regarding the authenticity of matcha consumption. Whether they truly enjoy the authentic taste of matcha or are just following the trend for a certain image. The current trend of matcha consumption among young Indonesians is more towards modified versions, usually with added sugar, milk, syrup, or toppings such as boba. This means that what many people like may not be matcha in its original form, but rather sweet beverage products with matcha flavor. This phenomenon shows how a cultural product can be commodified when it enters the realm of the popular food and beverage industry, where the taste aspect is adjusted to suit local market tastes (Firman & Amelia, 2022). In other words, "like matcha" can mean "like the modern version of matcha" which is sweet and creamy, a far cry from the original ritualistic matcha drink in Japan.

However, Specialist matcha cafés are emerging, offering ceremonial grade matcha with authentic flavors and a deeper yet accessible drinking experience. Some creators also educate audiences on selecting quality matcha and recreating its authentic taste at home, since café prices are often too high for daily use. Practices like making matcha lattes at home, sharing morning rituals, and visiting these cafés show how matcha has become a shared, commodified lifestyle. Beyond physical consumption, matcha is also experienced visually and symbolically in the digital sphere. As Featherstone (2007) notes, postmodern consumer culture is shaped by aesthetics, style, and media making matcha not just a product but also a cultural and social statement. While content on health risks from excessive matcha intake exists, it attracts far less attention than lighter themes like tutorials or café recommendations, indicating that audiences prioritize lifestyle and taste exploration over critical health concerns.

CONCLUSION

Social media platforms are essential in making matcha consumption a major social phenomenon because they enable it to function as a symbol of consumption within a unique digital subculture and as a tool for identity creation. Matcha is portrayed in four primary dimensions, according to a netnographic and thematic analysis of Instagram and TikTok content: as a mark of social class, a symbol of wellness and self-care, trend-based consumption, and aesthetic identity or constructed online persona. On the other hand, the reflective-projective theory describes how social media projects aspirational norms that shape consumer identity in addition to reflecting society ideals. Matcha culture can

therefore be viewed as a type of lifestyle commodification driven by social media algorithms, in which consuming it serves as a symbolic symbol of status, identity, and cultural affinity in addition to being a culinary practice. The findings' implications highlight how social media shapes the consumption habits and sense of community of the urban people, most likely within the younger generation. They also show how everyday consumption behaviors can be understood as socio-cultural phenomena in the digital age.

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