

Behind the Second Account: The Motives and Meaning of Using a Second Account on Instagram

Di Balik Akun Kedua: Motif dan Makna Penggunaan Second Account di Instagram

Syalsa Maulina Sitompul
State University of Padang
Email:
syalsamaulina@student.unp.ac.id

Amin Akbar
State University of Padang
Email:
aminakbar@fip.unp.ac.id

Correspondence:

Amin Akbar
Padang State University
Email: aminakbar@fip.unp.ac.id

Abstract

The increasing use of second Instagram accounts (second accounts or Finsta) has shifted their function from merely serving as alternative accounts to becoming spaces for emotional expression and identity management. However, previous research has been predominantly quantitative, leaving users' subjective experiences relatively underexplored. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of emerging adult women using second Instagram accounts. A descriptive phenomenological approach based on Giorgi's method was employed. Four women aged 25–28 years who actively used private second Instagram accounts participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed through phenomenological reduction, identification of meaning units, psychological transformation, and synthesis of the essential structure. Six main themes emerged: the second account as an emotional space, emotional freedom, audience selectivity and safety, sharing emotions without social validation, everyday interaction and closeness, and maintaining emotional boundaries. Scientifically, this study demonstrates that second Instagram accounts are not merely spaces for self-expression or audience management, but are experienced as psychological and relational spaces shaped by audience selectivity, perceived safety, emotional experiences, and the negotiation of personal boundaries.

Keyword : authenticity; digital; emotion regulation; phenomenology; second Instagram account

Abstrak

Meningkatnya penggunaan akun Instagram kedua (*second account* atau *finsta*) telah menggeser fungsinya dari sekadar akun alternatif menjadi ruang untuk mengekspresikan emosi dan mengelola identitas diri. Namun, penelitian sebelumnya masih didominasi pendekatan kuantitatif sehingga pengalaman subjektif pengguna belum banyak dieksplorasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup perempuan dewasa awal dalam menggunakan akun Instagram kedua. Penelitian menggunakan fenomenologi deskriptif berdasarkan metode Giorgi. Empat perempuan berusia 25–28 tahun yang menggunakan akun Instagram kedua bersifat privat diwawancarai secara semi-terstruktur. Data dianalisis melalui reduksi fenomenologis, *meaning units*, transformasi psikologis, dan struktur esensial. Hasil penelitian menghasilkan enam tema utama: ruang emosional, kebebasan emosional, selektivitas audiens dan rasa aman, berbagi emosi tanpa validasi sosial, interaksi dan kedekatan, serta menjaga batas emosional. Kontribusi ilmiah penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa akun Instagram kedua tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana ekspresi diri atau pengelolaan audiens, tetapi dimaknai sebagai ruang psikologis dan relasional yang terbentuk melalui selektivitas audiens, rasa aman, pengalaman emosional, dan negosiasi batas diri.

Kata Kunci : akun Instagram kedua; autentisitas digital; fenomenologi; regulasi emosi; pengalaman subjektif

Copyright (c) 2026 Syalsa Maulina Sitompul & Amin Akbar

Received 21/05/2026

Revised 12/09/2026

Accepted 02/10/2026



INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has transformed how individuals interact, build social relationships, and express themselves. Smartphones, initially serving merely as communication tools, have evolved into multifunctional devices integrated into various aspects of daily life—including communication, learning, productivity, entertainment, and social networking (Alharbi et al., 2026; Cha & Seo, 2018; Islambouli et al., 2025). Smartphone usage is also closely linked to social media use (Viner et al., 2019). In Indonesia, 73.2% of the population owns a smartphone and 50.2% use social media, while the average time spent online reaches 7 hours and 22 minutes per day, with approximately 4 hours and 38 minutes of that time accessed via mobile phones (Kemp, 2025). These figures indicate that social media has evolved from a mere medium for information exchange into a social space for communication, relationship-building, and identity expression.

Instagram is one of the most widely used platforms in Indonesia. Data from NapoleonCat (2025) indicates that there are 106,388,900 Instagram users in Indonesia—approximately 37.3% of the total population—with women accounting for 54.3% of the user base. As a visually oriented social media platform, Instagram provides a space for individuals to express their identities and project a self-image through photos, videos, and various other forms of content (Royal Society Public Health & Young Health Movement, 2017). The practice of visual self-presentation is also relevant to young adult women; Dhir et al. (2016) found that women in both adolescent and young adult age groups take and share more selfies than men. Through this process, individuals engage in self-presentation—a form of impression management aimed at shaping how they are perceived by others (Goffman, 2008). The way individuals present themselves on social media is also linked to their self-concept (Choi et al., 2020; Novianti & Merida, 2021). In a psychological context, self-concept is also associated with an individual's ability to cope with and adapt to the various experiences they encounter (Irianto et al., 2021).

Managing self-presentation has become increasingly complex because Instagram brings together family, close friends, college peers, colleagues, and acquaintances within a single digital space. This situation creates "context collapse"—the merging of previously separate social contexts—forcing individuals to contend with an audience characterized by diverse norms, expectations, and levels of intimacy (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). When a single post is visible to multiple groups simultaneously, individuals may struggle to determine which aspects of themselves are appropriate to display. One strategy for navigating this situation is audience segmentation through the use of a secondary Instagram account (often referred to as a "second account" or "Finsta"), which typically has a more limited and intimate follower base compared to the primary account (Loh & Walsh, 2021; Yuan et al., 2026).

The phenomenon of "second accounts" is also observed in Indonesia. A Jakpat Survey (2023) indicates that Instagram has the highest percentage of second-account

ownership compared to other social media platforms. These accounts are generally more private and are used to share daily activities, express emotions, and showcase facets of the self that are not typically shared on primary accounts. Research suggests that the use of alternative accounts is linked to self-presentation, authenticity, the management of social evaluation, and interpersonal validation (Nor et al., 2025; Skogen et al., 2021). Thus, a second account serves not merely as an additional account but can function as a social space with a purpose and significance distinct from those of the primary account.

Several studies have elucidated the motivations and usage patterns associated with secondary accounts. Kang & Wei (2020) found that "Finstas" are used to gain freedom of expression and engage in more honest self-disclosure. Won et al. (2021) demonstrated that using multiple accounts allows users to create distinct spaces and personas tailored to specific relational contexts and self-presentation goals. Xiao et al. (2020) showed that Finstas can serve as a form of "intimate reconfiguration" of social media, enabling more personal and intimate interactions. Huang & Vitak (2022) also found that primary accounts tend to feature content that is more positive, selected, and curated, whereas Finstas allow users to share content that is spontaneous and emotional. However, the authenticity found in secondary accounts does not imply an absence of self-presentation, as users still consider their audience and how they will be perceived (Huang & Vitak, 2022). Dewar et al. (2019) further demonstrated that Finstas can provide a space for users to reveal more personal aspects of themselves.

The use of a secondary account must be understood within the context of the demands of self-presentation on social media. The pressure to project an ideal self-image can be linked to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and a diminished sense of authenticity (Chae, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2021). A tendency toward social comparison while using social media can also be associated with the fatigue experienced by users (Suciani & Darmawanti, 2026). For young adult women, this context is particularly relevant, as social comparison is also linked to body dissatisfaction during the period of emerging adulthood (Ananta & Suhadianto, 2022). Thus, a secondary account can serve as a space allowing individuals to manage audience boundaries and reveal specific aspects of themselves to a group perceived as safer. This perspective is supported by Tao & Ellison (2023); through interviews with 17 young adult women who use both "Finsta" and "Rinsta" accounts, they demonstrated that self-presentation on secondary accounts evolves as individuals transition into adulthood.

Research on secondary accounts has also linked them to psychological aspects. Ilma et al. (2020), for instance, demonstrated a connection between self-disclosure, self-concept, and social anxiety among users of secondary Instagram accounts. These findings indicate that the use of secondary accounts involves significant psychological dimensions; however, the quantitative approach employed has not yet captured how users experience and derive meaning from this practice in their daily lives.

While research on secondary accounts has shed light on usage motivations, self-presentation patterns, audience management, and authenticity, limitations remain in understanding the subjective experiences underlying these practices. Previous studies have largely focused on the reasons for and functions of using secondary accounts—such as gaining freedom of expression, fostering closeness with specific groups, or presenting a more authentic self (Huang & Vitak, 2022; Kang & Wei, 2020). Although these findings offer insight into user actions and objectives, they do not fully explain how the use of secondary accounts is experienced and imbued with meaning in daily life. Consequently, there is a gap between the understanding of the functions of secondary accounts and the understanding of the meaning derived from the experience of using them.

Furthermore, previous research indicates a tension regarding the understanding of authenticity on secondary accounts. On one hand, "Finstas" are viewed as spaces that are more spontaneous, personal, and authentic than primary accounts (Dewar et al., 2019; Kang & Wei, 2020; Taber & Whittaker, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). On the other hand, users still engage in impression management and consider how they are perceived by specific audiences (Huang & Vitak, 2022). This suggests that authenticity on secondary accounts does not necessarily imply an absence of impression management; rather, it can be contextual and negotiated based on audience characteristics and the aspects of the self one wishes to present. However, little is known about how users themselves experience and interpret this negotiation process involving authenticity, impression management, and audience boundaries.

This gap is also evident in the context of research. Tao & Ellison (2023) explored the experiences of 17 female emerging adults who use both "Finsta" and "Rinsta" accounts through interviews, demonstrating that self-presentation on secondary accounts can evolve as individuals transition into adulthood. However, that study was conducted within the context of the United States. In the Indonesian context, research specifically exploring the lived experiences and psychological significance of using a second Instagram account remains limited. This is significant because experiences regarding privacy, self-disclosure, interpersonal closeness, social acceptance, and the boundaries between public and private spheres can be influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which individuals live.

This gap indicates that the research approach needs to be aligned with the questions being addressed. While a quantitative approach can provide information on usage frequency, motivations, behavioral tendencies, or relationships between variables, it is less effective at enabling researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of how individuals experience and ascribe meaning to a phenomenon. This study aims not only to determine why individuals use secondary accounts but also to understand how these accounts are experienced and what significance they hold for the users. Given that the research focuses on lived experience and subjective meaning, a phenomenological approach was selected to understand the

phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals experiencing it (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Addressing this gap, the novelty of this study lies in its exploration of the use of a second Instagram account as a lived experience and a source of subjective meaning for young adult women in the Indonesian context, rather than merely as an audience management strategy or a form of self-presentation. The study examines how young adult women experience the distinctions between their primary and secondary accounts, manage audience boundaries, negotiate authenticity, and derive meaning from these experiences in their daily lives. Thus, this research aims to broaden the understanding of second account usage—shifting the focus from mere function and behavior to the lived experiences and subjective meanings held by the users.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design based on the method developed by Giorgi. This approach aims to uncover and describe the essence of the participants' lived experiences as they experienced them, without adding interpretations beyond the experiences shared (Englander & Morley, 2023). Consequently, the study does not focus on measuring the frequency of secondary Instagram account usage or testing relationships between variables; rather, it focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of how participants perceive and make sense of using these secondary accounts as spaces for self-expression, emotional regulation, and the management of social relationships.

The bracketing process involved creating reflexive memos before and during the analysis to identify and set aside the researcher's assumptions regarding the use of secondary Instagram accounts, ensuring that interpretations remained centered on the participants' experiences. In the descriptive phenomenological approach, the researcher employed phenomenological reduction through bracketing—suspending assumptions, personal experiences, and prior knowledge concerning the phenomenon under study—to understand the meaning of the experience from the participants' perspectives. Consequently, the analysis aimed to capture the essential structure of the experience of using secondary Instagram accounts as lived by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Englander & Morley, 2023).

Research Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique involving the selection of participants based on specific characteristics aligned with the research objectives. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) women aged 18–29; (2) possession of a primary Instagram account and a secondary account active for at least the past six months; (3) use of the secondary account as a space for personal expression rather than for business or promotional purposes; (4) the secondary account being private; and (5) willingness to openly share

experiences regarding the use of the secondary account during the interview process.

The study involved four female participants aged 25–28. A sample of four participants was deemed sufficient, as it allowed for an in-depth exploration of experiences and yielded rich descriptions aligned with the focus of descriptive phenomenology. Participant adequacy was determined not by statistical representation, but by the depth and relevance of the experiences regarding the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures, data confidentiality, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the use of research data solely for academic purposes. Following this explanation, all participants provided voluntary informed consent to take part in the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Code	Ages	Education
P1	27 Years	Bachelor degree
P2	27 Years	Bachelor degree
P3	28 Years	Bachelor degree
P4	26 Years	Master's degree

Data collection technique

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews that allowed researchers to explore participants' experiences flexibly while adhering to a prepared interview guide. Interview topics covered the reasons for using a secondary account, emotional experiences associated with using both primary and secondary accounts, forms of self-expression, audience management, experiences of authenticity, and the significance of using a secondary account in daily life. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participant availability, and lasted approximately 15–20 minutes per participant. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive phenomenological approach based on Giorgi's method (Englander & Morley, 2023). The analysis began with

repeated readings of the entire interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived experiences. Subsequently, the researcher identified "meaning units"—segments of the transcripts containing psychological significance regarding the experience of using a second Instagram account.

Each meaning unit was then transformed into psychological language (psychological transformation) without losing the original meaning conveyed by the participants. The results of this transformation were subsequently synthesized based on shared meanings to form a thematic structure representing the participants' experiences. Finally, all thematic structures were synthesized to derive an essential structure describing the experience of using a second Instagram account as a psychological space in daily life.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study adheres to the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (Enworo, 2023). Credibility is strengthened through member checking—reconfirming interpretations with participants—and peer debriefing with the academic supervisor to discuss the analysis process and minimize researcher subjectivity. Dependability and confirmability are maintained through the systematic documentation of the entire research process in the form of an audit trail, allowing analytical decisions to be traced back and ensuring that interpretations are grounded in participant data rather than researcher assumptions. Meanwhile, transferability is supported by a detailed presentation of participant characteristics, the research context, and data collection procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on a descriptive phenomenological analysis using Giorgi's method (Englander & Morley, 2023), the researcher identified a number of meaning units from the interview transcripts; these were subsequently transformed into psychological meanings and synthesized into six main themes. Finally, these six themes were integrated into a single essential structure representing the participants' experiences of making sense of their use of a second Instagram account.

Table 2. Research Theme Structure Based on Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis

No	Master Theme	Subtheme	P1	P2	P3	P4	Persamaan dan Perbedaan Pengalaman
1	A Second Account as an Emotional Space	A space to express emotions	✓	✓	✓	✓	Similarity: All participants perceive the second account as a more personal space compared to the main account. Differences: P1 emphasizes the enjoyment of sharing content; P2 views it as a space for healing and emotional release; P3 sees it as a place to share stories with specific people; whereas P4 regards it as a digital diary.
		A space to show a side of yourself that doesn't appear on your main account.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants acknowledged the existence of a side of themselves that is more easily revealed on a secondary account. The differences lie in the mode of expression: P1 and P3 emphasized spontaneity, P2 showcased "another side of me," while P4 highlighted a reflective function.

2	Emotional Freedom	Free to express oneself without aesthetic demands.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants experienced greater freedom compared to their main accounts. P1 and P3 emphasized freedom from aesthetic and content-editing demands, whereas P2 and P4 emphasized the freedom to express emotions without fear of judgment.
		Free from social judgment.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants felt more at ease because they were not overly concerned with the judgments of others. The intensity of the experience was most pronounced in P2, who explicitly stated that they were being themselves without regard for others' opinions.
3	Audience Selectivity and a Sense of Security	Selecting a trusted audience.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants restricted followers of their secondary accounts to those closest to them. P2 had the most specific criteria (trusted female friends), whereas P1, P3, and P4 placed greater emphasis on emotional closeness.
		A sense of security in sharing.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants associated a sense of safety with a selected audience. The difference was that P1 and P4 emphasized trust, whereas P2 focused more on concerns regarding negative judgment on their main account.
4	Sharing Emotions Without Validation	Expressing feelings without expecting a response.	✓	✓	✓	✓	None of the participants uploaded content in search of popularity. P2 felt relieved when understood by close friends, P3 wanted to be understood by people with similar experiences, while P4 showed an attitude of not dwelling on the response after uploading..
5	Daily Interactions and Closeness	Maintaining relationships with close friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants used a second account to maintain social connections. P1 and P3 primarily used the account to keep up with friends, P2 found relief in being understood, while P4 emphasized sharing activities with close friends.
6	Maintaining Emotional Boundaries	Separating public and private spaces.	✓	✓	✓	✓	All participants distinguish between the functions of their primary and secondary accounts. P1 places greater emphasis on the need to maintain a positive image on the primary account, P2 highlights digital footprints, P3 links it to personal branding, while P4 stresses the broad audience reach of the primary account.
		Limiting shared content.	✓	✓	✓	✓	Despite feeling freer on their second accounts, all participants still observed certain limits regarding content considered too personal or sensitive.

* The six master themes were then synthesized into the essential structure of the experience.

Based on Table 2, it is evident that all participants shared a relatively similar experience in perceiving their second Instagram account as a safer space compared to their primary account. Nevertheless, each participant placed different emphasis on the function of the second account. These variations are explained in greater detail in the description of each theme below.

A Second Account as an Emotional Space

All participants perceive their second Instagram account as a space that is emotionally distinct from their primary account. The primary account is viewed as an open space fraught with social demands, whereas the second account is seen as a more private, personal, and pressure-free space.

"On my first account, I have to think about it first, edit it, and consider whether it's appropriate or not. But on my second account, I don't have to think about anything. I just post it. (P1, 18/12/25, lines 23-28.)"

"The first account is just like the surface of me. People don't know what my life is really like. On my second account, that's the other side of me. (P2, 20/12/25, lines 67-68)"

"The person is still the same; it's just the extent to which I show myself that differs. On my first account, I show less of myself, while on my second account, I show more. (P3, 30/12/25, lines 69-72)"

"The second account is like a diary. I put things there that I can't post on my first account. (P4, 04/01/26, lines 11-12)"

All four participants perceive their secondary Instagram accounts as spaces distinct from their primary ones, as they offer a sense of security for self-expression. However, the nature of this perception varies. P1 emphasizes freedom from the pressures of self-presentation; P2 views the secondary account as a space to reveal a more authentic side of themselves; P3 sees it as an extension of their expressive space without altering their identity; and P4 regards it as a digital diary for preserving personal experiences.

Emotional Freedom

A "second account" is viewed as an outlet for emotional release from the social pressures associated with one's primary account, offering space for freer and more spontaneous experiences.

"The second account is a place to release my feelings, a place to heal, and a safe space. When I'm tired, that's where I go." (P2, 20/12/25, lines 41-43)

"The second account is just for having fun—random stuff, without having to think about it." (P1, 18/12/25, lines 23-27)

"It's not that free either, but it's definitely more free than on my first account." (P3, 30/12/25, lines 74-77)

"Once I post something on my second account, I just let it be. It's simply a way to release my feelings." (P4, 04/01/26, lines 57-60)

In general, participants perceive the second account as a space offering greater emotional freedom compared to their primary account. However, the nature of this freedom varies among the participants. P1 emphasizes spontaneity and the liberty to post content without aesthetic pressures; P2 views the second account as a space for healing and emotional release; P3 sees this freedom as operating within self-imposed boundaries; and P4 emphasizes the account's function as a means to express feelings without regard for the reactions or judgments of others.

Audience Selectivity and a Sense of Security

The sense of security associated with using a secondary Instagram account is closely linked to the participants' ability to control who can access the account. All participants consciously select their followers based on emotional closeness, levels of trust, and comfort in interaction. This audience selectivity forms the basis for the sense of security felt when sharing experiences and feelings that are not disclosed on their primary accounts.

"Only close friends are allowed to follow me. I don't allow guys to follow me because sometimes I don't wear a hijab on my second account." (P1, 18/12/25, lines 71-73)

"My lovely friends whom I trust—girls who are close to me and who won't spill my secrets." (P2, lines 27-30)

"The second account is a part of myself that I only want to show to certain people." (P3, 30/12/25, lines 48-50)

"The people who can see my second account are those closest to me, people I already trust." (P4, 04/01/26, lines 85-87)

The synthesis of results indicates that the sense of security associated with using a second Instagram account is established through audience selectivity. All participants restricted access to individuals considered close and trustworthy; however, the underlying rationale differed among them. P1 prioritized privacy protection regarding self-presentation, P2 emphasized the importance of audience trust and loyalty, and P3 viewed the second account as a space specifically reserved for a select group of people, whereas P4 highlighted that audience filtering enabled a more comfortable and uninhibited sharing of experiences.

Sharing Emotions Without Validation

Participants view their second Instagram account as a space to express emotions without relying on responses or validation from others. Unlike their primary account—often associated with a focus on "likes," comments, or social judgment—posts on the second account serve primarily as a means to express feelings and document personal experiences. The satisfaction participants derive stems from the act of self-expression itself, rather than from audience reactions.

"Once I've posted something on my second account, I don't think about it anymore. I just let it be. It's simply a way to release my feelings." (P4, 04/01/26, lines 30-31)

"On my second account, I don't really think about what other people might think." (P1, 18/12/25, line 103)

"Sometimes they know how I'm feeling, and that alone makes me feel relieved." (P2, 20/12/25, lines 105-106)

"I just upload it and leave it at that. I don't feel anything afterward." (P3, 30/12/25, lines 125-137)

The majority of participants' experiences indicate that the use of a secondary Instagram account is not driven by a desire for social validation. They all use the platform to post content as a means of self-expression and emotional release. However, there are variations in their experiences: P1 emphasizes freedom from social judgment, P2 finds relief in being understood by those closest to them, P3 views posting as an activity that requires no further response, and P4 highlights the account's role as a medium for releasing emotions without regard for audience reactions.

Daily Interactions and Closeness

Although private in nature, a secondary account serves as a space to maintain and strengthen relationships with those closest to the user. Interactions—whether

through posts or responses from close friends—foster a sense of emotional closeness in daily life.

“After I uploaded an unboxing post, someone replied and asked me about it. Then I explained it to them. It was like, ‘Oh, they know this because they heard it from me.’ That made us feel closer.” (P1, 18/12/25, lines 82–86)

“The second account is a place to share activities with my close friends.” (P4, 04/01/26, lines 11–13)

“Even though we rarely meet, I can still know that they’re doing well.” (P3, 30/12/25, lines 151–157)

“On my second account, I feel brave enough to speak up and express my feelings, but I don’t want other people to feel uncomfortable just because they know about them.” (P2, 20/12/25, lines 59–64)

Participants utilize a second Instagram account as a space to maintain closeness with those closest to them; however, the nature of the experience varies. P1 emphasizes that interactions through posts can strengthen relationships; P2 defines closeness as the experience of being emotionally understood; P3 views the second account as a means to keep up with friends’ lives despite infrequent in-person meetings; while P4 places greater emphasis on the account’s function as a medium for sharing daily activities with a trusted circle of friends.

Maintaining Emotional Boundaries

Participants indicated that using a secondary account does not eliminate all emotional risks. Some participants experienced emotional discomfort and chose to withdraw as a form of self-protection.

“There are also moments when I feel uncomfortable, for example, when my friends’ responses turn out to be judgmental. That makes me overthink.” (P2, 20/12/25, lines 134–136)

“Sometimes I feel like it’s not healthy because I end up overthinking whenever I want to post something on my first account.” (P3, 30/12/25, lines 142–143)

“When I want to vent, I don’t tell all of my close friends. I still choose which friend I want to open up to.” (P1, 18/12/25, lines 124–125)

“I never feel anxious because I’ve already filtered my audience.” (P4, 04/01/26, lines 41–42)

Overall, participants indicated that maintaining emotional boundaries is a crucial aspect of the experience of using a secondary Instagram account. However, the approaches taken varied among the participants. P1 preferred to keep their distance when feeling uncomfortable; P2 became more cautious after facing negative judgment from others; P3 recognized the pressure stemming from self-presentation demands on their primary account; and P4 ensured emotional comfort by filtering their audience from the outset, thereby avoiding anxiety while using the secondary account.

The Essence of the Second Account Experience

A synthesis of the six themes reveals that a second Instagram account is perceived not merely as an alternative account, but as a safe psychological space for being one’s true self. This space enables participants to manage their emotions, express experiences more authentically, build relationships with trusted individuals, and maintain emotional boundaries according to their personal needs.

“I feel like life is more fun when you have a second account.” (P1, 18/12/25, line 168)

“The second account is a place where I can release my feelings.” (P2, 20/12/25, lines 41–43)

“It’s not a different self, but a different space.” (P3, 30/12/25, lines 69–72)

“The second account is my diary.” (P4, 04/01/26, line 48)

Although each participant placed varying emphasis on the function of their secondary Instagram account, the overall experience points to a single, essential structure: the account serves as a psychologically safe space for being one’s authentic self. This space allows participants to express emotions more freely, manage relationships with those closest to them, maintain emotional boundaries, and document life experiences without the pressure to meet the social expectations associated with their primary accounts.

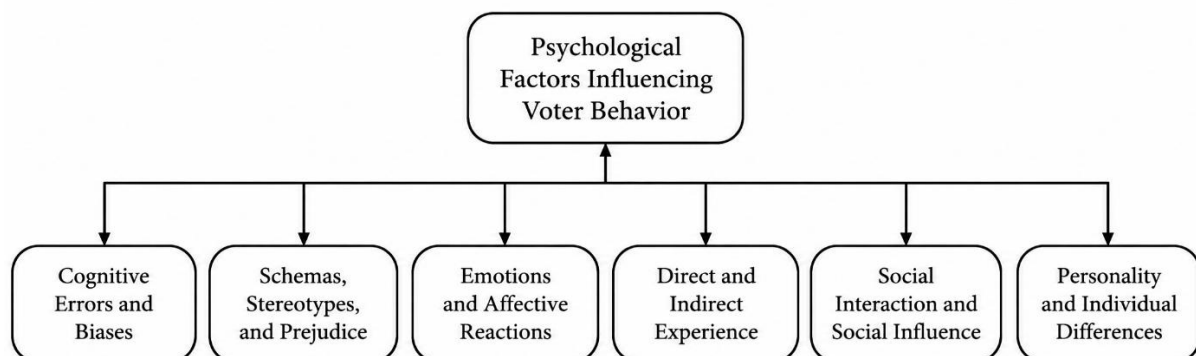


Figure 1. Essential structure of the experience of using a second Instagram account.

DISCUSSION

Research findings indicate that a secondary Instagram account is perceived as a psychological space distinct from the primary account. The primary account is largely viewed as a space involving demands for self-presentation, whereas the secondary account is seen as a more personal space with clearer audience boundaries. This dynamic allows for the experience and expression of certain emotions and aspects of the self in a more spontaneous manner. Thus, the distinction in meaning between the two accounts relates not only to the existence of an alternative account but also to differences in social context and the individual's level of control over the audience.

Previous research has identified the use of Finstas as spaces offering greater flexibility for self-expression and the cultivation of closeness (Kang & Wei, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020). Differences in self-presentation between primary and secondary accounts have also been observed among Finsta and Rinsta users (Tao & Ellison, 2023). The findings of this study extend that work by demonstrating that the distinction between the two accounts is perceived not merely as a difference in self-presentation, but also as a difference in psychological experience; the secondary account is experienced as a more controlled, personal, and safe space due to the greater predictability of the audience.

Freedom of expression and authenticity.

Freedom of expression on a secondary account emerges in contexts where the pressure to maintain a specific image is perceived as lower. A limited and trusted audience affords the liberty to share experiences that might not be displayed on a primary account. Freedom of expression and more honest self-disclosure have been identified as reasons for using "Finstas" (Kang & Wei, 2020), while interactions on these secondary accounts are also understood as a form of "intimate reconfiguration" of social media (Xiao et al., 2020).

However, this freedom does not signify an absence of self-presentation. Considerations regarding audience characteristics and impression management remain evident in the use of secondary accounts (Akhmad et al., 2024; Huang & Vitak, 2022). Therefore, the freedom experienced by participants is best understood as freedom from the pressure of a broad audience, rather than freedom from all forms of self-management.

The findings also demonstrate that authenticity on secondary accounts is contextual. While "finstas" are perceived as more personal and authentic spaces compared to primary accounts (Dewar et al., 2019; Kang & Wei, 2020; Xiao et al., 2020), impression management is still conducted based on audience characteristics (Huang & Vitak, 2022). Similar patterns have been observed by Taber & Whittaker (2020) and Tao & Ellison (2023). Thus, authenticity and self-presentation need not be viewed as mutually exclusive conditions. In the context of this study, authenticity is best understood as the experience of having greater latitude to determine which aspects of the self to display and with whom to share them.

Audience selectivity and the establishment of a sense of security.

Audience selectivity is a factor that fosters a sense of security regarding secondary accounts. Participants tend to select individuals who are close to them and whom they trust, thereby reducing uncertainty about who views their content and how others might respond. When the audience is more predictable, the pressure to conform to various social expectations is also diminished.

Kondisi tersebut dapat dipahami melalui konsep This situation can be understood through the concept of "context collapse"—the convergence of various social contexts within a single digital space, requiring individuals to engage with audiences holding differing norms and expectations (Marwick & boyd, 2011). The use of a secondary account can be viewed as an attempt to reshape these contextual boundaries. Privacy management has been identified as a component of self-regulation in social media usage (Masur & Scharkow, 2016), while multiple accounts can be employed to segment audiences and manage the presentation of identity and personal information (Yuan et al., 2026).

These findings extend that understanding by demonstrating that audience segmentation functions not only as a privacy management strategy but is also experienced as a condition that fosters a sense of security and emotional openness. From the participants' perspective, the presence of a limited audience makes interactions feel more predictable and reduces concerns regarding social judgment.

However, the sense of safety found in this study stems from more than just technical privacy. Trust in the individuals comprising the audience is a crucial component of that sense of security. Consequently, a private account does not automatically constitute a safe space; for the participants, a sense of safety emerged when audience restrictions were coupled with trust in the people who had access to the content.

A second account as a space for emotional expression.

The "second account" is also experienced as a space for expressing emotions, releasing feelings, and documenting personal experiences. Reduced concern regarding social judgment allows for greater freedom of emotional expression. These findings do not indicate that second accounts directly enhance emotional regulation; rather, they show that such accounts serve as a context that facilitates the expression and release of emotional experiences.

Emotion regulation encompasses various processes used to influence the experience and expression of emotions (Gross, 2015). In this study, such experiences appear linked to changes in social context. When the pressure to maintain a specific image diminishes, the perceived barriers to expressing emotions also decrease. Characteristics of the digital environment associated with affective experiences and emotion regulation have also been reported in previous research (Schaffner et al., 2022).

These findings offer a different perspective from research indicating that the demands of self-presentation and social evaluation can be linked to psychological distress

(Chae, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2021). This discrepancy likely stems from audience characteristics and the purpose of usage. Thus, emotional experiences on social media cannot be divorced from the social context in which interactions occur. A "second account" serves as an emotional space not because Instagram inherently provides psychological benefits, but because the social conditions within it are perceived as safer.

Self-expression and social validation

Research findings indicate that sharing activities on secondary accounts are not primarily aimed at gaining popularity or validation from a broad audience. A greater sense of relief is derived from the process of expressing experiences, although responses from trusted individuals remain meaningful. This pattern reveals a distinct orientation regarding social feedback, contrasting with social media usage that is more focused on public evaluation.

These findings differ from research linking a reliance on social validation to psychological distress associated with social media use (Chae, 2017; Marino et al., 2018). This discrepancy can be understood by considering the characteristics of the audience for "second accounts," which is more limited and pre-selected. On a primary account, responses may come from a diverse social circle, making social evaluation harder to predict; conversely, on a second account, responses originate from individuals deemed close or trustworthy.

Thus, the need for social validation does not entirely disappear but undergoes a shift in meaning. Recognition from a broad audience becomes less dominant, whereas responses from trusted individuals remain significant to the participants. These findings demonstrate that self-expression and the need for social connection can coexist.

A second account as a relational space.

Beyond serving as a space for personal expression, a secondary account is viewed as a venue for maintaining closeness with one's inner circle. Replying to posts, sharing daily activities, and staying updated on friends' well-being foster a meaningful sense of connection. Digital communication within such private spaces has also been linked to social support and relational closeness. (Bazarova et al., 2015; Schaffner et al., 2022).

However, closeness in this study is not determined solely by the frequency of communication. Shared experiences with trusted individuals are understood as a crucial part of the relationship's meaning. Thus, privacy and connectedness need not be viewed as opposing conditions; indeed, limiting the audience can create conditions that better foster openness and the maintenance of specific relationships.

Emotional boundaries are maintained.

Although a secondary account offers a safer and more authentic experience, the space is not entirely free from social evaluation. Participants still experience discomfort when they perceive a risk of judgment or misunderstanding. Consequently, they engage in content selection, interaction restrictions, and the maintenance of distance from their audience as forms of self-protection.

Digital authenticity remains influenced by social norms and audience expectations (Abidin, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2021). The findings of this study demonstrate that "second accounts" do not eliminate the need for self-presentation management; rather, they provide individuals with greater latitude to determine the boundaries of openness for themselves. Thus, authenticity remains situational and is negotiated based on the social relationships involved.

The phenomenological meaning of using a second account

When viewed holistically, the second account is understood not merely as an alternative account, but as a social space for renegotiating the relationship between the self, the audience, and the boundaries of openness. A selective audience fosters a sense of security; this security, in turn, enables greater openness, facilitating more spontaneous self-expression and emotional experiences. At the same time, boundaries are maintained to preserve that sense of security.

Phenomenologically, a second account can be understood as a space for remaining connected with others without having to reveal one's entire self to the public. Therefore, the distinction between a primary account and a second account is not primarily about the existence of two separate identities, but rather about two social contexts in which different facets of the self can be experienced and presented with varying degrees of openness.

This interpretation expands upon previous research that primarily focused on freedom of expression, self-presentation, audience management, and identity construction regarding "second accounts" (Akhmad et al., 2024; Huang & Vitak, 2022; Kang & Wei, 2020; Tao & Ellison, 2023). In this study, these functions are understood not merely as behavioral characteristics but are experienced as psychological and relational phenomena within daily life.

Theoretical implications and research contributions

Research findings indicate that self-presentation on social media cannot be separated from the context of the accompanying audience. Context collapse can create pressure to adapt to various social groups, whereas the use of multiple accounts can serve as a way to reshape those contextual boundaries (Marwick & boyd, 2011; Yuan et al., 2026). These findings also provide a more complex understanding of digital authenticity. Authenticity need not be understood as the absence of self-presentation, but rather as the experience of having greater control over how the self is presented to specific audiences. This understanding is consistent with findings regarding the management of self-presentation and audiences on secondary accounts (Huang & Vitak, 2022; Taber & Whittaker, 2020; Tao & Ellison, 2023).

Thus, the novelty of this study does not lie in the finding that secondary accounts are used for freer self-expression, as this has been established previously. Instead, the study's novelty lies in the phenomenological understanding of the secondary Instagram account as a psychological and relational space—experienced through audience management, the negotiation of authenticity, emotional expression, and the maintenance of social connections—among young adult women in the Indonesian

context. This understanding shifts the study of secondary accounts from a focus on function and behavior toward the psychological meanings constructed by individuals within their digital social lives.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study reveals that a second Instagram account serves as a psychological and relational space, offering young adult women the freedom to express themselves, share emotions, maintain close relationships, and manage boundaries regarding openness. Audience selectivity reduces the pressure of self-presentation, allowing for a greater sense of authenticity; however, this authenticity is still negotiated through considerations of the audience and emotional boundaries. Thus, the second account functions not merely as an alternative account, but as a digital space that derives its meaning from the users' subjective experiences.

Suggestion

Future research should involve a more diverse group of participants and explore the use of alternative accounts on other platforms to broaden the understanding of experiences regarding authenticity, emotional expression, and audience management. Longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches could also be employed to further develop these phenomenological findings. For psychology practitioners and platform developers, the study's findings highlight the importance of audience control, privacy, and social boundary management in fostering a safer social media experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author extends their gratitude to all participants who kindly dedicated their time and shared their experiences during the interview process. Appreciation is also expressed to the academic supervisor for the input and guidance provided throughout the course of this research.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles, including respect for participant autonomy, data confidentiality, and the protection of participant identities. Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures, their right to withdraw at any time, and the fact that the data would be used solely for academic purposes. All participants provided voluntary informed consent before taking part in the study.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the research, writing, or publication of this article.

TRANSPARENCY OF DATA

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because they contain personal information and participants' subjective experiences, the confidentiality of which is guaranteed. Summaries of the data or additional information may be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, while maintaining adherence to participant confidentiality principles.

FUNDING

This research did not receive specific funding from government agencies, commercial entities, or non-profit organizations.

AI USAGE STATEMENT

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used solely to support language refinement, grammar checking, and editorial improvements during the manuscript preparation process. AI tools were not used to generate original research data, conduct data analysis, interpret findings, or formulate the study's conclusions. All intellectual content, research design, analysis, arguments, and final decisions regarding the manuscript remain the sole responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, verified, and edited all AI-assisted outputs to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic integrity standards.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the research, methodology development, data collection and analysis, interpretation of results, manuscript drafting, and article revision, and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

REFERENCES

- Abidin, C. (2016). Visibility labour: Engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and #OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia*, 161(1), 86–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X16665177>
- Akhmad, M. A., At, M. R., & Muhammad, S. (2024). Reconstructing Generation Z's Digital Identity: Self-Presentation and Impression Management Strategies in Second Account Instagram. *Thammasat Review*, 27(2), 335–350.
- Alharbi, R., Ibrahim, A., & Abualait, T. (2026). Smartphone usage in young adults: cross-sectional associations with physical activity, sleep, social isolation, academic achievement, and anxiety. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2025.1722523>
- Ananta, A., & Suhadianto, S. (2022). Body Dissatisfaction Pada Wanita Masa Emerging Adulthood: Bagaimana Peranan Social Comparison dan Perfeksionisme. *Psikostudia : Jurnal Psikologi*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.30872/psikostudia.v11i4.8853>

- Bazarova, N. N., Choi, Y. H., Schwanda Sosik, V., Cosley, D., & Whitlock, J. (2015). Social Sharing of Emotions on Facebook. *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 154–164. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675297>
- Cha, S.-S., & Seo, B.-K. (2018). Smartphone use and smartphone addiction in middle school students in Korea: Prevalence, social networking service, and game use. *Health Psychology Open*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102918755046>
- Chae, J. (2017). Virtual makeover: Selfie-taking and social media use increase selfie-editing frequency through social comparison. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 370–376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.007>
- Choi, S., Williams, D., & Kim, H. (2020). A snap of your true self: How self-presentation and temporal affordance influence self-concept on social media. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820977199>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. SAGE.
- Dewar, S., Islam, S., Resor, E., & Salehi, N. (2019). Finsta. *Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3290607.3313033>
- Dhir, A., Pallesen, S., Torsheim, T., & Andreassen, C. S. (2016). Do age and gender differences exist in selfie-related behaviours? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 63, 549–555. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.053>
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2021). *Gendered Visibility on Social Media: Navigating Instagram's Authenticity Bind*. <https://doi.org/10.32376/3f8575cb.3f03db0e>
- Englander, M., & Morley, J. (2023). Phenomenological psychology and qualitative research. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 22(1), 25–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-021-09781-8>
- Enworo, O. C. (2023). Application of Guba and Lincoln's parallel criteria to assess trustworthiness of qualitative research on indigenous social protection systems. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 23(4), 372–384. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-08-2022-0116>
- Goffman, Erving. (2008). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books/Random House.
- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion Regulation: Current Status and Future Prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>
- Huang, X., & Vitak, J. (2022). "Finsta gets all my bad pictures": Instagram Users' Self-Presentation Across Finsta and Rinsta Accounts. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 6(CSCW1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3512916>
- Ilma, U., Latifa, R., Subchi, I., Layyinah, Idriyani, N., & Roup, M. (2020). Social Anxiety on Instagram Second Account User. *2020 8th International Conference on Cyber and IT Service Management (CITSM)*, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CITSM50537.2020.9268809>
- Irianto, M. A., Rahman, F., & Abdillah, H. Z. (2021). Konsep Diri Sebagai Prediktor Resiliensi Pada Mahasiswa. *Psikostudia : Jurnal Psikologi*, 10(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.30872/psikostudia.v10i1.4120>
- Islambouli, R., Ingram, S., Farah, J. C., Charlesworth, Z., Aouad, R., Delabays, A., Abi Saad, M., & Gillet, D. (2025). Exploring the Negative Impact of Smartphone Usage on Students' Digital Wellbeing: A Systematic Review of Empirical Studies. *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction*, 41(24), 15727–15749. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2025.2499943>
- Jakpat. (2023, March 14). Terungkap Alasan Orang Memiliki Second Account di Media Sosial. *Jakpat.Net*. <https://jakpat.net/info/terungkap-alasan-orang-memiliki-second-account-di-media-sosial/>
- Kang, J., & Wei, L. (2020). Let me be at my funniest: Instagram users' motivations for using Finsta (a.k.a., fake Instagram). *The Social Science Journal*, 57(1), 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2018.12.005>
- Kemp, S. (2025). *Digital 2025: Indonesia*. Datareportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-indonesia>
- Kvale, Steinar., & Brinkmann, Svend. (2009). *InterViews : learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications.
- Loh, J. (M. I., & Walsh, M. J. (2021). Social Media Context Collapse: The Consequential Differences Between Context Collusion Versus Context Collision. *Social Media + Society*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211041646>
- Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2018). The associations between problematic Facebook use, psychological distress and well-being among adolescents and young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 226, 274–281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.10.007>
- Marwick, A. E., & boyd, danah. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–133. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313>
- Masur, P. K., & Scharrow, M. (2016). Disclosure Management on Social Network Sites: Individual Privacy Perceptions and User-Directed Privacy Strategies. *Social Media + Society*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116634368>
- NapoleonCat. (2025, November). *Pengguna media sosial di Indonesia*. Stats.Napoleoncat.Com. <https://stats.napoleoncat.com/social-media-users-in-indonesia/2025/11/>
- Nor, N., Iqbal, N., & Shaari, A. (2025). The Role of False Self-Presentation and Social Comparison in Excessive Social Media Use. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(5), 675. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15050675>
- Novianti, R., & Merida, S. C. (2021). Self-concept dengan Citra Tubuh pada Mahasiswi. *Psikostudia : Jurnal Psikologi*, 10(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.30872/psikostudia.v10i1.4516>
- Royal Society Public Health & Young Health Movement. (2017). *#Statusofmind: Social media and young people's mental health and wellbeing*. RSPH. <https://www.rsph.org.uk/static/uploaded/d125b27c-ob62-41c5-a2c0155a8887cd01.pdf>

- Schaffner, B., Lingareddy, N. A., & Chetty, M. (2022). Understanding Account Deletion and Relevant Dark Patterns on Social Media. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 6(CSCW2), 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3555142>
- Skogen, J. C., Hjetland, G. J., Bøe, T., Hella, R. T., & Knudsen, A. K. (2021). Through the Looking Glass of Social Media. Focus on Self-Presentation and Association with Mental Health and Quality of Life. A Cross-Sectional Survey-Based Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6), 3319. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18063319>
- Suciani, G., & Darmawanti, I. (2026). Dispositional Social Comparison Orientation Predicting Multidimensional Social Media Fatigue in Generation Z TikTok Users. *Psikostudia: Jurnal Psikologi*, 15(1), 179. <https://doi.org/10.30872/psikostudia.v15i1.26229>
- Taber, L., & Whittaker, S. (2020). “On Finsta, I can say ‘Hail Satan’”: Being Authentic but Disagreeable on Instagram. *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376182>
- Tao, M., & Ellison, N. B. (2023). “It’s Your Finsta at the End of the Day . . . Kind of”: Understanding Emerging Adults’ Self-Presentational Changes on Secondary Accounts. *Social Media + Society*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231152812>
- Viner, R. M., Gireesh, A., Stiglic, N., Hudson, L. D., Goddings, A.-L., Ward, J. L., & Nicholls, D. E. (2019). Roles of cyberbullying, sleep, and physical activity in mediating the effects of social media use on mental health and wellbeing among young people in England: a secondary analysis of longitudinal data. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 3(10), 685–696. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642\(19\)30186-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(19)30186-5)
- Won, Y. J., Shin, E. J., & Koh, A.-R. (2021). A Study on Persona and Self-Presentation through Fashion on Instagram - Focusing on Women in Their 20s and 30s-. *Journal of the Korean Society of Clothing and Textiles*, 45(5), 804–824. <https://doi.org/10.5850/JKSCT.2021.45.5.804>
- Xiao, S., Metaxa, D., Park, J. S., Karahalios, K., & Salehi, N. (2020). Random, Messy, Funny, Raw: Finstas as Intimate Reconfigurations of Social Media. *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376424>
- Yuan, C. W. (Tina), Chiu, H.-C., & Wohn, D. Y. (2026). Managing multiple accounts for identity construction on Instagram: A privacy management framework. *New Media & Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448261424891>