

The Fragmented Self: Having Multiple Accounts in Instagram Usage Practice among Indonesian Youth

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ABSTRAK

Penggunaan media sosial telah menjadi bagian dari kehidupan kaum muda pada era digital ini. Di Indonesia, utamanya, Instagram merupakan salah satu kanal yang populer di kalangan kaum muda. Dalam praktik penggunaan Instagram, ditemukan bahwa satu orang dapat mengelola lebih dari satu akun, menciptakan fenomena yang disebut 'akun Instagram asli' dan 'akun Instagram palsu'. Bentuk praktik ini memunculkan pertanyaan terkait identitas yang dipresentasikan oleh pengguna dalam akun-akun tersebut. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis praktik kepemilikan banyak-akun di Instagram, berfokus pada bagaimana presentasi diri para pengguna ditampilkan dan mengapa presentasi tersebut muncul, utamanya dalam kontestasi konsep antara yang 'asli' dan 'palsu'. Lingkup kajian dalam tulisan ini mencakup psikologi media dengan interkoneksi antara diri dan kanal media sosial. Hasil dari analisis atas diri yang terfragmentasi dalam banyak-akun di Instagram berfokus pada isu bagaimana konsep 'asli' dan 'palsu' didefinisikan oleh para pengguna, serta aspek yang melatarbelakangi pengertian tersebut. Rupanya, pada kanal media sosial Instagram, kaum muda berada dalam pencarian atas sensasi kebebasan, di mana mereka dapat merasa bebas untuk mengekspresikan diri. Namun, ditemukan juga indikasi bahwa standar-standar tertentu telah terbentuk dalam Instagram sehingga para pengguna terkondisikan untuk mempresentasikan diri mereka dengan cara-cara tertentu.

Kata Kunci: budaya digital, presentasi diri, identitas, Instagram, psikologi media

Introduction

Along with the enhancement of communication and information technology, the issue of self-identity in cyberspace has been the spotlight of academic discussions. Particularly, in the era of social media, which mediality could enable people to multiply themselves through profiles and avatars. The common usage practice of social media shows that users tend to use their 'real'

identity, such as using their real name, age, location, and many more personal information to be made public in their social media profile. This form of practice is usually found when users are built their social media reality based on their offline social life (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011). However, this tendency didn't apply to some phenomenon where users were using a



pseudonym or even anonym identity for their social media profiles. As common as the usage of real identity, this practice of using a fake identity in social media platform has also become common among users.

In this era of social media, it's also a common practice that a person is using more than just one social media platform. For example, we can have an account on each of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Each platform has its mediality that enables users to utilize those platforms according to their preferences (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011). Besides being able to multiply themselves through several platforms, the mediality of social media also enables users to have more than one account or profile on each social media platform. For example, we can have more than one account on Facebook, in which we can use a different name, different age, come from a different location, or perhaps even admit to having different sex in the profile. In other words, people could be a different person in the social media space. This practice apparently could be commonly found on Instagram.

Before taking a look at why Instagram usage practice is significant to be observed, it's only rational to know the growing active social media users first. Active social media users in Indonesia shows significant growth. As of January 2020, the data shows the record of active social media users in Indonesia has reached approximately 160 million, with a penetration rate of about 59% from last year's record (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). It's more than half in comparison to the total population of this country. This number indicates about 8.1% growth, approximately about 12 million active users, from April 2019 (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). On average,

Indonesian spends approximately three hours twenty-six minutes within a day to access social media (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). Among many social media platforms, Instagram is used by 79%, number four in popularity behind YouTube, WhatsApp, and Facebook (Hootsuite & We Are Social, 2020). This data shows the massiveness of Instagram usage among Indonesian, particularly youth above 13 years old.

Currently, the pop culture of Instagram is to have more than one account with categorically different self-identities. The most familiar terms are 'real Instagram account' and 'fake Instagram account' (Wiederhold, 2018). This form of practice is raising a question in regards to the identity presented by users both in what they refer to as both 'real' and 'fake' accounts. Considering the mediality of Instagram that has conditioned certain appropriate content for the users, it is significant to analyze the practice of having multiple accounts on the Instagram platform. This paper aims to focus on how the self-presentation of users presented and why such presentation displayed, particularly in the contestation between the concept of 'real' and 'fake'. The interconnection between self and social media platforms in the frame of media psychology is explored as the scope of the study in this research.

Literature Review

Instagram, as a social media platform, carries the mediality of social media, includes connectivity, sociability, networking, and interactivity (Dijck, 2013; Lovink, 2011). The connectivity of Instagram has enabled users to connect not only with their peer group but also other people outside their peers who have an Instagram account. In this connectivity, users can choose whom they want to



connect with, in form of following or having followers. The sociability of Instagram has made it possible for users to keep updated to recent issues of certain accounts they follow, through feed or discovery features. There's also a like and comment feature that helps users in building engagement with their following or followers. The networking of Instagram has enabled users to find people with similar interests to them. The size of the network is determined by users; they can follow as many or as few accounts as they want, including making a personal circle that is facilitated by close friend features. The interactivity of Instagram has made it possible for users to interact with accounts that are connected to them. This interaction is facilitated through the comment feature (inclined to be public) and also direct message feature (inclined to be private).

The mediality of Instagram is also driven by the algorithms that work on the platform. This algorithm aspect, at some point to some extent, has created the 'echo chamber' inside the cyberspace (Parmelee & Roman, 2020; Fung et.al., 2020; Turner & Lefevre, 2017; Sunstein, 2001). 'Echo chamber' refers to the condition where space built-in social media tends to be in the favor of users' interest; this is constructed by the algorithm of social media platform that tends to feed users with only information which they frequently access. In the early studies regarding the echo chamber, the discussions were focusing on how the echo chamber in social media affects marketing and political aspects, such as political views or marketing decisions among users. In the development, the echo chamber also affects the self-presentation presented by users on social media platforms (Purwaningtyas, 2019). At this level, accounts and contents that are frequently seen or liked by users, in some way to some extent,

are affecting the way they present themselves in their social media space. Thus, the identity is not only constructed by the users themselves, but also by their surroundings in social media space (Parmelee & Roman, 2020; Purwaningtyas, 2019; Wiederhold, 2018; Caldeira, 2016; Lovink, 2011). On one side, the social media space has allowed users to be able to freely express themselves. They tend to create personal space that is based on convenience and similarity (Purwaningtyas, 2019). On the other side, the environment in social media space has certain aspects that construct the way they express themselves. At this level, they tend to present what other people want them to be seen rather than what they want to be seen (Purwaningtyas, 2019). In regards to self-identity, this duality of social media has become a significant aspect in constructing the way users disclose themselves through self-presentation (Takahashi, 2016; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011). At a certain level, the mediality of social media has demolished the panopticon, but surveillance still exists in another form in which users can watch and be watched. This condition, nevertheless, has created an 'ambivalent self', in which users seem to have lost their authentic self during the process of fitting in within the standards in social media space (Purwaningtyas, 2019).

The discussion in regards to self-identity has become a significant aspect considering the users of social media in which mostly are youth. Age could be one of the indicators to refer to some group of people as 'youth'. However, in this research, youth is defined as the digital native generation, whose life is adhered to social media on daily basis (Purwaningtyas, 2019; Newman, 2015; Prensky, 2001). In regards to self-identity, youth is seen as the generation in search of identities, in which is embodied in their usage



practice of social media as an integral part of their daily life (Gretzel, 2017; Takahashi, 2016; Davis, 2016). The social media has created the fragmented self, in which the condition when the self is multiplied in many platforms through many channels (Purwaningtyas, 2019; Cover, 2016; Herbig, et.al., 2015; Capurro, et.al., 2013, Van Zoonen, 2013). At this level, the identity built-in social media space is constructed to adjust to the environment, whether based on the mediality of the existing imagined audience on the platform. Therefore, discussing fragmented self is often closely related to the dialectic of online privacy, in which is the tug of war between self-disclosure and self-boundary (Capurro, et.al., 2013; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011, 2012).

Even though it was thought to have been giving the space for freedom of expression towards users, the social media space is not necessarily free of value. At some point to some extent, certain social standardization has been created in the social media space. Examples of these standards were explored in previous research regarding Instagram and self-identity, including the idealization of some concepts that are associated with the self and identity, such as beauty, cool, nice, good, body image, and many more ideal concepts related to self-presentation (Hong, et.al., 2020; Marcella-Hood, 2020; Feltman & Szymanski, 2018; Jackson & Luchner, 2018; Matley, 2018; O'Donnell, 2018; Ahadzadeh, et.al., 2017; Slater, et.al., 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Cheung, 2014; Goldenfein, 2013). These standards, whether we realize it or not, have given certain boundaries toward users to act accordingly in social media. These boundaries are believed to have brought certain nuances towards the identity construction that is conducted by users in social media space.

Methods

This research was conducted by a mixedmethod of new ethnography (Saukko, 2003) and virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000). Both methods were used as complementary to each other, hence both were main methods. New ethnography was utilized for its commitment to be 'truer' to the lived realities of other people. This method was used in the effort to challenge the ideal concept in society, in the case of this research is self and identity in cyberspace. As one of the characteristic features of new ethnographic work is a dialogic shifting between the researcher's Self and the perspective of the Other people being studied, the researcher gained the perspective of informants through in-depth interviews. Instead of seeking 'truth', this method enables the researcher to look for similarities and see the differences, hence doing justice to the lived worlds of others. The polyvocality came from the many perspectives of informants that were used to make sense of the multiple voices that speak through any individual's lived realities. In this case, the researcher's selfreflexivity was used as a tool to enhance awareness of the situatedness, to be more receptive to the perspective that approaches the reality from a different position.

Virtual ethnography was utilized to observe not only interactivity but also texts, that lies in the cyberspace. Through this method, the social media platform is seen as both culture and cultural artifact. In regards to this research, virtual ethnography is needed to approach the self and identity structured in the cyberspace. Since virtual ethnography is necessarily partial, this method was only used to gain documented data on Instagram through observation and screenshots, as well as experiencing first-hand by taking over



the account of informants with their agreement. As virtual ethnography involves intensive engagement with mediated interaction, the researcher was also experiencing first-hand in using Instagram to gain a valuable source of insight. In this case, cyberspace is not to be thought of as a space detached from any connections to 'real-life' and face-to-face interaction, hence the combination of virtual ethnography and new ethnography became the logical solution to do justice to the experience of informants.

Informants in this research were six youngsters who practice having multiple accounts on Instagram. Their ages were ranging from 18 to 23, considering that they are active college students, hence giving the context of self and identity construction during this phase of life. All of them reside in big cities or urban areas in Indonesia (namely Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya); this background gave socio-cultural context in reading the informants' experience regarding the issue. As of sex, the informants consisted of three female and three male informants; this proportion, although qualitatively less significant, was determined to help the researcher in avoiding gender-biased analysis and enriching the perspectives from as many genders as it could in the result. The data collection process took place for several months in late 2019 to the beginning of 2020. Applying the logic of new ethnography, the process of data collection and data analysis in this research was conducted in non-linear steps. The data analysis process was conducted by crosschecking and double cross-checking the result and the analysis simultaneously. Lastly, to protect the personal data of informants, if any, all the names mentioned in this paper would be pseudonyms.

Results and Discussion

Looking through the activity of Instagram usage practice, all informants in this research have more than one account. All of them admitted to having at least one account that is using their real information, such as name and profile picture. Some of them who put information in their profile's bio even mention their school or city where they currently live. In this so-called 'real account' or 'main account', they connect with their friends or acquaintances whom they have already known in real life. Some of them also admitted to following some public figures with this real account, such as celebrities, idols, and influencers. In their real account, users tend to upload photos of themselves, their friends, family, pets, daily activities, hobbies, or anything that they put interest in. Interestingly, when being asked about the reason why they have to have this real account, users tend to get confused. "[trans.] I don't know. Come to think of it, I never really think about the particular reason why I made this Instagram account. It's just like everybody is doing it, my friends are doing it, so I'm just doing it." This finding indicates that the motivation behind having a real Instagram account is already embedded in the reality of youth nowadays. They tend to take it for granted, thus they never question themselves in regards to the motivation of using Instagram.

Another indication of users' motivation in having a real Instagram account is that they tend to follow the trend. When they know that many of their friends are on the platform, they do not hesitate to follow the steps. This shows the tendency of a phenomenon called 'fear of missing out' (FOMO). There is a certain concern or even anxiety about not being able to catch up with what happens in



the world if they do not connect to the internet and social media. Some informants admitted that they use Instagram because they like photography and utilize Instagram as a platform to publish their portfolio. However, this kind of motive only came up after they've been a user for some time. As for the very basic motivation, they show this tendency to only following the trend for the sake of not being missed out.

Besides the real Instagram account, informants in this research also manage to have other accounts, commonly being referred to as 'fake account' or 'second account'. The purpose of having this fake account is varied among users. Some informants admitted to having fake account purposely for doing fandom-related things, online shopping (as a buyer), secretly observing their love interest or their lover's ex, or even to put some erotic photos. Regarding the motivation of having a fake account, informants in this research tend to believe that they made it because they need it. "[trans.] There are things I cannot do in my real account, so I make this second account." Hence, findings in regards to the motivation of making fake accounts show the tendency of users to hide certain parts of themselves in a form of other identities. In a fake account, all informants in this research are using a pseudonym. Some of them even do not tell their close friends or family regarding the existence of this account. Thus, they are not connecting with anyone they know in real life through their fake account. The discussion in regards to the practice of having multiple accounts on Instagram then leads to two aspects of identity and selfpresentation: a sense of freedom and authenticity.

The Self who Hides: Sense of Freedom in Escapism

In the discussion regarding to possession of multiple accounts in Instagram, users were showing different personality in each account they held, which leads to different self-presentation and identity they tend to build in social media space. In their 'real account', informants in this research tend to present themselves as what they want to be seen by the public. At this level, the persona that they want to present is blurred with the persona that they think the public wants to see in or from them, to some extent. In one case from an informant, for example, she wants to present herself as a person who concerns about social and humanity issues, thus she tends to post some information regarding to those issues, sometimes by reposting other news or informational accounts. In another case, an informant wants to present himself as a person who has edgy and cool taste in music and films, hence he tends to upload some contents that would give impression to his followers that he is indeed having edgy and cool taste in music and films. These findings show indication that in social media space, what is referred to as 'real account' is understood as a space to present the 'public version of the self' (Purwaningtyas, 2019; Wiederhold, 2018; Takahashi, 2016). At this level, this public version of the self tends to be an 'ambivalent self, which is not only desiring recognition but also longing for validation from their public.

The users' public version of the self in which is presented in their 'real account' was designated for the public that they imagine to be their main audience of their social media contents. This 'imagined audience' was constructed not only based on their offline relationship with people they know, but also strangers who follow them on their Instagram account. Through both feed and story features on Instagram, contents they post in



this real account are classified as public information in the mind of users. "[trans.] I mean, we know who our followers are, so I post only things I want them to see in my real account." Thus, what users defined as 'real' was constructed by public information in which contains information that supports their imagined public image. In other words, their 'real' self is defined as the public image they want to present to their followers. At this level, what users imagined to be their 'real' self is inbound within control from their own imagined audience.

Meanwhile, what is presented in the 'fake account' is quite or totally different from the 'real account'. Not all informants refer their other account as 'fake account'; some of them refer it as 'second account'. Based on this reference, it indicates that not all users define the self they present on their other account as a 'fake' one. According to informants in this research, the 'fake account' was designated to present another side of themselves. "[trans.] I have this other account that I use for fangirling purpose. I follow all of my idols in there. Username is not my real name, of course, and my profile picture is the photo of my idol. No, I rarely show in my real account that I'm a fangirl. But in this account, I can be a fangirl as much as I want." For this informant, there is this certain concern that if she presented herself as a fangirl in her real account, her friends would put certain judgment on her and she wouldn't be comfortable with it. Hence, she decided to make this fake account to unleash her desire in fangirling. This tendency is also admitted by some other informants. At this level, fake account is understood as a defense mechanism that users utilize in cyberspace.

In the frame of using their fake account, users

show the tendency of being freer in expressing themselves. One who likes being a fangirl tends to be free being a fangirl. Ones who like to do online shopping admitted that they could follow as many online shop accounts as they want without feeling concern that their friends would refer them as a shopaholic. Another informant gave a unique finding by admitting that in her other account she likes to post some photos of herself wearing lingerie. She referred those photos as 'sexy photo'. She set her profile as private and let no one knows about the existence of this account, even and foremostly her close friends and family members. Accounts she followed were accounts of foreign celebrities who often post 'sexy photo' and also official accounts of lingerie brands such as Victoria's Secret, La Senza, and many more. As for followers, she chose to have zero followers in this account. Since the account is private, other account has to send a request if they want to follow this account; she chose to reject every request that came in. As for the reason, she claimed to be doing that because she feels afraid of what people might think about her when they knew that she likes to make a 'sexy photo'. It was also a precaution for unwanted misuse of her photos in the future. These findings indicate the practice of using a fake account as a defense mechanism or shield from the certain judgment they might get from their imagined audience in the real account.

The building process of self-identity is most likely to be unconscious (Horowitz, 2012). Users tend to not realize firsthand what structures and experiences they had that subconsciously built up their identity. There is also the analogy of the brain 'revises' things to help humans think critically. When users know how to separate what kind of content they want to post online on their real



account and fake account, they organize what kind of 'schema' they want to put on cyberspace. At this level, what users choose to present on both real accounts and fake accounts are constructing their identity; in this term, all is real. Hence, the more appropriate terminology is to refer to it as 'main account' and 'secondary account', rather than 'real' and 'fake'. Besides in the effort of not giving banality by putting those accounts on contestation, it is also in the effort of embracing and understanding that every side which user presents in both accounts is part of the selfidentity. By building their hidden self in the secondary account, users tend to look for a sense of freedom in escapism. Hence the question: whom or what do they escape from? It is a certain judgment from the imagined audience.

The Anxious Self: Sense of Authenticity in Fragmented Self

In the usage practice of secondary accounts on Instagram, it is found that the fragmented self in social media space is portrayed in the façade identity. However, this identity is built to remain hidden from a certain public. Aside from the finding that users tend to look for a sense of freedom in the escapism, it is also found that users tend to conduct selective exposure and selective avoidance in regards to information or contents they share on each account (Parmelee & Roman, 2020). Even though they claimed to search for freedom in the usage practice of secondary accounts, practically they still conduct selective exposure by choosing certain contents to post. An informant stated, "[trans.] I rarely post anything onto my fake account, not on the feed and not on the story. I purely use my fake account for hunting things in online shops, mostly clothes, shoes, and bags." Another informant said, "[trans.] Since it's a fangirling account, I only post photos of my idols there, and some memes that also using my idols' photos." At this point, the sense of freedom that they got in escapism from their main account is bound within another form of control, which is users' consciousness in splitting the identity in the fragmented self. Thus, there is this tendency that selective exposure is conducted to fulfill their designated persona in the secondary account.

Moreover, the process of selective avoidance is also found in the practice of using secondary accounts. In this case, there is a tendency that selective avoidance is conducted to build or construct certain spaces, which is the space that gives them a sense of safety and freedom. Safety, in terms, that they are safe from any possible judgment or even harassment they might get from their environment. To build a safe space, they tend to not telling their friends and acquaintances regarding the existence of their secondary account. Hence, the avoidance of building a space that is based on offline relationships. Freedom, in terms, that they are free from any possible burden they might feel by presenting a certain persona. To build a space of freedom, they tend to not posting certain content even though it's on their secondary account. Hence, the avoidance of some contents that they think might ruin the persona they tried to build. "[trans.] Although no one is following me in my second account, not all sexy photos of mine I post. It's for my pleasure, like my own secret garden, or secret gallery, so I post online what I think is good and aesthetic."

The next discussion in regards to self-identity is a question of authenticity. In the fragmented self that is divided through more than just one profile in social media space, is there any authenticity in the identity that they present? Understanding that



all identities, no matter how different it may be, present in the cyberspace is all a part of selfidentity (Davis, 2016; Horowitz, 2012), then the possibilities are whether all is authentic or nothing is authentic. At this level, all informants showed a tendency that they believe what they perform on their secondary account is also a part of their real selves. "[trans.] All is me. On my real account, on my fake account. It's all for me. Funny though that I called it as 'fake', it's also me; it's not fake, literally. It's just that one thing I like to disclose, while another thing I like to keep in private." This indicates that there is a sense of authenticity that users got in their usage practice of secondary accounts. However, no matter how real they think it is, they choose to hide it anyway. At this point, it is significant to analyze why users tend to hide some parts of themselves even though they believe that it is a part of their self-identity.

Through some findings in this research, it is found that users showed the tendency of being concern or even anxious about certain things in regards to Instagram usage practice. In their usage practice of both the main account and secondary account, informants in this research were feeling anxious about the persona that they build in cyberspace. The imagined audience in social media space has thought to build certain surveillance towards users (Purwaningtyas, 2019). In this case, what users choose to disclose or hide is subconsciously controlled by their environment. At this level, freedom is almost non-existent but only in a form of sense in the mind of users. They concern about what other people might think of them. They also concern about whether the persona they present would bring a backlash towards them. They concern about their image on a screen. However, paradoxically they conduct various ways to utilize the screen as a shield or defense mechanism

against what caused their concerns: the imagined audience.

In a secondary account, users tend to feel that they are more expressive and being open about their true nature. However, their practice has shown that there is still a process of selective exposure and avoidance took place in it. When selfpresentation is subconsciously driven by the environment, authenticity is almost non-existent but only in a form of sense in the mind of users. On one side, all forms of self-presentation displayed by users are part of their identity. On the other side, those forms of self-presentation are constructed in the dialectic between what they want to present and what the public wants to see from them. The existence of secondary account itself, though bringing the sense of freedom and authenticity at some point to some extent, is the proof that users cannot wholly present their identity through only one channel; hence the fragmented self. At this point, as relatively stable as it is, identity is fluid. On the other side, as fluid, as it is, identity is bound within some aspects of human life. Towards the identity, what fragmented self does is establishing it at a certain platform to a certain audience in a certain way.

Conclusion

In the usage practice of having multiple accounts on Instagram, it is found that the fragmented self in social media space is consisted not only of the 'public version of the self' and the 'hidden self', but also the self that holds anxiety. This 'anxious self' is derived from the ambivalent that is created by the dialectic between self-disclosure and self-boundary in self-presentation. This dialectic of self-presentation, to some extent, is bound within some standards that apply in cyberspace,



particularly Instagram in this case. Fear of social judgment and concern of social rejection has affected users in a way that they tend to present the 'expected self'—the self that the public expects to see. This practice is clearly shown in the usage of the main account and a little bit shown in the usage of the secondary account. On one hand, they tend to desire for freedom to express themselves. On the other hand, their expression tends to be constructed by their environment, particularly in the selection process of exposure and avoidance.

Diving into the lived-realities of users who have multiple accounts on Instagram has brought understanding in regards to how the fragmented self is proceeding in cyberspace. At some point to some extent, the fragmented self in every form of it is a part of identity. Just because the self is divided and scattered in many places, it doesn't mean that it's not a part of oneself. At this level, a secondary account is not an antithesis of the main account. Just because it presents a different side, it doesn't mean it's not a part of the same whole. Hence, the referral of 'real account' and 'fake account' is rather out of context when it comes to the discussion of self-identity. Therefore, this paper suggests the term 'main account' and 'secondary account' to refer to multiple accounts. These terms are not intended to put the account above or below one another, but rather to give the sense of the parallel relationship between the accounts. Though it may seem to be hierarchical, those terms are considered as less antithesis than using 'real account' and 'fake account' terms.

The media of Instagram, in a way, has helped users to build the space with a sense of safety and freedom to express themselves, through the feature of private account, close friends, direct message, as well as the ability of users to make

more than one profile. In another way, the media of Instagram has kept users under the surveillance and control of their imagined audience, although most of the time users do not realize it, particularly when they are using their secondary account. One aspect to be highlighted in this research is that in both the main account and secondary account, apparently users still act according to a certain standard they thought is appropriate in Instagram specifically and the social media generally. Even though there is this sense of freedom and authenticity they found in using a secondary account, to some extent there are concerns in regards to what they have to post and who could see their post. Thus, freedom and authenticity are bound within the appropriacy that is constructed in cyberspace.

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