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Representation Of Teenage Identity on Instagram: Dual Account Practices and Self-Presentation in Digital Society

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Indonesian teenagers construct and negotiate their digital identities on Instagram through the use of dual accounts, commonly referred to as primary and secondary accounts. While previous studies on self-presentation and social media identity have predominantly focused on Western contexts, limited attention has been given to how adolescents in Indonesian digital culture manage audience expectations and authenticity in online interactions. Using a quantitative exploratory approach, this study collected survey data from 28 active Instagram users aged 13–20 years. The research draws upon Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective to analyze patterns of identity representation across different digital spaces. The findings reveal that 82.1% of respondents maintain secondary accounts, which function as more private and emotionally expressive spaces, while primary accounts are used to present curated and socially acceptable identities. The study further demonstrates how audience segmentation and platform features shape teenagers' strategies of self-presentation and identity negotiation. These findings provide insight into the fragmented and dynamic nature of youth identity construction in contemporary digital society.

Keywords: Instagram, Digital Sociology, Identity Representation, Teenagers, Self-Presentation

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana remaja Indonesia membangun dan menyesuaikan identitas digital mereka di Instagram melalui penggunaan dua akun, yang umumnya disebut sebagai akun utama dan akun sekunder. Meskipun penelitian sebelumnya mengenai presentasi diri dan identitas media sosial sebagian besar berfokus pada konteks Barat, perhatian yang diberikan terhadap bagaimana remaja dalam budaya digital Indonesia mengelola ekspektasi audiens dan keaslian dalam interaksi daring masih terbatas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan eksploratif kuantitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data survei dari 28 pengguna Instagram aktif berusia 13–20 tahun. Penelitian ini mengacu pada konsep “*looking-glass self*” Cooley dan perspektif dramaturgikal Goffman untuk menganalisis pola representasi identitas di berbagai ruang digital. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 82,1% responden memiliki akun sekunder, yang berfungsi sebagai ruang yang lebih pribadi dan ekspresif secara emosional, sementara akun utama digunakan untuk menampilkan identitas yang telah disusun dan dapat diterima secara sosial. Penelitian ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bagaimana segmentasi audiens dan fitur platform membentuk strategi remaja dalam presentasi diri dan negosiasi identitas. Temuan ini memberikan wawasan mengenai sifat terfragmentasi dan dinamis dari konstruksi identitas remaja dalam masyarakat digital kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Instagram, Sosiologi Digital, Representasi Identitas, Remaja, Penampilan Diri



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1. Introduction

The digital era is a place for the development of various kinds of technology that facilitate human life, including the presence of smartphones. Nowadays, using a smartphone is a very inherent and important part of a person's daily life. Technology is also inseparable from the existence of the internet as an online medium. Various social media applications appeared on the internet, facilitating human interaction without the limits of distance and time. The internet and social media today have become part of the life of the global community. According to (Nasrullah, 2015) social media is one of the places where content such as profiles, activities or even user opinions are published, as well as media that provides a space to communicate and interact in social networks on cyber media. From a sociological point of view, social media is an opium that makes people prioritize their individualist side. Social media plays an important role as a means to express themselves or form a self-concept for its users. Self-concept is a person's perspective on themselves. According to Cooley, self-concept includes the relationship between self-awareness and other people's views of him, which is called the theory (looking-glass self) of self-mirror (Saliyo, 2016).

Recent studies show that social media acts like a "digital social mirror," where teens constantly build and check their identities based on how others interact with them and respond to their content. Adolescents actively take part in activities like showing themselves in a certain way, comparing themselves with others, and managing how they are seen by others, which together help shape their understanding of who they are in online environments. This shows that how people form their identity in the digital age is closely connected to the tools technology offers and the ways people respond to each other online.

Among different social media platforms, Instagram has become one of the most powerful tools for shaping how people see themselves. Its features that rely on visuals, like sharing photos, posting stories, and using reels, let users show a selected version of themselves. Studies indicate that teenagers use Instagram for more than just talking to each other; they also use pictures, text, and how they interact to show who they are and how they see themselves. This visual culture shows how important it is to look a certain way, live a certain lifestyle, and get approval from others when forming an online identity.

Instagram makes people choose what they show, so they often focus on the good parts of their lives and don't share much about the bad stuff. This situation matches larger studies showing that teenagers carefully think about how they are seen by others online. Showing a positive image on Instagram can affect how people see themselves and develop their identity over time. This shows that online actions and mental processes are connected in a way that influences each other.

Besides carefully chosen self-presentation, new studies have found that more and more teenagers are using multiple or second accounts. In the digital society era, teenagers utilize dual Instagram accounts as a self-presentation strategy to negotiate and differentiate their public and private identities within online social interactions (Hsb, 2023). These accounts, sometimes called "finsta" (fake Instagram) and "rinsta" (real Instagram), let users split up different parts of their personality and take care of separate groups of followers. A study by (Tao & Ellison, 2023) discovered that secondary accounts allow for more genuine and less controlled self-expression than primary accounts, showing how identity changes depending on the situation.

Having two accounts shows that people need to separate their audience, and they adjust how they present themselves depending on who is looking. Teenagers often use their main accounts to share things with a wider group of people, like people they know casually and even the general public. They keep their second accounts private, only for their closest friends. This practice shows how teenagers balance being true to themselves with fitting in on the internet. Moreover, how people create their identities on Instagram is not just about personal choices, but also shaped by the features of the platform and the social norms that exist there. Research indicates that teenagers use certain methods to manage how they are seen by others. These methods include choosing what content to share, modifying pictures, and controlling how they interact with people in order to create the image they want. These strategies show a deliberate attempt to match online presence with what society usually expects.

The idea of showing different sides of oneself also connects to classic sociology ideas, especially the concept of the looking-glass self. In online spaces, teenagers think about how others see them and change their actions based on that. Social media makes this process stronger by offering quick responses like likes, comments, and shares, which highlight how much people rely on others' approval to shape their sense of self.

In addition, research shows that teenagers' online personas aren't set in stone. Instead, they keep changing as kids interact and have experiences on social media. Instagram is a place where people try out different versions of themselves, figure out their place in social groups, and react to what others say about them. This shows how identity can change and develop in online environments.

Even though there is more research now about social media and how people see themselves, there is still a need to learn more about how teenagers handle different parts of their identity on various accounts, especially in Indonesia. Many current research studies look at people from Western countries, which means there's not enough information about how culture affects how people show themselves online. So, this study looks at how teens show who they are on Instagram by using both their main account and another account. This study looks at how people present themselves and how they divide their audience, aiming to add to the conversation about how digital identities are formed. It also offers real-world findings about the social effects of social media use among teenagers.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Identity and Self-Presentation in Sociological Perspective

In sociology, the concept of identity is not fixed; it develops through ongoing social interactions. Charles Horton Cooley, through the concept of the looking-glass self, explains that a person forms their identity based on how they think others view them, how they interpret others' judgments of them, and how they feel emotionally about those judgments. In this context, identity is the result of ongoing social reflection. This idea was later expanded by Erving Goffman using a dramaturgical approach, which views social life as akin to a performance on a stage. People present themselves in different ways depending on the audience they are facing, a concept known as the front stage and backstage. In the digital age, this concept has become increasingly relevant because social media provides people with a space to manage and control how they present themselves to different audiences.

Recent studies show that self-presentation in digital spaces has become more strategic and selective. Individuals not only express themselves, but also edit, filter, and curate the content they share online (Marwick, 2015) (Papacharissi., 2020). This indicates that identity on social media is performative and socially constructed rather than a direct reflection of reality. In adolescence, this process becomes more significant because teenagers are in an important stage of identity exploration. Social media therefore functions as an experimental space where they test different forms of self-representation.

However, identity formation on social media is not only shaped by personal interaction, but also by digital structures. (Marwick & Boyd, 2011) explain the concept of *context collapse*, where multiple audiences such as family, friends, and acquaintances are combined into one digital space. This situation creates challenges for teenagers because different audiences have different expectations. As a result, users often develop strategies to separate audiences and manage impressions more carefully.

1.2 Social Media and Digital Identity Construction

Social media has transformed the way people construct and negotiate identity. Instagram, as a visual-based platform, allows users to create representations of themselves through photos, videos, captions, and interactions. The identities displayed on Instagram are often the result of a selective curation process. Research also shows that digital identity is influenced not only by individuals, but also by platform structures such as algorithms and audience interactions (Bucher, 2021). Algorithms shape visibility and engagement, while likes and comments become forms of social validation that influence self-perception.

In addition, social media encourages the development of self-branding culture, especially among teenagers who tend to present idealized versions of themselves in order to gain social acceptance (Abidin, 2020). On one hand, Instagram provides opportunities for self-expression, but on the other hand, it creates pressure to appear attractive, successful, and socially acceptable. This condition demonstrates that digital identity is formed through the interaction between individual agency, social expectations, and technological systems.

Most existing studies on digital identity and self-presentation focus on Western societies. Therefore, discussions regarding how teenagers in non-Western contexts negotiate identity on social media remain limited. In Indonesia, where collectivist values and social norms strongly influence interpersonal relationships, identity management on social media may have different meanings and strategies. This study aims to contribute to this discussion by examining how Indonesian teenagers manage identity representation through dual-account practices on Instagram.

1.3 Dual Account Phenomenon and Audience Segmentation

The use of dual accounts on Instagram has become a common practice among teenagers. Generally, the main account is used to display a socially acceptable and curated identity, while the second account functions as a more private space for emotional and authentic expression (Dewi & Janitra, 2018)(Duffy et al., 2019). This phenomenon reflects the separation between public identity and private identity in digital spaces.

The practice of using two accounts is closely related to audience segmentation strategies. Teenagers consciously separate audiences in order to manage how they are perceived online. Main accounts are usually accessible to broader audiences, while second accounts are limited to close friends and trusted circles. This strategy can also be understood as a response to *context collapse*, where different audiences occupy the same digital environment.

Thus, dual-account practices are not merely a trend among teenagers, but also represent strategies of identity negotiation in digital society. Teenagers actively adapt to social pressures, platform visibility, and audience expectations while still trying to maintain spaces for more authentic self-expression.

1.4 Teenagers, Identity Formation, and Digital Culture

Adolescence is an important stage in forming identity, as explained by Erik Erikson in his psychological development theory. At this stage, a person goes through an identity crisis, which pushes them to search for and build their sense of self. In the digital age, this process is no longer limited to face-to-face interactions but also takes place in virtual spaces. Social media is the main place where teenagers explore their identity, seek social recognition, and form relationships.

However, this process is also influenced by social pressure and cultural norms that exist on digital platforms. Teenagers often have to balance their desire to express themselves authentically with the need to maintain social acceptance in online environments. In this context, Cooley's concept of the *looking-glass self* becomes relevant because teenagers continuously shape their identities based on how they imagine others perceive them. At the same time, Goffman's dramaturgical perspective explains how teenagers manage different forms of self-presentation depending on the audience they face.

The fluid nature of digital identity allows teenagers to edit, remove, and reconstruct their self-representation as their experiences and social interactions change. This shows that identity in digital spaces is dynamic rather than fixed. As a response to these conditions, the use of dual accounts can be understood as a strategy of audience segmentation, where teenagers separate public and private spaces in order to manage social expectations more effectively. Main accounts function as a "front stage" for socially acceptable performances, while secondary accounts become a "back stage" for more personal and authentic expression. Therefore, dual-account practices reflect not only individual preferences, but also teenagers' adaptation to the social pressures and interaction patterns that characterize digital society.

2. Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive design to explore how teenagers represent their identities through the use of second accounts on Instagram. The research population consists of teenagers aged 13 to 20 years old, selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion of being active Instagram users. A total of 28 participants were involved in this study, and the sample is intended to provide an initial and exploratory understanding of digital identity representation among teenagers rather than broad generalization. This age group was chosen based on Erik Erikson's theory of identity development, which emphasizes adolescence as a critical stage in the formation of self-identity.

Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire covered demographic information, ownership of second accounts, types of uploaded content, and differences in behavior between primary and secondary accounts. The indicators used in the questionnaire were developed based on theoretical concepts such as the *looking-glass self* and self-presentation theory to ensure content relevance. Reliability was supported through consistent question structure and clear wording. Data collection was conducted online between February 25 and 27, 2026, while adhering to research ethics principles, including informed consent and participant confidentiality. The data were analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of identity representation and social media practices among respondents. Although the study initially adopted a descriptive-correlational perspective, inferential statistical testing was not conducted due to the limited sample size. Therefore, the findings are positioned as exploratory and intended to provide preliminary insights into the phenomenon of dual-account practices among teenagers in digital society.

Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics to find common patterns and how responses were spread out, and thematic analysis was used to understand the open-ended answers given by the respondents. The findings were then analyzed using the theoretical perspectives of Charles Horton Cooley and Erving Goffman to understand the dynamics of identity representation in the digital context. Even though the study has some limits, like a small sample size and not using inferential analysis, it still offers some early insights into how teenagers use dual accounts and manage their online identities.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Findings: Prevalence of Dual Accounts

Table 1. Distribution of Instagram Account Ownership Among Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Instagram Ownership	Have account	28	100%
	Do not have account	0	0%
Second Account Ownership	Have second account	25	82.1%
	Do not have second account	3	17.9%
Total Respondents		28	100%

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

The research results show that out of the 28 respondents, all of them have an Instagram account, and 25 of them (82.1%) have a second account. The findings show that the use of dual accounts has become a common practice among teenagers in managing their digital identities on Instagram. Most respondents stated that their primary accounts are used to display curated and socially acceptable content, such as formal photos, achievements, and interactions visible to wider audiences. In contrast, secondary accounts are generally used for more personal expression, emotional sharing, and interactions with close friends. This indicates that teenagers consciously differentiate between public and private digital spaces.

The differences between primary and secondary accounts also reflect how teenagers adapt to audience expectations on social media. On primary accounts, respondents tend to be more selective in uploading content because they are aware of broader audiences, including family members, acquaintances, and school friends. Meanwhile, secondary accounts provide a relatively safer space for spontaneous expression without strong pressure to maintain a certain image. This finding supports Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, where primary accounts function as a "front stage" for socially acceptable performances, while secondary accounts become a "back stage" for more relaxed and authentic interactions.

In addition, the findings demonstrate that social media identity is shaped not only by personal preferences, but also by social pressure and digital interaction patterns. Teenagers continuously negotiate how they want to be perceived by others while trying to maintain authenticity in online environments. The practice of using second accounts can therefore be understood as a strategy to manage context collapse, where different social audiences occupy the same digital platform. Rather than simply representing "fake" and "real" identities, dual accounts illustrate how teenagers navigate multiple social expectations in digital society.

Overall, the results suggest that dual-account practices are part of teenagers' adaptive strategies in dealing with visibility, social judgment, and audience segmentation on Instagram. This phenomenon highlights that digital identity among teenagers is flexible, situational, and continuously reconstructed through online interaction.

3.2 Patterns of Identity Representation in First-Person Accounts

Table 2. Comparison of Identity Representation Between First and Second Accounts

Aspect	First Account	Second Account
Type of Audience	Public / broad (friends, acquaintances)	Private / limited (close friends only)
Privacy Setting	Mostly public	Mostly private
Content Type	Positive, curated, socially acceptable	Personal, spontaneous, expressive
Posting Frequency	Low	High
Emotional Expression	Limited	High
Purpose	Image building (self-branding)	Authentic self-expression
Social Function	Maintaining social image	Strengthening close relationships

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

On the main account, respondents tend to show a positive, controlled, and socially acceptable identity. The content that is uploaded is usually about activities that are considered "fit to show," such as formal events, friendly social interactions, and happy moments. This image shows that the main account acts as a public space where individuals try to create an ideal self-image. In this context, the main account represents an identity that has gone through a selection and curation process. Not all aspects of life are shown, but only parts that are thought to improve self-image are included.

This phenomenon can be explained through the dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman, where the main account serves as the front stage. In this space, individuals take on specific roles to meet the expectations of the audience. Every upload is part of a "social performance" that is designed to create a specific impression. Besides that, the concept of looking-glass self from Charles Horton Cooley is also relevant in explaining this behavior. Teenagers upload content while thinking about how others will judge them. So, the identity we show is not just about who we really are, but also comes from how we imagine others might judge us. Previous research shows that selective self-presentation is a common practice on social media, where individuals tend to show their best version of themselves. This is supported by the presence of digital features such as filters, editing, and cropping, which allow users to have more control over their self-image.

In addition, the main account also serves as a tool for building social capital. Teenagers try to keep their social connections and gain recognition from their surroundings by showing a positive image. This shows that digital identity is not just personal, but also has a strong social aspect. Therefore, the main account can be understood as a space for representing identity in a normative way, where individuals adjust themselves according to the applicable social standards.

3.3 Representation of Identity in the Second Account: Authentic Expression Space

Unlike the main account, the second account serves as a more private space and allows for a more authentic expression of self. Respondents said they feel more free to upload personal, spontaneous, and unfiltered content. The content on the second account includes different aspects of daily life that aren't shown on the main account, like feelings, complaints, entertainment preferences, and personal experiences. This shows that the second account becomes a space where a person can show a more "honest" side of themselves.

From a dramatic perspective, the second account can be seen as the back stage, which is a space where individuals don't have to maintain a specific social role. In this space, the pressure to appear perfect decreases, allowing a more authentic identity to emerge. This phenomenon also shows that people need private space even when they are interacting online. Although social media is public, teenagers still look for ways to express themselves more freely by creating certain types of content.

In addition, the second account also serves as a way to cope with social pressure on social media. Having an alternative space allows teenagers to balance the pressure to look perfect with the need to be themselves. Recent studies show that alternative accounts are often used as a way to avoid the performance pressure that exists on the main account. This shows that having a dual account is not just about identity, but also about the psychological well-being of the user. So, the second account can be seen as a space of resistance against strict social norms, and also as a way to keep one's true identity alive in the digital world.

3.4 Audience Segmentation and Identity Management Strategy

One of the main findings of this research is the practice of audience segmentation. Respondents consciously distinguish between the main account and the second account, aiming to control how they are perceived. On the main account, the audience tends to be more widespread and includes different social groups, such as friends, family, and even people who aren't very well known. On the other hand, the second account is only accessed by a limited social circle and is considered trustworthy.

This strategy shows that teenagers are able to think carefully about how they interact with others. They know that each audience has different expectations, so a different approach is needed when presenting the identity. The concept of context collapse is relevant in explaining this phenomenon, where different audiences end up in the same digital space. To avoid identity conflicts, teenagers create a second account as a solution. Another thing is that audience segmentation shows that identity is not only formed by individuals, but also by the social relationships they have. Identity is something that is constantly negotiated through interactions with others.

This phenomenon also shows that technology is not neutral, but rather, the way research is conducted influences how individuals interact and form their identities. Features like private accounts allow users to manage who can access their information. So, audience segmentation can be seen as an adaptive strategy for dealing with the complexity of interactions on social media.

3.5 Quantitative Data Analysis: Differences in Activity Across Accounts.

The data analysis shows a clear difference between the first account and the second account in terms of the number of followers, the number of people they follow, and the number of posts they have made. In general, the main account has more followers but fewer posts, while the second account has fewer followers but is more active in posting. This difference shows that the level of user activity is not only determined by how often someone uses the account, but also by the social context of the account. On the main account, users tend to be more careful when uploading content, so the frequency of posts becomes lower.

On the second account, the user feels more comfortable expressing themselves without worrying about being judged by a large audience. This caused the posting frequency to increase. This finding shows that there is a connection between the level of privacy and the freedom to express oneself. The more limited the audience, the more intense the self-expression becomes. This suggests that having control over your audience is an important part of building your digital identity.

In addition, the difference in the number of followers also shows that popularity is not always the main goal when using the second account. Instead, the main focus is on the quality of interactions and social closeness. From a sociological point of view, this shows that the social value of social media isn't just about how many connections you have, but also about how deep the relationships are that you build. Thus, the quantitative data supports the findings from the qualitative study regarding the differences in functions between the main account and the secondary account.

3.6 Theoretical Synthesis: Integrating Findings with Theory

This study shows that classic theories in sociology are still useful for explaining digital phenomena. The idea of the looking-glass self, developed by Charles Horton Cooley, helps explain how teenagers form their identity based on how they think others see them. In addition, the dramaturgy theory by Erving Goffman provides a strong framework for understanding the difference between the main account and the secondary account as front stage and back stage. Combining both theories shows that a person's digital

identity comes from how they interact with their social environment. Social media does not change the basic concept of identity, but it expands the space where the research process takes place.

In addition, these findings support Goffman's self-presentation theory, which explains that individuals actively manage how they are perceived by others in social interactions. This can be observed in how respondents carefully select and differentiate the content uploaded to their primary and secondary accounts based on audience expectations. The dual-account phenomenon also demonstrates that digital identity is contextual and dynamic rather than singular and fixed. Teenagers continuously adjust their self-representation according to different social situations and interaction spaces. Therefore, this study contributes to digital sociology by showing how classical sociological theories remain relevant in explaining contemporary forms of identity negotiation within social media environments.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that social media, especially Instagram, has become a main space for teenagers to build and represent their personal identities. The main finding shows that using two accounts, called first account and second account, is a common way people manage their digital identities. The main account is used as a public space to show a positive and socially acceptable image, while the second account serves as a private space where someone can express themselves more authentically without social pressure.

The findings of this study confirm the continued relevance of Cooley's *looking-glass self* and Goffman's dramaturgical perspective in understanding identity construction within digital society. Teenagers' identities on social media are shown to be fluid and context-dependent, where individuals actively adjust their self-presentation according to different audiences and interaction spaces. In this sense, social media functions not only as a communication platform, but also as a space for continuous identity negotiation. Furthermore, the practice of using dual accounts reflects teenagers' strategies in adapting to *context collapse*, where multiple social audiences coexist within the same digital environment. By separating primary and secondary accounts, teenagers attempt to manage the boundaries between public and private expression while balancing social acceptance with authenticity. These findings suggest that digital identity is shaped through the interaction between individual agency, platform structures, and broader social norms within contemporary digital culture.

However, this study has limitations in terms of the relatively small sample size and the analysis approach, which remains descriptive. Therefore, future research is recommended to use a larger sample, mixed methods, and inferential statistical analysis in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Also, exploring across different cultures and platforms is important for expanding the generalization of the findings. Overall, this research contributes both theoretically and empirically to the study of digital sociology by showing that adolescent identities in the social media era are fragmented, curated, and continuously negotiated. By understanding this dynamic, the research opens up possibilities for further studies on the relationship between technology, identity, and social change in contemporary digital society.

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