Multiple Instagram Accounts and the Illusion of Freedom

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ABSTRACT

This article is motivated by the phenomenon of the ownership of multiple accounts on Instagram among teenagers. Previous research mentioned that a second Instagram account is used to express oneself without worrying that the identity of the users will be recognized by the public. Users feel they can upload anything on Instagram's second accounts without following Instagram rules' pressure of perfection. The second accounts become a sphere for users to perform their self-authenticity. The researchers inquire how teenagers use and manage their multiple Instagram accounts as a sphere for exploring themselves. Reflecting on the practice of surveillance between users through social media, including Instagram, the researchers argue that second Instagram accounts function as the sphere for pseudo-liberations for its users. Hence, the researchers also question how freedom is experienced in that sphere. The researchers use digital ethnography to get the answers to the questions. As a result, since the self is socially constructed and self-authentic, the researchers found that second accounts are not liberating their users. The constructed self-authenticity has shifted from the control of their parents and other adults; to their peers' surveillance.

Keywords: Instagram; Self-Authenticity; Pseudo-Liberation; Teenager.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini dilatarbelakangi oleh fenomena kepemilikan akun *multiple* di Instagram di kalangan remaja. Penelitian terdahulu menyebutkan bahwa akun kedua Instagram digunakan untuk mengekspresikan diri tanpa khawatir identitas penggunanya akan dikenali oleh publik. Pengguna merasa bahwa mereka dapat mengunggah apa pun di akun kedua Instagram tanpa harus mengikuti aturan Instagram yang menekankan kesempurnaan. Akun kedua menjadi ruang bagi pengguna untuk menampilkan keaslian diri mereka. Peneliti mmpertanyakan bagaimana remaja menggunakan dan mengelola beberapa akun Instagram mereka sebagai ruang untuk mengeksplorasi diri mereka. Berkaca pada praktik pengawasan antar pengguna melalui media sosial, termasuk Instagram, peneliti berpendapat bahwa akun kedua Instagram berfungsi sebagai wadah kebebasan semu bagi penggunanya. Oleh karena itu, peneliti juga mempertanyakan bagaimana kebebasan yang dirasakan oleh pengguna di dalam ranah tersebut. Peneliti menggunakan etnografi digital sebagai metode untuk mendapatkan jawaban dari pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut. Akibatnya, karena diri dikonstruksi secara sosial, begitu pula keaslian diri, para peneliti menemukan bahwa akun kedua tidak membebaskan penggunanya. Keaslian diri yang dibangun telah bergeser dari kontrol orang tua mereka, dan orang dewasa lainnya; ke pengawasan oleh rekan-rekan mereka.

Kata Kunci: Instagram*;* Autensitas Diri; Kebebasan Semu; Remaja.

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the number of Instagram users in July 2021 reached 91.77 million. Users aged 18-24 become the largest users, reaching 36,4%. They use Instagram to socialize and connect with their family, friends, or other users. Sakti & Yulianto's research on Instagram users (2013) shows that teenagers seek various information, increase their knowledge, and share photos and videos on Instagram. Sakti & Yulianto's research also explains that through these posts on Instagram, teenagers create a picture of themselves based on what is considered good by social media users.

The social media norms for its users to look perfect on Instagram put pressure on them. Social media, including Instagram, is often mentioned as a way for its users to escape reality (Kırcaburun & Griffiths, 2019). Watching videos of others can help them to release from their unpleasant reality. Besides, having friends on Instagram may fulfill an individual's social needs, distracting them from loneliness in real life.

However, instead of escaping everyday life's social burden, Instagram gives its users another burden. Instagram users believe they are free to create and present their identities. The facts are the contrary. According to Bonanno (2014), social media users are subjected and submitted to specific structures. It creates an illusion of agency, where users cannot represent themselves freely. Quoting Judith Butler, Bonanno mentioned that social media has a hegemonic nature*, and its users seem to abide by the "rules" or "universals" imposed by the owners.* This logic applies when we are looking at Instagram in particular. There are some features in Instagram, such as likes, comments, filters, or the display of the number of followers and following. These features create what Bonanno called "rules" or "universals"; we prefer to mention them as social media norms. The rules guide the users to post photos or videos with certain styles using filters provided by Instagram. It becomes something to be proud of when users achieve a lot of likes and positive comments.

In fact, the freedom of expression on Instagram, believed by some people, seems just an illusion. As a consequence, Instagram burdens its users to post perfect photos, garnering high likes and quick compliments. To have another escaping from these burdens, the users create second Instagram accounts.

Orlando (2018) explained that having a second Instagram account is necessary for teenagers. Second Instagram accounts can reduce the pressure that society puts on them. Moreover, in the second Instagram account, they are free to create self-image without worrying about having negative comments from their followers. The second Instagram accounts promise freedom for users to express themselves without any worries about certain consequences. They can escape the pressure of Instagram "rules" and norms that they have to fulfill in their first account, known as their real account. These "rules" and norms require individuals to show the perfect side of their lives, which often creates pressure for them.

Some research has shown how users use second Instagram accounts. Kang & Wei (2018) stated that Instagram users manage their self-presentation strategically. Users on the first Instagram account emphasize the flattering aspect of self, whereas, on the second, users show unflattering aspects of self. Users are motivated to use a second account more to provide a fun daily update and socially bond with close friends. Permana & Sutedja (2021) have listed fifteen reasons why users create a second Instagram account. I summarize the fifteen reasons in the following chart:

Figure 1. Fifteen Reasons Users Creating Second Instagram Accounts
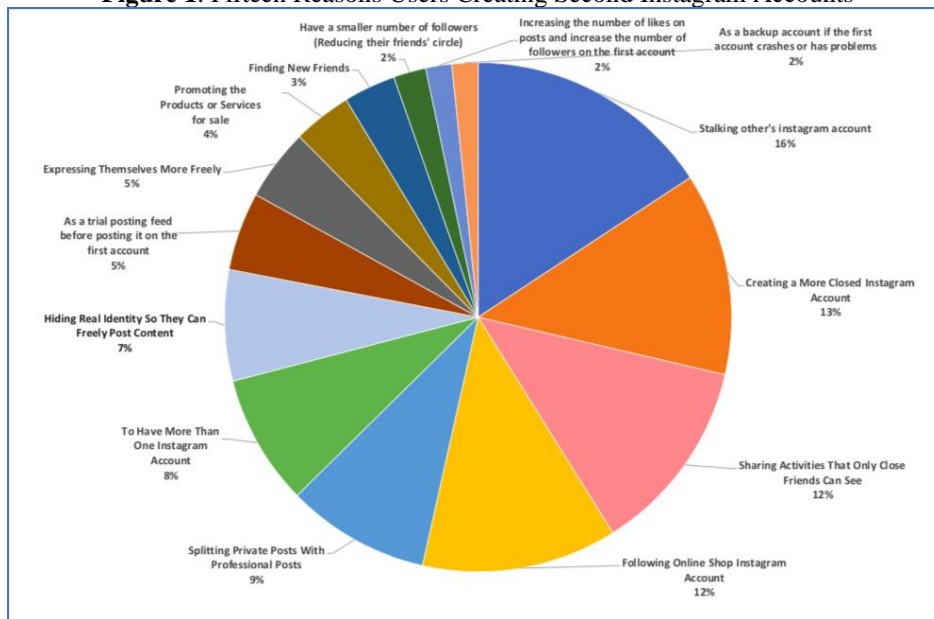
Source: Permana & Sutedja, 2021

Dewi and Janitra's research (2018) concluded that the informants created a second Instagram account as their diaries. It also functions to give negative comments to celebrities, to represent the other side of them, and for business purposes. Referring to dramaturgy theory, Dewi & Janitra argue that the second Instagram account becomes their backstage or other stages since the first Instagram accounts usually are used to construct their positive images. Second Instagram accounts can help users be more confident as they can escape a sense of insecurity (Prihantoro et al., 2020). The sense of insecurity, as explained by Orlando, emerged because of the first Instagram account. Certain demands burdened users. In comparison, the second Instagram account becomes a way for users to display other self-images without disturbance (Shabrina et al., 2022).

Based on previous research on the ownership of second Instagram accounts, the researchers sum up that seconds Instagram accounts can liberate them, in which they can disclose themselves to other users and followers. When their Instagram accounts get more followers, it shows their success in constructing their self-image. They have already posted photos and videos which fulfill the public's taste. However, on the other hand, the successful implicated in losing their freedom to post anything they want to share with their followers. Their privacy has been disturbed. In order to maintain privacy, they create second accounts. Second accounts are limited, only for their close friends. It caught the researchers' attention. As users, they would not let themselves be controlled by others: the followers. They take advantage of the feature in Instagram, which allows users to have more than one account to manage their privacy.

We believe some previous studies on second Instagram accounts have been conducted (Dewi & Janitra, 2018; Kang & Wei, 2018; Orlando, 2018; Permana & Sutedja, 2021; Prihantoro et al., 2020; Shabrina et al., 2022). However, those studies did not discuss the issue of freedom specifically. With the high intensity of Instagram users, especially among Indonesian teenagers, it is crucial to investigate the use of second Instagram accounts phenomenon.

Some research showed that social media offers a pseudo-liberation sphere for its users (Fandia, 2021). Social control is always there. Even though they have been able to remove the control from their parents through social media, their peer groups take over the control. In the end, users unconsciously submit to their friends' will while posting content on social media. Harju & Lillqvist (2015) also stated that there is light on the symbiotic, yet problematic, relationship between platforms as capitalist, commercial organizations, and users as unwitting commodities. This condition causes social media sites to function as "pseudo-public" spaces. They argue that the expectation of "freedom" arises from a "cognitive illusion" of publicness that blurs the governing commercial rationale. It highlighted Fuchs' (2009) argumentation that the internet, since the beginning, has

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brought the expectation of better democracy since it became the new "public sphere". However, what may have started as an egalitarian project, finally, is marked by the commodified Internet economy.

The fact encourages the researchers to assume that the freedom offered by second Instagram accounts is only pseudo-liberation and pseudo-public spaces. Hence, this article attempted to investigate that phenomenon.

METHODS

This research focused on the owner of multiple accounts on Instagram. The researchers conducted digital ethnography to gain data based on fieldwork and reported experience. The result is a narrative of reported experience. Digital ethnography concerns human communication through digital technologies, in which identity formation and social order emerge in virtual reality detached from the social context of the social world (Cruz & Ardèvol, 2013). Digital ethnography is used to investigate Internet usage, creating meaning for people interacting. Instagram has become the online sphere where people can interact and create meaning.

We utilized digital ethnography to understand the perspective and behavior of Instagram users. They use Instagram as part of their daily lives; hence, applying ethnography as the method is essential to understand their use of Instagram without ignoring the context. This method helped us as the researchers to analyze the data collected from the dialogic shifting between the researchers and the informants as the subjects, involving their perspectives. Therefore, digital ethnography is very useful for observing the mediated interaction in the virtual field.

The steps of data collection and analysis of this research are as follows:

1. Online observations on Multiple Instagram accounts.

   It becomes the primary source of information in digital ethnography because it allows the researchers to observe the subjects and their behaviour in their natural environment. We selected Instagram informants whose Instagram accounts based on the following criteria:

   a. Instagram users are aged 18-23 years old, part of generation Z. According to the Global Web Index (GWI) survey, Instagram is the favorite social media of Generation Z (Dihni, 2021). Generation Z has unique characteristics. According to Anwar (2019), Generation Z people can follow the latest technological developments to create their lifestyles.

   b. The Instagram accounts have more than 1000 followers. The researchers chose the accounts categorized as influencers, which must have at least 1000 followers. Then, the researchers preferred to choose Instagram accounts owned by people we know who have diverse backgrounds and have more than one Instagram account.

   c. The researchers chose four informants. In the next step, the researchers conducted online observation to interpret their online behavior in Instagram, both their first and second accounts.

   We conducted participant and non-participant observation. Through participant observation, we interacted with the social actors in a computer-mediated environment and participated in their online activities to understand the meaning of their actions. We kept in touch through Instagram accounts, posted content, commented and participated in their online activities, such as joining their live video. We also conducted non-participant observation to observe the informants from a distance without interacting with them.

2. In-depth interviews with the Informants

   The researchers also interviewed the four informants to get in-depth information about their online behaviour.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The First and Second Instagram Accounts' Usage

The First Accounts: Compromising Social Media Rules

Users usually set public in their first accounts. As the platform for visualization of everything, images on Instagram exist as objects stored in actual archives and are produced according to standardized rules (Trillò et al., 2021). Posting content emphasizing positive aspects of self is one important

Instagram unwritten rule. Yau and Reich (2019) categorized certain online activities that indicate the positive aspect of self on Instagram. First, users should portray themselves as interesting, for example: by posting photos of extreme sports; listing interests, such as traveling and partying. Frequent status updates of mundane activities, overly emotional posts, and heated discussions perceived as uninteresting and uncomfortable are considered inappropriate. Second, it is favourable for users to portray themselves as well liked and affiliated with others (posting photos in group rather than individual photos). Third, users is suggested to portray themselves as attractive, so it is important to look good in their profile picture with lighting and certain angles, and editing or even using aesthetic filters. Other studies also mentioned that Instagram account should go through a development phase, so it needs to be updated (Zillich & Riesmeyer, 2021).

All the informants used the first accounts for their positive image. As a consequence, they try to perform their self-presentation to gain an impression and avoid criticism from their followers. For example, one of our informants said, "*First account saya berisi foto-foto yang artistik* [my first account consists of aesthetic photos]. Posting aesthetic pictures protects them from their followers' negative comments. Not just avoiding negative comments, all informants agreed that their first Instagram accounts became official and professional for various reasons: such as indicating their Instagram accounts to the public, showing off their activities, or building a certain image.

However, not all users managed their first accounts well. Some had few postings or none in their Instagram posts. They well-arranged photos or videos in Instagram Post (Feed) or Stories: they used filters to post photos or videos to look dramatic. They also did not permanently put the posted photos or videos in the Instagram post and deleted some of them frequently. They felt more comfortable posting the daily activities in the story. Thus, the content of Instagram posts in the first accounts were limited compared to posted content on Instagram Story. According to Kang & Wei (2018), and Orlando (2018), the first account is considered real because it mentions the user's real names. In contrast, the second account used a fake name or pseudonym. Our informants used names such as @miegoren99luvv_, @blendoooong, @_rxxmaa, and @aamandthefckingworld. Second accounts, then, is created to take the distance between themselves from others' approval (Yau & Reich, 2019).

The Second Account: Performing Authentic Traits and Habits

Orlando's research (2018) discovered that in creating a second Instagram account, users function it as a sphere to express their silliness or vulnerability to their close friends and to create a space where they can devote their particular interests. Unlike the first ones, all informants set private their second Instagram accounts. They only accepted followers they knew well, such as college friends and people they often met or communicated with. Unlike in the first accounts, in their second accounts, the number of followers was less than the following. For the comparison, the first account of one of the informants had 1,230 followers and 1,140 followings; his second account had 162 followers and 201 followings. He said that he followed some online shops and celebrities in his second account because if he put them in the first account, the number of followers would be higher than the follower, which was not good for the image. It is the rule.

The informants explained that they did not consider much about the photos or videos they posted on their second Instagram accounts. An informant even said he posted the photos or videos "randomly". It means that he uploaded any photos or videos he liked. Other informants admitted they do not have to follow the rule. They just uploaded photos or videos because they loved them. They still used Instagram filters frequently to perform their odd looks. For them, being odd looking was their authentic selves. Exposing their interests, preferences, and activities is also part of being authentic.

The second Instagram accounts function as personal accounts. However, they managed their second accounts seriously. Since the second accounts were private, users had a sense of security in being themselves. They used features provided by Instagram to present what they thought as their authentic selves by exposing tastes and preferences or daily activities. One of the informants was a K-Pop lover, and she never posted any photos or videos about her musical taste in the first account. She shared her preference only in her second account. She had no confidence in showing it in the first account. The other informant, who loved singing, posted videos performing his singing activities on both accounts. However, he could sing more expressively in the second account. Some informants possessed a bad experience posting their hobbies or activities in their first accounts. Since they

received negative comments from their parents, they decided not to post the same things on their first accounts.

Representation of Authenticity on Instagram

When the informants present themselves on second Instagram accounts, they think it becomes their self-authenticity. One of the informants said, "*Di second accounts saya bisa menampilkan apa adanya.*" [In the second account I can show myself just the way I am]. Authenticity implies the possibility of inauthenticity and vice versa. If the second accounts are considered to represent self-authenticity, can we say that their first accounts are inauthentic?

To understand this situation, it is important to reflect on Erving Goffman's theory of face-work which examines how people interact with others. In that situation, they become actors in a play to preserve their image in the eyes of others around them. People live in various social encounters which require them to take a certain way, a pattern of verbal and nonverbal gestures to express themselves in any given situation. The term "face" refers to the way people conduct themselves according to the way they assume the environment believes them have taken. When someone is in the right face for a given situation, he feels confident because he has taken the right way the environment expects him to (Goffman, 1955). Calka (2015) applied Goffman's face-work theory in mediated context. According to Calka, when a user takes and shares photos on a social media site, he is presenting and maintaining a face for others to get approval.

Applying to informants' posts on their Instagram accounts, they attempted to create and maintain their desired faces to different followers on different accounts. In their first accounts, they performed their face to conform to public expectations. It was not the right way when informants shared photos or videos displaying their particular traits and habits, such as smoking or drinking alcoholic beverages, visiting nightclubs, being a big fan of K-Pop and Korean dramas, singing expressively, or playing music. They chose to post those in second accounts. However, it did not mean that in the second account, informants could express themselves more freely. In the second account, there was also the selection process. The informants still decide what, how, and to whom they share personal information.

The followers on the informants' second accounts, who were actually considered friends who knew and understood them, sometimes gave negative comments. Consequently, the informants used Instagram features, such as closing the comment column, removing followers, or setting Instagram Story only for "Close Friends", in which only selected people were allowed to view their posts on Instagram Story. The "Close Friends" setting was temporary and changeable, depending on the category of the posts. For example, when one informant was going to post a photo of a Korean boyband member, she first marked the followers she allowed to see. However, on another occasion, when she posted photos showing her goofy face, she reset the "Close Friends" by removing certain accounts she thought would disturb her privacy. At this point, images selected by users are categorized to certain criteria, such as context, content, and style. Images can also be used to categorize people and objects (Trillò et al., 2021).

Having multiple Instagram accounts, the informants attempted to negotiate their desired images with their followers' expectations by utilizing technological affordances. Affordances in the context of Computer-Mediated Communication emerge in the mutual interaction between users, the material feature of the technologies, and the situated nature of use (Evans et al., 2017). In this context, claiming the first accounts are more authentic than the second ones and vice versa seems oversimplified because the process of being authentic is complicated.

Goffman's face-worked theory has proved that the idea of the true self is socially constructed. This study showed that users construct themselves differently in each sphere (accounts). Thus, the researchers can say that each account performs its true self. Kreling et al. (2022) compared Instagram Story and Instagram Post in giving the sense of feeling authentic. According to Kreling et al., Instagram Story and Instagram Post have different features and affordances, which lead to different authenticity outcomes. Instagram Story allows users to share short-lived captures of life as it happens, including users' daily activities and thoughts spontaneously and informally. As a consequence, users expect Instagram Story facilitates more authentic self-presentation. Moreover, Instagram Story has lower visibility than Instagram Post, preventing users from self-censoring and fearing their followers' judgment through negative responses.

We found that the informants posted more content on Instagram stories than Instagram posts on their accounts, both first and second. However, there were different reasons why they preferred posting on Instagram Story on their first and second accounts. On the first accounts, there were not more than ten photos posted on Instagram Post. It is because they erased old photos from the Instagram Post but still saved them in the archive, so their followers could no longer view the posts. In Instagram Story, they still posted content regularly. There was a tendency of ambivalence. On one side, they wanted publicity for their activities, while on the other, they wanted privacy. Posting on Instagram Story was the solution to this ambiguity. They were still able to publish their activity publicly while maintaining privacy since the contents on Instagram Story will disappear after 24 hours. On the second account, all informants kept more content on Instagram Post and posted content for Instagram Story. The desire to capture the moment became the reason behind posting content on Instagram Story.

Although Kreling et al. found that users share short-lived captures of life as it happens spontaneously and informally in Instagram Story, it did not apply to informants of this study. They did not post the photos or videos just in time, but they took time to edit the content using filters or set the followers who are allowed to view the content. After 24 hours, they saved some content into the Highlight feature, so the followers could still view them. So, it was not a random process of posting photos or videos in Instagram Story. There was still a process of choosing to conform to the views and opinions of followers

Thus, the researchers conclude that the first and second accounts perform self-authenticity. As a construct, self-authenticity in both accounts is a dialectic process between the user's desire to present themselves and the followers' expectations.

This study believed that multiple Instagram accounts constructed different self-authenticity. Consequently, the researchers do not agree with some studies, for example, Kang & Wei (2018), or Orlando (2018), which identified that the first Instagram account was the real one, known as Rinsta. In contrast, the second was the fake one, named Finsta. Identifying the first account as real and the second as fake, or vice versa, seems inappropriate and oversimplifies the complexity of self-presentation in both accounts.

Eldred (2013) called this phenomenon the game of self-presentation. Based on this study, self-presentation did not mean to cover or uncover the true self. Thus, we can say there is no true self because self is a never-ending process of becoming. People keep constructing themselves so that the self is the product of social interaction and a personal claim to individuality (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Thus, we can also say that every construction of the self in each account is the true self; or even the truer self, the self we would like to be (Goffman in Vannini & Franzese, 2008).

Self-authenticity is an idealized performance contrived by people consciously and unconsciously to achieve, obtain or even deceive (Goffman in Hurley, 2019). So, if you imagine being authentic means being yourself just the way you are, then the authentic self does not exist. Otherwise, every face performed in different accounts is the authentic self. Consequently, there is the multidimensionality of the self (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). The two accounts represent fragmented self-authenticity. The authentic self is never singular and coherent.

As we know, social media spreads information quickly and extensively (Aula in Damayanti, 2020). According to Gergen (2000), emerging technologies saturate people with diverse kinds of people: some of them we know well, and the rest are alien to us; at one time, they are nice, but the other time they violate us. This social saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of self, so it is impossible to make a coherent, single and identifiable self (Calka, 2015). Who were you when you posted Instagram Story on the first account? And who are you when you upload videos or reels with captions on your second's Instagram Post (Feed)? These fragments lack coherence. Using various filters will alter, enhance, and transform their appearance. According to Hurley (2019), users draw on the range of Instagram affordances to construct the self and their identity. It is also applied to this study; the informants utilized Instagram affordances while constructing their self-authenticity.

Spaces of Pseudo-Liberation

This study also revealed that there is no liberation among users in performing their self-authenticity since self-authenticity is a dialectic process between users' desire to present themselves and the followers' expectations. According to the informants, as mentioned in the previous section, they

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created second Instagram accounts to feel free to express themselves from their parents and other adults' (older siblings or teachers') control. However, the second account did not allow them to post whatever they wanted because they sometimes got negative feedback from their friends. It means there is a shift of control from the parents and other adults to peers, from kinship to friendship.

Although they managed this situation by controlling Instagram's affordances, it did not mean they had self-autonomy completely. If Oxford Languages define freedom as the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint. So, what is experienced by users on second accounts is the illusion of freedom. The users act as if they can control and manage their space to express themselves, but actually, it is just pseudo-liberation.

The researchers borrowed the concept of pseudo-liberations from Fandia (2021) when she argued that personal space in social media tends to be "a space of pseudo-liberation". Fandia's research on *Path* indicated control shifting from family relations in offline reality to friend-based relations. The researchers also found the same logic when users create second accounts, as researchers mentioned earlier. However, the control shifting from family relations is not from the offline reality but from the first accounts. On the second Instagram account, the same as *Path*, users built the relationship based on friendship because it gave them a sense of liberation from social control that can threaten their personal space (Fandia Purwaningtyas, 2019). Unfortunately, in practice, the control shifted to friendship. Users, at this point, were still controlled unconsciously. Therefore, the freedom they achieve in that sphere is only a sense, a pseudo. Users can still manage the Instagram feature to reveal and conceal certain content to certain followers, but their decision is still determined by the followers. As a consequence, the freedom they experienced was just an illusion.

CONCLUSION

Sophisticated technology liberated people from doing activities in everyday life. As more and more people engage in interactions in virtual spheres, they lose their freedom while using the virtual spheres created by technology. People have to deal with the voices of others harmoniously or violently, peacefully of antipathy. User has fragmented their selves corresponding to the situation. These relationships encourage people to play various roles. It explains why Instagram users create multiple accounts. Instagram affordances offer and navigate the fragmentation of self and identities to the users. Managing first accounts as professional accounts, users perform the self that conforms to Instagram norms and rules: looks good and popular. As the personal accounts, users portray their "authentic-self" on second accounts.

Calka highlighted that the self is defined through relationships with technology. However, the researchers add that the established multiple selves also depend on the current situation and the followers' expectations. So, the freedom of spheres created by technology has receded. It only left a sense of liberation among the users. They feel they can perform the desired images and the authentic traits and preferences, but unconsciously they serve the followers' gaze instead. The researchers illustrated the situation as the illusion of freedom.

Experiencing the illusion of freedom does not put the users into the object entirely. Users still have the autonomy to utilize Instagram affordances and manage the boundary to protect themselves from violating their personal space. The way they create borders for each follower to decide what to reveal and conceal certain personal information. It enables Instagram users in this study to not only be just the object, but also become the subject with autonomy to control.

More issues are potentially explored in the next research related to using multiple accounts on Instagram and other social media. If this research focused on pseudo-freedom, the next research could explain what they imagine of being themselves in the second account and why they choose to be that way. Hence, using a psychoanalytic approach needs to be considered.

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