

Performing the Self in Digital Spaces: Understanding Dual Instagram Accounts through Dramatism and Media Ecology Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explores how Indonesian Instagram users construct and negotiate their digital identities through the use of two accounts commonly known as the first account and the second account. Using Kenneth Burke's dramatism and Marshall McLuhan's media ecology as theoretical frameworks, the study investigates the symbolic and environmental dimensions of online self-presentation. The study adopts a qualitative approach combining content analysis and semi-structured interviews with five active Instagram users who maintain public and private accounts. The findings reveal that users perform distinct identities in these two spaces: the first account serves as a stage for curated, professional, and aesthetically controlled self-representation, while the second account serves as a more intimate and expressive arena for personal narratives and emotional disclosure among a trusted audience. Through Burke's pentadic analysis, these practices are understood as symbolic acts shaped by social expectations and platform affordances. From a media ecology perspective, Instagram's visual and interactive architecture reinforces distinct modes of communication that shape users' identity performances. This study contributes to broader discussions on digital identity and self-presentation by demonstrating how technological environments mediate symbolic expression and the negotiation of privacy in everyday social media practices. This study also highlights the growing importance of multiple account culture as a coping mechanism for navigating authenticity, visibility, and social pressures in digital society.

Keywords: digital identity, Instagram, dramatism, media ecology, self-presentation, online expression

Introduction

In the contemporary digital landscape, social media platforms have become vital arenas for identity construction, public visibility, and interpersonal communication. Across the globe, individuals perform aspects of their personal and social selves

through mediated environments shaped by algorithms, aesthetic norms, and audience engagement metrics (Marwick, 2015; Papacharissi, 2018). Among these platforms, Instagram occupies a distinctive position due to its highly visual nature and its emphasis on immediacy and self-presentation. In Indonesia, where social media penetration reaches 85.3% of active internet users, Instagram remains the second most used platform, with an average daily engagement of more than three hours (We Are Social & Meltwater, 2024). It functions not only as a tool for interaction but as a performative space for identity management, emotion sharing, and reputation construction (Dewi & Janitra, 2018; Latifa et al., 2020).

A prominent behavioral trend emerging within this environment is the use of dual Instagram accounts, consisting of a first account which is typically public, curated, and professional and a second account, often private, spontaneous, and emotional. This dual-account phenomenon illustrates how users strategically separate their social performances into distinct spaces to navigate the conflicting demands of authenticity and visibility in networked publics (Boyd, 2014; Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022). On one hand, the first account acts as a “digital front stage,” designed to meet social expectations and maintain personal branding. On the other hand, the second account operates as a “backstage” where norms of presentation are relaxed, allowing for a freer expression of identity and emotion (Dewi & Janitra, 2018).

This practice reflects a broader socio-cultural negotiation: between the desire to be seen and the need to remain private, between performing idealized versions of the self and maintaining emotional sincerity (Sokowati & Manda, 2022). In Indonesia, a collectivist society that values harmony, modesty, and social conformity, these tensions are particularly pronounced. The use of a second account can be interpreted as a coping mechanism to manage moral expectations while maintaining a sense of digital authenticity (Chambers, 2013).

Despite its prevalence, scholarly attention to this dual-account culture remains limited, especially within Southeast Asian contexts. Previous studies (e.g., Dewi & Janitra, 2018; Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022; Sokowati & Manda, 2022) have explored second-account usage mainly through psychological or behavioral perspectives, highlighting its role in selective self-disclosure or anxiety management. However, these works seldom interrogate how such practices function as symbolic acts of communication within technologically mediated environments. In other words, there is limited understanding of the communicative logic that underlies the decision to perform different selves across multiple digital spaces.

This research fills that gap by integrating Kenneth Burke’s dramatism and Marshall McLuhan’s media ecology frameworks to examine how dual-account practices embody both symbolic action and technological adaptation. Through dramatism, users’ posts, captions, and behaviors are interpreted as communicative performances comprising acts, scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes (Burke, 1969). Meanwhile, media ecology offers a lens for understanding how the material and structural affordances of Instagram shape these symbolic performances (McLuhan,

1964). The synthesis of these two frameworks allows for a more holistic analysis of identity as both a performed narrative and a technologically mediated process.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address the following research question: How do Indonesian Instagram users construct and negotiate their digital identities through the use of first and second accounts, and what symbolic and environmental factors shape these identity performances?

By adopting a qualitative design that combines content analysis and semi-structured interviews, this study aims to contribute both empirically and theoretically to the scholarship on digital identity and social media communication. Empirically, it enriches the understanding of Southeast Asian users' strategies in managing visibility and privacy online. Theoretically, it extends the dialogue between dramatism and media ecology, demonstrating how identity work in digital spaces is shaped by both symbolic motives and media affordances. In doing so, this research highlights Instagram not merely as a social platform, but as a cultural environment where users negotiate the boundaries of self-expression, authenticity, and surveillance in the networked age.

a. Dramatism and Symbolic Communication

Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism provides a rich interpretive framework for understanding human communication as symbolic action. Rather than viewing communication merely as information exchange, Burke (1969) conceptualizes it as a form of drama, wherein language constitutes both action and motive. His Pentad Model comprising act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose offers an analytical tool to examine how meaning emerges from the interaction between individuals, their contexts, and their communicative choices. Dramatism asserts that all human behavior is motivated by symbolic purpose; thus, the act of posting, commenting, or curating content on social media can be read as a communicative performance that reveals identity, intention, and moral positioning (Overington, 1977).

In contemporary digital communication, the dramatisitic perspective has gained renewed relevance. Scholars argue that social media platforms are modern "stages" where users continuously perform roles, negotiate impressions, and engage in symbolic interaction (Baym, 2015; Papacharissi, 2018). The front stage is carefully constructed through strategic self-presentation, while the backstage offers space for authenticity and self-reflection (Goffman, 2023). Within this performative logic, *Instagram posts, captions, stories, and likes* can be understood as dramaturgical resources that enable users to manage impressions among varied audiences. The "curated self" often embodies aesthetic discipline, social aspiration, and digital literacy, while the "hidden self" in private spaces reflects vulnerability and unfiltered emotion (Marwick, 2015).

Applying dramatism to digital identity construction allows researchers to interpret online behavior as a process of narrative meaning-making. For instance, the *act* may involve posting a professional photo, the *scene* represents the digital

ecosystem of Instagram, the *agent* is the user as communicator, the *agency* is the platform's technical affordances, and the *purpose* is to achieve self-validation or audience recognition (Burke, 1969). In this sense, social media users are dramatists of their own digital lives, performing different selves depending on context and perceived audience.

Scholars have extended dramatism into online contexts to unpack digital performance and identity duality. For example, (Amelia, 2022) explored how influencers consciously manipulate “platform dramaturgy” to balance authenticity and branding, while (Ma, 2017) applied dramatism to analyze social media activism as moral performance. Within this tradition, the dual-account phenomenon can be understood as a deliberate dramaturgical strategy a separation of performance spaces that aligns with users' communicative motives and audience management goals.

b. Media Ecology and the Environment of Social Media

Complementing dramatism's focus on symbolic action, media ecology pioneered by Marshall McLuhan emphasizes that media themselves shape human perception, cognition, and social organization. (McLuhan, 2019) dictum “the medium is the message” captures the idea that the properties of a medium influence not just what is communicated, but how communication and social relations are structured. Media ecology examines how technologies of communication become environments that condition human experience (Postman, 1980; Strate & Levinson, 2019).

Instagram, in this sense, is not a neutral communication channel but a highly designed technological environment characterized by visual emphasis, algorithmic curation, and instant feedback systems (Leaver et al., 2020). Its architecture encourages users to think visually, communicate affectively, and continuously seek engagement through likes, shares, and stories (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). Such affordances create a feedback loop between visibility and self-worth, motivating users to align their identities with the platform's dominant aesthetics (Fuchs, 2021).

Media ecology theory thus provides an explanatory lens for how Instagram's technical and cultural environments shape the symbolic practices identified through dramatism. For example, the availability of Stories ephemeral, short-lived content supports spontaneous and intimate expression, while the Feed favors permanence and aesthetic curation. The possibility of managing multiple accounts simultaneously enables differentiated identity performances across varying contexts of visibility and control.

Building on McLuhan's work, scholars such as (Meyrowitz, 1986) and (Postman, 1980) argue that media environments blur boundaries between public and private life, altering how people perceive and perform their social roles. In digital platforms, this blurring intensifies through context collapse the merging of distinct audiences (friends, family, coworkers) into one undifferentiated group (boyd, 2014). The creation of second accounts can thus be interpreted as a user-generated

response to context collapse, restoring control over audience segmentation and social performance.

Recent studies have applied media ecology to explore social media's influence on mental health, identity, and social relations (Couldry & Hepp, 2018; Hogan, 2023). These studies highlight that digital spaces are not merely platforms but media ecosystems that encourage certain communicative behaviors while discouraging others. Within such environments, maintaining multiple accounts can be viewed as an ecological adaptation users rearranging their communicative habitats to regain balance between exposure and autonomy.

c. Dual-Account Culture and Digital Identity Management

The phenomenon of maintaining more than one social media account within a single platform commonly referred to as dual-account culture has become increasingly visible in the past decade, particularly among younger users (Marwick, 2015). In Indonesia, this trend resonates strongly with generational shifts toward greater digital intimacy and the negotiation of social expectations (Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022). The first account typically functions as a curated digital portfolio emphasizing professional, aesthetic, and socially acceptable aspects of the self, while the second account sometimes called *finsta* (fake Instagram) serves as a more personal and emotionally expressive space for trusted circles (Dewi & Janitra, 2018; Latifa et al., 2020).

Empirical studies suggest that the dual-account practice fulfills multiple communicative and psychological functions. Dewi and Janitra (2018) describe the second account as an "alter ego" environment that enables emotional release and identity experimentation, while (Dewi & Janitra, 2018; Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022) link it to social anxiety management. Similarly, (Sokowati & Manda, 2022) introduce the notion of pseudo-liberation, arguing that while the second account offers perceived freedom, users remain embedded within social control systems even among their limited audiences. In other words, the second account does not entirely escape surveillance but relocates it within smaller, more manageable social ecologies.

Globally, the dual-account phenomenon aligns with broader discussions on networked privacy (Boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2015), contextual integrity (Nissenbaum, 2010), and digital performativity (Papacharissi, 2018). These frameworks emphasize that online privacy is not the absence of sharing, but the ability to control how, when, and to whom personal information is shared. Maintaining separate accounts allows users to tailor communication according to audience, purpose, and affective tone essentially engaging in strategic compartmentalization of identity ((Leaver et al., 2020).

Moreover, the phenomenon reflects a deeper shift in digital selfhood: from monolithic identity toward modular identity. Users construct fragmented versions of themselves across platforms and contexts to align with multiple roles professional, social, familial, and personal (Arnd-Caddigan, 2015). This aligns with the notion of polycontextual identity proposed by (Jenkins et al., 2013), wherein individuals navigate

overlapping social and technological contexts through selective visibility and narrative coherence.

From a cultural standpoint, Indonesian users' dual-account behavior intersects with societal values emphasizing collective harmony and moral propriety. The desire to maintain a positive social image on the first account while expressing vulnerability or critique on the second reflects a communication strategy that balances face-saving with authentic self-expression (Fuchs, 2021). Thus, dual-account culture can be interpreted as both a psychological strategy for coping with social pressure and a communicative mechanism for managing relational boundaries in digital spaces.

d. Digital Space, Self-Presentation and Digital Identity

Currently, digital representations on social media tend to be detached from the physical reality of their users. Unlike collective content, digital profiles are generally designed for personal exposure. However, the dynamics of new media, through combinatorial logic, are beginning to blur the boundaries between consumption and production and the social and individual dimensions. As primary communication vectors, media platforms not only regulate symbolic resources but also redefine the communication landscape through the process of datafication.

In this context, identity formation in cyberspace is becoming increasingly complex; according to (Szulc, 2019), platforms require users to extensively present themselves for the sake of data collection. While media provides broader symbolic references and is not tied to physical location, this actually makes identity more fragile and triggers a crisis of authenticity. The phenomenon of massive self-presentation has now become a key characteristic of online communication and a central pillar of modern digital identity.

e. Conceptual Synthesis

Integrating dramatism and media ecology offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing dual-account practices as both symbolic and environmental phenomena. From the dramaturgical view, maintaining two accounts represents a bifurcation of the self into two stages where distinct roles are enacted for different audiences. The first account symbolizes a public-facing performance that fulfills social and aesthetic expectations (front stage), whereas the second account provides a semi-private space for emotional authenticity and peer-based validation (backstage). Through the pentad analysis, each account embodies different acts, scenes, agencies, and purposes aligned with user motives and situational contexts.

From a media ecological perspective, these performances are not merely individual choices but adaptive responses to technological affordances. Instagram's interface design its visibility metrics, temporality of stories, and multi-account features encourages segmentation of identity. The platform's structure conditions how users perceive privacy, perform relationships, and engage with digital audiences. Hence, dramatism explains why users perform dual identities (symbolic motivation), while

media ecology explains how the platform's environment makes such performances possible (technological mediation).

This integrative framework positions dual-account culture as a key site for examining digital identity negotiation in an age of algorithmic surveillance and social comparison. It underscores that online identity work is not solely psychological or aesthetic, but communicative, contextual, and ecological. By situating Indonesian users within this framework, the present study advances the global conversation on digital selfhood by foregrounding cultural specificity and environmental interdependence in digital communication research.

Method

In order to investigate how Instagram users interact and show themselves through their primary account (first account) and secondary accounts, this study uses a qualitative methodology that includes content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Because it can be used to reveal users' meaning, subjective experiences, and communication techniques in a complex digital social setting, this approach was selected (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Ten Instagram profiles belonging to five informants chosen through purposive sampling served as the study's research objects. The following criteria were used to select informants: having two active Instagram accounts (primary and second), being between the ages of 20 and 35, and agreeing to give access to their accounts and take part in interviews. To make sure that the research participants were pertinent and capable of offering detailed information in line with the study's goals, this purposive sampling strategy was employed (Patton, 2015).

Additionally, non-participatory observation of each informant's two Instagram accounts was used to identify social media text samples. During a certain time period, this observation involved keeping track of the quantity of uploads, follows, likes, and the kind and frequency of shared content. An interview guide and an observation guide made up the data collection tools. These tools were created using the ideas of digital communication between people and self-representation on social media. Asserts that although the researcher is the primary tool in qualitative research, a guide is still required to guarantee that the data gathering procedure is methodical and pertinent to the study's topic. The methods for gathering data were then implemented in two phases:

First, the content of the uploads on the primary and secondary accounts was examined using the Krippendorff model (2013), which enables methodical, impartial, and significant message analysis. Second, to investigate the opinions, reasons, and subjective experiences of users about the use of several Instagram accounts, semi-structured online interviews were carried out. These interviews were intended to be open but targeted in order to guarantee that the data gathered is comprehensive and contextual. The first and second account observations cover aspects, (1) Number of uploads, (2) Type of Upload, (3) Number of likes and comments, (4) Dominant content

topics, (5) Language and visual style, (6) Upload frequency (weekly/monthly), (7) The purpose of self-representation, (8) Account privacy.

Only the feeds and article uploads from the previous two weeks, specifically May 28, 2025, to June 11, 2025, will be observed by the researcher. The researcher establishes the following criteria for observation in order to meet the research requirements: (1) the quantity and kind of uploads on the first and second accounts; (2) the quantity of likes and comments on each upload; (3) themes of content that are commonly shared (formal/informal, aesthetic, expressive, and others); (4) the language and visual styles used; (5) the frequency of uploads per week or per month; and (6) differences in content characteristics between the main account and the second account. Based on the validity of the interview data, the study data is then analyzed using pentad analysis in dramatism theory (Burke, 1969) to examine data created from user accounts, both the first and the second. The elements of the Pentad Dramatism in the first and second accounts include, Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose.

To ensure consistency while allowing flexibility, a semi-structured interview guide was used. Example questions include:

a. Account Usage and Identity Construction

"Can you describe the main differences between your first and second Instagram accounts?"

"What kinds of content do you feel comfortable sharing on your first account, and what do you prefer to share on your second account?"

b. Audience and Privacy Considerations

"Who do you imagine as your audience when posting on each account?"

"How do privacy settings influence what you choose to post?"

c. Motivations and Emotional Meaning

"What personal needs does your second account help you fulfill?"

"Have you ever used your second account as a space for emotional expression or relief? Can you give an example?"

d. Symbolic and Dramaturgical Dimensions

"If your first account represents a role or performance, how would you describe it?"

"How would you describe your 'self' on the second account compared to the first?"

These questions were designed to explore symbolic motives, identity performance, and environmental influences in alignment with dramatism and media ecology perspectives.

The data analysis method employed thematic analysis, which categorized information from observations and interviews into recurrent themes associated with the study's goals. Because it enables flexible and thorough organizing and analysis of qualitative data, this technique was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By comparing

direct observations with informants' subjective narratives, triangulation between observational and interview data improved the validity of the data (Miles et al., 2014).

This study used source triangulation and method triangulation, two triangulation approaches, to improve the validity of the data. In order to acquire a richer and more complete viewpoint, source triangulation was carried out by gathering information from multiple informants with varying backgrounds and experiences pertaining to the use of primary and secondary profiles on Instagram (Denzin, 2017). In the meantime, method triangulation was used to supplement and validate the results by integrating semi-structured interviews and content analysis from account observations, increasing the validity and reliability of the data collected (Patton, 2015). It is anticipated that this triangulation strategy will reduce bias and boost the results' credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Results

a. Content Analysis of First and Second Accounts

Table 1. Content Analysis of First and Second Accounts

Observation Aspects	First Account	Second Account
Number of posts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @f*****78 (2,010 followers): 9 posts 2. @had*****l (1,218 followers): 5 posts 3. @na*****n (756 followers): 2 posts 4. @z*****re (1,370 followers): 2 posts 5. @a*****ky (2,537 followers): 4 posts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @fi*****u (136 followers): 10 posts 2. @lil*****3 (201 followers): 3 posts 3. @d*****nn (30 followers): 10 posts 4. @s*****e (67 followers): 6 posts 5. @ki*****re: 9 posts
Type of posts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @f*****78: Instagram stories 2. @had*****l: Instagram stories 3. @na*****n: Instagram stories 4. @z*****re: Instagram stories 5. @a*****ky: Instagram stories, live Instagram 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @fi*****u: Instagram stories 2. @lil*****3: Instagram stories 3. @d*****nn: Instagram stories, feeds 4. @s*****e: Instagram stories 5. @ki*****re: Instagram stories
Number of likes and comments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @f*****78: likes: 10, comments: 4 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @fi*****u: likes: 3, comments: 1

	2. @had*****l: <i>likes: 1, comments: 0</i> 3. @na*****n : <i>likes: 3, comments: 2</i> 4. @z*****re : <i>likes: 0, comments: 0</i> 5. @a*****ky : <i>likes: 5, comments: 3</i>	2. @lil*****3 : <i>likes: 0, comments: 0</i> 3. @d*****nn: <i>likes: 1, comments: 4</i> 4. @s*****e : <i>likes: 3, comments: 4</i> 5. @ki*****re: <i>likes: 2, comments: 5</i>
Dominant content topics	1. @f*****78: running, hanging out/playing, coffee/cafe, scenery, styled photos 2. @had*****l: work 3. @na*****n : styled photos, F1, college, abroad 4. @z*****re : styled photos, hanging out/getting together with friends, scenery 5. @a*****ky : work, styled photos, activities with partner, hanging out with friends, scenery	1. @fi*****u : running, work, hanging out/playing, random videos 2. @lil*****3 : funny memes, rap music 3. @d*****nn: daily activities, F1, funny memes, policy criticism, hanging out/playing, random chat screenshots, venting, random videos 4. @s*****e : daily activities, college, venting, book recommendations, photo votes, random 5. @ki*****re: daily activities, random videos, sharing, hanging out/playing, work
Language and visual style	1. @f*****78: formal, aesthetic 2. @had*****l: formal 3. @na*****n : formal, aesthetic 4. @z*****re : formal, aesthetic 5. @a*****ky : formal, aesthetic	1. @fi*****u : informal, less tidy 2. @lil*****3 : informal, less tidy 3. @d*****nn: informal, less tidy 4. @s*****e : informal, less tidy 5. @ki*****re: informal, less tidy
Frequency of posts (weekly/monthly)	1. @f*****78: Once every two days 2. @had*****l: Once or twice a week 3. @na*****n : Once or twice a week 4. @z*****re : Three to four times a week	1. @fi*****u : 1-3 times a day 2. @lil*****3 : 1-2 times a week 3. @d*****nn: 1-3 times a day 4. @s*****e : once a day 5. @ki*****re: 1-3 times a day

	5. @a*****ky : Once every two days	
Purpose of self-representation	1. @f*****78: personal branding, promotion 2. @had*****l: promotion 3. @na*****n : personal branding 4. @z*****re : personal branding 5. @a*****ky : personal branding, promotion	1. @fi*****u : A more personal, open, and expressive account 2. @lil*****3 : A more personal account 3. @d*****nn: I'm more personal, being myself, more open, and expressive 4. @s*****e : A more personal, open, and expressive account 5. @ki*****re: A more personal, open, and expressive account
Account privacy	1. @f*****78: public account 2. @had*****l: private account 3. @na*****n : private account 4. @z*****re : private account 5. @a*****ky : private account	1. @fi*****u : Private account, followers only to those closest to you 2. @lil*****3 : Private account, followers only to those closest to you 3. @d*****nn: Private account, followers only to those closest to you 4. @s*****e : Private account, followers only to those closest to you 5. @ki*****re: Private account, followers only to those closest to you

Between May 28 and June 11, 2025, researchers looked at how five people handled their primary and secondary Instagram accounts. Significant variations in the goals, material types, communication methods, and frequency of online interactions between their primary and secondary accounts were found by the analysis. These results shed light on the ways in which people portray themselves online.

f. Overview of Primary vs. Secondary Account Posts

The primary and secondary accounts have different uploading habits. Some people post often on the primary account, including @f*****78 (nine times in two weeks, roughly every other day), and @a*****ky (four times at a similar interval). On the other hand, @z*****re and @na*****n only post twice a week, which is less frequent. The secondary accounts, on the other hand, show more upload activity. For instance, @fi*****u posts 10 times in a two-week period, sometimes up to three times

a day. During the same observation time, the accounts @d*****nn and @ki*****re also seem to be more active, posting 10 and nine posts, respectively.

Type of Upload

The majority of posts on the main account (First Account) concentrate on more professional and structured information. Accounts like @f*****78, @had*****l, and @z*****re regularly post Instagram stories that feature both fashionable images that convey a professional image and public activities like coffee with friends or work. In the meantime, @a*****ky uses live broadcasts and Instagram stories to engage with her followers and share her professional endeavors. Conversely, more informal, unstructured, and private posts predominate on secondary accounts (Second Account). For instance, @fi*****u regularly shares more expressive random films and sincere outpourings. @d*****nn regularly posts amusing memes, policy criticism, and intimate revelations from chats with friends.

Number of likes and comments

Engagement on the initial account is typically lower. @z*****re only got 0 likes and 0 comments, however @f*****78 got 10 likes and 4 comments. However, despite having a smaller following, the second account displayed a higher level of engagement. While @diggiimann received one like and four comments, accounts like @ki*****re received two likes and five comments. This increased involvement would suggest that followers who feel closer to the account owner are more inclined to engage directly with the second account since it is more intimate and personal.

Dominant content topics

Social, professional, and outdoor activities are the main topics of the content posted on the First Account. For instance, @f*****78, who regularly posts images of landscapes, running, and cafes, all project a laid-back yet sophisticated vibe. While @z*****re and @na*****n concentrate on fashionable pictures and activities with friends, @a*****ky posts stuff about work and activities with partners. The subjects discussed are more open and varied on the Second Account. While @lil*****3 regularly tweets amusing memes and rap music, @fi*****u usually shares about personal hobbies like exercising or hanging out. Additionally, @d*****nn posts about routine things like arguing with friends and criticizing policies. The posts from @ki*****re, which discuss work and daily life, follow a similar trend.

Language and visual style

The wording used on the First Account is more formal and structured. For instance, the usage of professional and visually pleasing captions by @f*****78, @na*****n, and @z*****re results in a sophisticated and courteous image. The Second Account, on the other hand, frequently uses emojis or slang and speaks in a more casual, expressive manner. As an illustration of a more open and free attitude,

@fi*****u speaks in a more casual and informal manner. Additionally, @s*****e employs more emojis to convey her emotions and has a more laid-back style.

Frequency of posts (weekly/monthly)

In general, compared to the Second Account, the First Account posted less frequently and more frequently. While accounts like @z*****re posted less regularly (3–4 times per week), those like @f*****78 and @a*****ky posted every other day. However, the Second Account was more active, with several users writing nearly every day. For example, during the observation period, @fi*****u and @d*****nn posted 10 and 9 times, respectively.

Purpose of self-representation

Users of First Accounts typically use their accounts for marketing and personal branding. Using their primary accounts, for instance, @f*****78, @z*****re, and @a*****ky present their professional life, formally announce themselves to the public, and cultivate a positive reputation in their workplace or social circles. The main objective on their Second Accounts, on the other hand, is to openly express themselves and look for approval or support from a smaller fan base. @ki*****re, @d*****nn, and @fi*****u are more interested in discussing intimate, emotional events, including their own sentiments or memories.

Account privacy

The First Account and the Second Account clearly differ in terms of account privacy. While certain accounts, such as @had*****l and @na*****n, have chosen to keep their accounts private, the First Account is mainly public or more available to the public. On the other hand, only close friends can follow the Second Account, which is nearly completely secret. This makes it safer to share private stuff and enables more intimate conversations with followers.

Table. 2 First Account and Second Account Management

Elements of Pentad Dramatism	First Account	Second Account
Act	For personal branding, provide official materials, landscape pictures, or professional activities (such as organizing tasks or vacation shots).	Increase the amount of free, humorous, private, or arbitrary stuff you share (such as jokes, criticism of policies, or sentimental items).
Scene	Used for formal and aesthetically pleasing articles that relate to a more "ideal" self-image and emphasize more regimented activities.	Used to communicate more intimate stuff, frequently outside of a formal setting, including private moments or times shared with close friends exclusively.

Agent	Those who wish to keep their social connections, brand, and more professional self-image on public media.	With close friends or loyal followers, people who are more laid-back and open display their personal side and are more expressive.
Agency	Structured material and visually appealing images (such as photographs or videos with regular editing) are features of Instagram Stories, Feeds, and Reels.	More impromptu and genuine material on Instagram Stories and Reels, occasionally utilizing more intense elements
Purpose	Presenting a more official and businesslike self-image, emphasizing achievements and pursuits to win approval from others.	Complaining, posting amusing content, or expressing yourself more openly without a filter in order to gain emotional support from close friends.

1. Act

In order to provide a more controlled and structured self-image, all respondents indicated that the majority of their actions on their First Account were concentrated on providing formal and structured information, such as pictures of stunning scenery, work-related activities, or holidays.

*"First Account is for displaying formal and branding things..." (F***y)*

*"...like, for example, where we went, who we met, and what events we attended—it's like that..." (N****ra)*

*"On First Account, it's usually more about very general things, like just scenery or things that aren't very personal..." (Z****re)*

Actions on Second Account, on the other hand, are more impromptu and unrestrained, and users frequently share humorous content, intimate tales, and more private subjects that are meant to be shared with close friends rather than the general public.

*"...the second one is for close friends who aren't too serious, or even not serious at all, just for fun" (A****a)*

*"...while the second account usually has content that's more relaxed and free" (N****l)*

*"The second account is more fun, it shows off our personalities more, joking around...besides, I also like uploading stories with friends, playing around, joking around, basically anything funny..." (N****ra)*

Although the second account is a place for informal and relaxed content, some respondents said that this second account mostly discusses POVs regarding certain booming events, such as government policies, the economy, etc.

"...our point of view on something, for me it's like that, usually I like to comment on things like the government, or really sensitive social

*issues, or maybe I like to comment on financial policies, the stock market,..." (N****ra)*

2. Scene

A First Account is utilized in more formal settings, when it turns into a public platform for displaying a "ideal life." It is also more structured and frequently contains content meant to promote personal branding or highlight specific accomplishments.

*"...uploads on my first account usually highlight things I have, my value, my label, my brand among my friends. Material things..." (N****ra)*

*"...posting about organizations, posting about work, or posting to seek validation from others is on my first account..." (A****a)*

A Second Account, on the other hand, is more frequently used to share more private information or moments from daily life. Speaking or interacting more casually without worrying about broader social criticism is made possible by the setup of a second account.

*"...I usually use it when I want to post random things that others might never see on my main account." (N****l)*

The respondents went on to say that there was no set period of time for selecting an account. Additionally, one respondent said that mood had a substantial impact on how they used both accounts, whereas other respondents said that mood had no such effect.

*"Oh yeah, that's pretty obvious. If I'm in a bad mood, I won't post anything that could make it worse on my first account because I don't want to be influenced. But if I'm in a good mood, I'm happy to post anything on both accounts." (Z****re)*

3. Agent

Users on the First Account tended to try to create a more cool or organized image by portraying themselves as more professional, courteous, and calm. Users who identified as more formal and reserved in public were @a*****ky , @had*****l, @na*****n , and @zafiire. The identical sentiment was expressed by @f*****78 on both his first and second accounts.

*"Actually, it's the same, only the first one brings out more moments or hobbies or holiday achievements" (F***y)*

Without the stress of upholding a flawless image, people can express themselves more freely and truthfully on a second account. They can converse more openly, share more humorous moments, or just make jokes with their closest pals when they have a second account.

*"On my second account, there are more random things, from good to bad," (N****l)*

*"On my second account, it's totally different. Oh, it turns out it's not like that. The person is really friendly, really fun, talkative, and a total extrovert. So, my interpretation of my first account and my second account are completely different." (N****ra)*

4. Agency

According to the majority of respondents, the First Account's media usage is more professional, with visually appealing feed posts and Instagram stories emphasizing elegant and well-structured images. Posting to the feed is still very infrequent, although features like Reels are rarely used in favor of showcasing images or narratives about individual achievements. Additionally, language is more circumspect in order to preserve a favorable self-perception.

*"For example, I post photos once a week, or twice a month, and those are also posted in stories. However, I rarely upload to my feeds on my first account or my second account. My writing style is also more careful because my first account is mostly for my organization friends or work friends." (A****a)*

*"On my first account, I probably focus more on photos. I rarely post reels, maybe just stories or Instagram feeds." (Z****re)*

*"On my first account, I definitely post more stories, highlighted stories. I rarely post on my feeds, unless there's a mega, super-duper big event happening in my life." (N****ra)*

However, some respondents posted more reels than photos in their feeds.

*"Actually, in terms of language, it's still the same, except that reel posts focus on hobbies, games, etc., or collaborations with friends." (F***y)*

On the other hand, users of a second account are more likely to post impromptu and less planned content on Instagram Stories and occasionally on their feeds. Additionally, the second account's features are utilized more frequently, enabling greater self-expression without undue emphasis on beauty. Speaking with peers tends to be more informal, utilizing regional dialects and everyday language.

*"Maybe it's just a difference in the posts, but I can definitely express myself more freely on my second account, whereas I still feel a bit shy on my main account." (N****l)*

"...on my second account, I really speak like I'm talking to friends. Sometimes I'm you, sometimes I'm you, sometimes I'm the other one..."
(N****ra)

However, one respondent added that when discussing government policy, she usually uses English.

"...sometimes when discussing government policy, I also use English explanations," (N****ra)

5. Purpose

Building a professional image, preserving wider social ties, and developing personal branding are the key goals of First Accounts. Whether it's job, accomplishments, or other official activities, the information shared on these accounts usually focuses on moments that highlight the best parts of the user's life.

"On the first account, we really want to show off, to brag. It's like showing off who we are, what's so good about us? Just the good and cool things on the first account..." (N****ra)

"...so on the first account, I might just glance at how my friends are doing, or check out the people I follow..." (Z****re)

A Second Account, on the other hand, is used to express oneself more unrestrictedly. This account is meant to be used to rant, discuss personal information, or just spend time with close friends without worrying about being judged by a wider audience.

"...on Second Account, because close friends don't always see each other, daily, every moment, or even monthly, we share positive and negative energy there. So, without having to tell them, our friends already know when we're sad, what we're up to, or upset, or whatever." (A****a)

"The goal is more to have more freedom." (N****l)

"It's more about narrowing down to those closest to us. The goal is to share motivation, hard work achievements, worries, and random, trivial things." (F***y)

Discussion

The study's findings revealed a duality of digital identities that were purposefully controlled by the answers from the first and second Instagram accounts. This supports Burke's (1969) assertion that, in this particular instance, users can be viewed as actors on the digital social stage who adopt various personas based on the situation and the

audience they are interacting with. By creating a positive, polished, and attractive self-image and showcasing a particular accomplishment, users on the main or initial account place greater focus on formal and strategic self-representation. This discovery reinforces the notion of purpose in dramatism, wherein communication actions are performed to create a particular impression in front of a larger audience (scene) that demands order and perfection. Because it is restricted to close friends only, the second account serves as a more private alternative environment where individuals may express themselves freely, truthfully, and secretly. This includes more impromptu acts in a safer context (scene). This instance is consistent with the idea of dramatism, which holds that human cognition and conduct can be formed on the basis of layers of motivation and language (Overington, 1977).

In addition to its dramatic element, Marshall McLuhan's media ecology lens can also be used to explain this conclusion. According to McLuhan (1964), "the medium is the message," which means that how media present information affects consumers' social structures and mentalities. Because Instagram is a visual platform built on pictures and stories, it fosters an atmosphere where users are continually projecting their identities in a way that is quick, easy to absorb, and visually appealing. Because it uses more ephemeral and informal characteristics, the second account becomes a more open area for exploration, while the first account is typically intended to establish a professional image with a carefully chosen visual aesthetic. As users adjust to the affordances offered by the platform, the Instagram medium itself produces a technological bias that affects how users connect with various audiences and express themselves.

This study supports earlier research, including that of Dewi & Janitra (2018), who claimed that in the context of social media dramaturgy, a second account serves as a backstage platform where the user's alter ego or other side can emerge free from the constraints of social norms and dominant norms. Additionally, Paramesti & Nurdiarti (2022) emphasized that using pseudonyms in a second account enables people to increase self-disclosure in private settings and prevent social anxiety. Research by Ilma et al. (2020) supports this, demonstrating that people with high levels of social anxiety frequently utilize a second account to express themselves without worrying about being judged by others. This illustrates how people deliberately select communication tools (agency) and operate as agents in two distinct social contexts to accomplish opposing but complementing self-representation objectives within the context of dramatism.

This study also demonstrates that the idea of actual freedom does not always align with the perceived freedom of utilizing a second account. In their idea of "pseudo-liberation," Sokowati & Manda (2022) explain that although a second account is regarded as a safe place for speech, users are nonetheless subject to social surveillance by their closest friends who follow the account. This indicates that social media still functions inside a framework of symbolic power that affects users' mobility. According to the dramatist Kenneth Burke, this state creates a certain system of

narratives and symbols that both permits and restricts action. Consequently, having multiple Instagram accounts is a way to manage identity communication as well as to engage in meaningful social performance, role negotiation, and adaptation to the constantly changing social demands of digital culture. According to McLuhan, Instagram is a social environment that actively influences its users' communication habits and identity formation through the medium's structure. It is not only a technological platform in this sense.

Beyond dramatism and media ecology, the findings may also be interpreted through alternative explanatory perspectives. First, personality factors may influence how individuals manage dual accounts. Users with higher social anxiety or introverted tendencies may rely more heavily on second accounts as safer emotional spaces, whereas extroverted users may treat them as extended social arenas (Latifa et al., 2020). Second, algorithmic dynamics also shape behavior. Instagram's engagement-driven architecture incentivizes curated performance on first accounts while enabling spontaneous interaction in second accounts where users feel less pressure to "perform" for algorithmic visibility (Leaver et al., 2020). Third, social class and cultural context play a role. In Indonesian collectivist culture, maintaining social harmony and moral propriety encourages self-censorship on public accounts while shifting honest expression to closed circles. Thus, dual-account practice is not merely personal preference, but embedded in broader socio-cultural and technological systems.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to young adult users, which may not fully represent broader demographic variations. The study also relies on self-reported experiences that may be influenced by retrospective bias. In addition, the observation period was relatively short and focused only on a two-week window, potentially missing long-term behavioral patterns. Future research may expand this study by including larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal data collection, and cross-platform comparison. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also deepen understanding of how algorithms, personality traits, and socio-economic contexts shape dual-account practices.

Conclusion

The two facets of a user's digital identity are depicted by this study, which clearly distinguishes between the use of First and Second Accounts on Instagram. With more formal content that emphasizes accomplishments or personal branding, First Accounts is more concerned with establishing a polished and orderly self-image. Second accounts, on the other hand, are more for private expression and feature more open, emotive, and laid-back content that users can share with close friends. Users of both accounts have the ability to more freely manage their identities in accordance with social and private circumstances. Overall, the study's findings show that social media is a tool for creating and maintaining complex identities in addition to being a

way to share information. While the Second Account gives users the flexibility to express themselves more quietly and intimately, the First Account is used to develop a self-image in front of a broader and more formal audience. The two accounts so help one another to establish equilibrium between users' private and public social lives, which is consistent with the idea of dual identity in the context of social media.

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- Credit Author Statement

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- Declaration of AI Involvement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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