
NEGOTIATING PRIVACY AND INTIMACY: GENERATION Z'S SELF-DISCLOSURE THROUGH INSTAGRAM SECOND ACCOUNTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

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Abstract:

This study examines how Generation Z uses Instagram second accounts as spaces for self-disclosure when expressing personal problems, and the implications of this practice for social interaction. Guided by questions on why second accounts feel safer than primary accounts, how privacy and audience boundaries are negotiated, and how this reshapes social dynamics including closeness, support, validation, and exclusion this qualitative scoping review synthesizes literature through frameworks such as Social Penetration Theory, dramaturgical self-presentation, Communication Privacy Management (CPM), privacy calculus, and context collapse. The findings reveal that second accounts function as semi-private arenas enabling more personal, emotional, and selective disclosure. Their perceived safety stems from limited, trusted, and controllable audiences. However, this practice yields ambivalent outcomes: it strengthens relational closeness, emotional support, and trust, yet may intensify dependence on peer validation, reinforce insider-outsider boundaries, and create new privacy vulnerabilities. The study concludes that Instagram second accounts are not merely outlets for online venting but represent controlled intimacy spaces a concept introduced to capture how Generation Z strategically negotiates privacy, vulnerability, and social interaction under intense digital visibility pressures. These spaces allow for restoring fragmented contexts while managing the risks of collapsed audiences, ultimately reshaping how young people balance authenticity, safety, and connection in digitally saturated environments.

Keywords: self-disclosure; Generation Z; Instagram second account; privacy calculus; controlled intimacy spaces; digital social interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become one of the most important infrastructures in the social lives of young people. For Generation Z, digital platforms are no longer merely tools of communication, but spaces in which identity is performed, relationships are maintained,

emotions are expressed, and belonging is negotiated (boyd, as cited in Li et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, everyday life supported by digital platforms has become particularly significant. DataReportal reported that Instagram's advertising reach in Indonesia reached approximately 108 million users by the end of 2025, indicating that Instagram remains deeply embedded in the communication ecology of society (DataReportal, as cited in Sked Social, 2025). At the same time, the 2026 Pew Research Center report placed Instagram among the three most widely used platforms among teenagers, together with TikTok and Snapchat, confirming that Instagram remains highly relevant for youth connection, messaging, and social experience (Pew Research Center, 2026).

Within this environment, the emergence of Instagram second accounts has become a highly important phenomenon to examine. Unlike primary accounts, which are usually curated for broad visibility and reputation management, second accounts tend to be more selective, more relaxed, and more emotionally expressive (Aulia et al., 2025). Studies in Indonesia show that these accounts are used to express personal thoughts, emotional frustrations, and everyday vulnerabilities to smaller and more trusted circles of followers. A phenomenological study of Generation Z in Yogyakarta found that ownership of second accounts has become a real phenomenon among young people, and that self-disclosure is a central element in the use of such accounts (Aulia et al., 2025). Similarly, a 2025 study in Baubau found clear differences between primary and second accounts in terms of audience, content selection, and decision-making processes regarding what is safe to post.

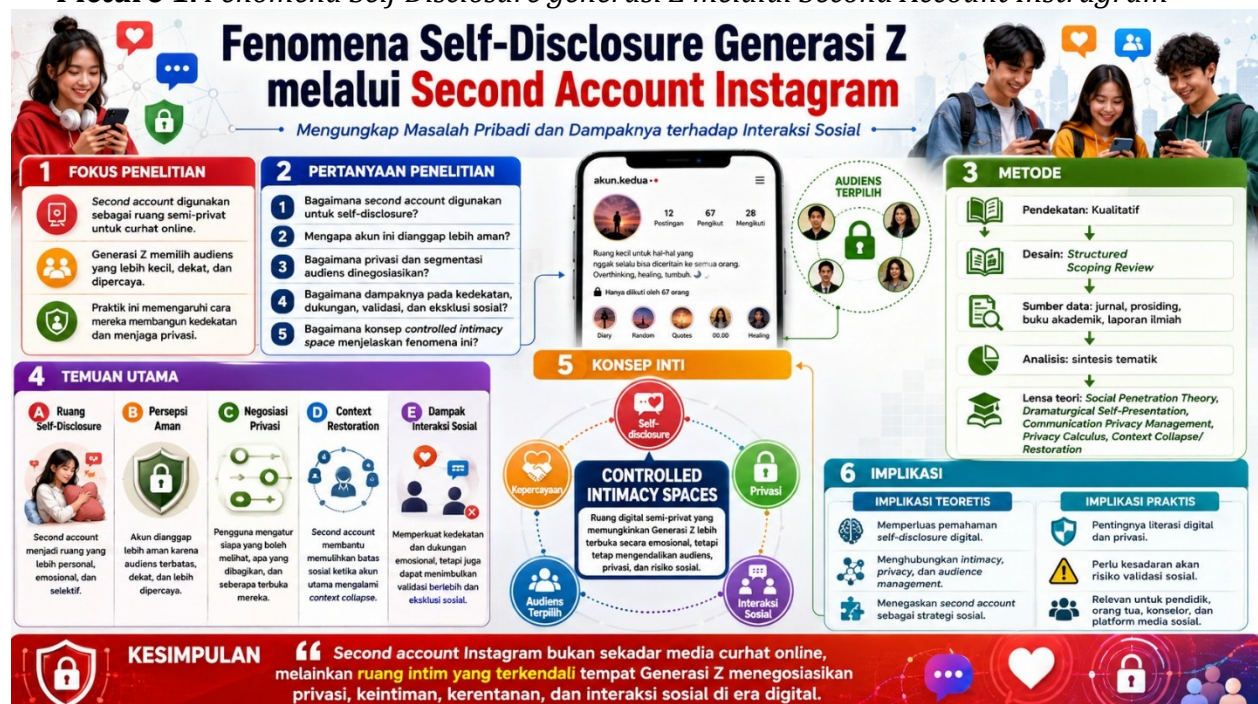
This phenomenon should not be understood as a trivial trend, but rather as a meaningful social response to technologically mediated visibility pressure. One useful theoretical starting point is Social Penetration Theory from Altman and Taylor (as cited in Core, 2026). This theory explains that the development of interpersonal relationships is related to the increasing depth and breadth of self-disclosure. Contemporary literature continues to use this perspective to explain online communication, showing that social media environments can support the formation of intimacy through selective self-disclosure rather than unrestricted openness. In digital contexts, self-disclosure does not automatically become deeper simply because technology facilitates communication; instead, it becomes strongly dependent on perceived safety, reciprocity, and audience control (Trepte et al., as cited in ScienceDirect, 2025).

A second relevant perspective is dramaturgical self-presentation from Goffman (as cited in Amelia & Amin, 2022). Although originally developed to explain face-to-face interaction, its relevance becomes even stronger in the age of social media because users continuously manage impressions before multiple overlapping audiences. On Instagram, the primary account often functions as a highly visible "front stage," where posts are

curated for acceptance, status, and image management. By contrast, the second account may function as a more "backstage-like" space, where users feel freer to relax the standards of self-presentation attached to the primary account (Aulia et al., 2025). Nevertheless, a second account is not a completely private space; it remains a performative environment, only with a narrower audience.

A third theoretical lens comes from Communication Privacy Management (CPM) by Petronio (as cited in Ingenta Connect, 2024) and the related perspective of privacy calculus. CPM emphasizes that private information is managed through boundaries and rules that regulate who may know what, under what conditions, and with what expectations. Privacy calculus research also shows that users weigh the expected benefits of self-disclosure against the potential risks (Trepte et al., as cited in ScienceDirect, 2025). In the context of social media, self-disclosure is shaped not only by individual tendencies, but also by platform affordances, expectations of social support, and privacy concerns. Trepte and colleagues show that when deciding what to disclose online, users weigh potential benefits such as social support against privacy risks, and that platform affordances also influence this calculation (Trepte et al., as cited in ScienceDirect, 2025). Research on social media users in Indonesia also shows that self-disclosure is influenced by a combination of personal factors and factors inherent in social media itself.

Picture 1. Fenomena Self Disclosure generasi Z melalui Second Account Instagram



Source : Generate by AI

A fourth highly relevant concept is context collapse. Social media platforms often merge diverse audiences into one communicative space, bringing together close friends,

acquaintances, family members, classmates, and even authority figures within a single profile. This makes it difficult for users to tailor messages to different social groups and increases the pressure to manage impressions continuously. Recent studies show that users do not only adapt to context collapse, but also engage in context restoration, namely efforts to rebuild social boundaries through filtering, selective sharing, and multiple-account strategies (Li et al., 2024). Thus, second accounts can be understood as practical mechanisms for restoring social context under digital conditions marked by audience convergence.

The broader concept of networked publics also helps explain why Generation Z does not simply abandon social media in response to visibility pressure. Rather than rejecting digital public spaces, young users create different spaces within them. Boyd's work on networked publics (as cited in Li et al., 2024) shows that young people use these digital environments to gather, socialize, and participate in peer culture, while still navigating privacy in ways that often differ from adult assumptions. This is where second accounts become significant: they do not reject public sociality, but create bounded and more controlled forms of publicness.

Although these theories are relevant, the existing literature remains fragmented. So far, studies of second accounts have often been descriptive, discussing privacy risks without analyzing their consequences for social interaction, or discussing self-disclosure without fully explaining how audience segmentation and context restoration operate together. International studies of self-disclosure largely focus on psychological well-being or disclosure behavior in general, while Indonesian studies of second accounts tend to be local and descriptive (Dewi et al., 2024; Jakpat, as cited in Dewi et al., 2024). This is where a clear research gap emerges: there is still limited integrative analysis explaining how second accounts simultaneously function as spaces of privacy negotiation, emotional expression, and the reconstruction of social interaction among Generation Z.

This article seeks to address that gap by proposing the concept of controlled intimacy spaces. This term refers to semi-private digital arenas in which users can be more emotionally open than on their primary accounts, but only under conditions of audience restriction, privacy calculation, and relational trust. The novelty of this article lies in the integration of Social Penetration Theory, dramaturgical self-presentation, CPM/privacy calculus, and context collapse/context restoration into one explanatory framework that specifically focuses on Instagram second-account culture. Accordingly, this article raises three main questions: How do second accounts facilitate Generation Z's self-disclosure? Why are these accounts perceived as safer than primary accounts? And how do they reshape social interaction in terms of closeness, exclusion, support, and validation?

Although research on self-disclosure in social media and the use of Instagram second accounts has begun to develop, existing studies remain fragmented. Most studies merely describe the motives for using second accounts or examine self-disclosure as an individual behavior, without integrating the aspects of privacy negotiation, audience segmentation, context collapse, and their impacts on social interaction into a single analytical framework. Therefore, there remains a research gap in explaining second accounts as social spaces that simultaneously function as arenas of emotional expression, vulnerability management, and the reconstruction of social relations among Generation Z.

The increasing use of Instagram second accounts among Generation Z shows that young people need safer and more controlled spaces to disclose personal problems. However, few studies have comprehensively explained how these spaces work as media of self-disclosure, how privacy and audiences are negotiated within them, and how such practices affect social interaction, relational closeness, and the dynamics of validation and exclusion in digital life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Disclosure in Digital Communication

The concept of self-disclosure refers to the process by which individuals reveal information about themselves to others, including personal experiences, emotions, views, problems, and aspects of identity that are not always directly visible. In classical interpersonal communication studies, self-disclosure is viewed as an important element in the formation of relational closeness. (Altman & Taylor, 1973), through Social Penetration Theory, explain that interpersonal relationships develop through increasing depth and breadth of self-disclosure. The more personal the information shared and the greater the trust between individuals, the greater the possibility of emotional closeness.

In the context of social media, self-disclosure undergoes important changes because the process of self-disclosure no longer takes place only in face-to-face interaction, but also through digital platforms that have particular characteristics, such as visibility, persistence, shareability, and broad audience reach. Social media users do not only consider the content they wish to convey, but also who will see it, how it will be interpreted, and what social risks may arise after personal information is shared. (Siahaan et al., 2022) show that self-disclosure among social media users in Indonesia is influenced by a combination of personal and social media factors. Thus, digital self-disclosure cannot be understood merely as individual behavior, but also as the result of interaction among users, platform features, and social contexts.

Recent studies also show that self-disclosure on social media has a complex relationship with psychological well-being. (Chu et al., 2023), through a meta-analysis of 38 empirical studies, found that the relationship between social media self-disclosure

and psychological well-being is not determined solely by how often a person discloses, but more by the quality of disclosure, honesty, emotional valence, and the social responses received. This finding is important because it shows that online venting or self-disclosure on social media does not automatically produce positive or negative effects. Its impact depends on relational context, audience quality, and the form of response provided by the digital social environment.

In this regard, self-disclosure on social media should be understood as an ambivalent practice. On the one hand, it can strengthen social support, provide emotional relief, and increase closeness with others. On the other hand, self-disclosure can also generate risks such as misinterpretation, regret, dissemination of personal information, dependence on validation, or interpersonal conflict. (Hossain et al., 2023) show that self-disclosure may relate to subjective well-being through social support as a mediator. Thus, self-disclosure on social media depends heavily on the quality of the relationship between the user and the audience receiving the information.

Instagram, Generation Z, and Second-Account Practices

Instagram is one of the important platforms in the digital lives of Generation Z because it combines visual elements, self-narration, social interaction, and identity management. For Generation Z, Instagram is not merely a space for sharing photos or videos, but also an arena for constructing image, maintaining relationships, gaining recognition, and displaying social identity. However, Instagram's highly visual and public character often turns the primary account into a space full of pressure, especially because users feel they must present themselves as attractive, visible, and in line with the expectations of a broad audience.

Under these conditions, the practice of using a second account or alternative Instagram account emerges. Unlike primary accounts, which are usually more formal, aesthetic, and open to diverse audiences, second accounts are generally more closed, selective, and followed only by people considered close or trustworthy. (Beatrice & Damastuti, 2024) found that second accounts among Generation Z in Yogyakarta became important spaces for self-disclosure because users felt freer to express personal matters than on their primary accounts. (Zayana et al., 2025) also show that primary and second accounts have different functions in the self-disclosure practices of Generation Z in Baubau; the primary account is more associated with social image, while the second account is more often used for personal and emotional expression.

A similar phenomenon is found in international studies of Finsta and Rinsta, namely fake/alternative Instagram accounts and real/primary Instagram accounts. (Huang & Vitak, 2022) show that users distinguish how they present themselves on primary and alternative accounts. Primary accounts tend to be used for more curated self-

presentation, while alternative accounts become spaces for sharing content that is more spontaneous, imperfect, humorous, emotional, or personal. This finding strengthens the argument that the practice of second accounts is not only a local Indonesian phenomenon, but part of a broader pattern in youth digital culture.

Thus, second accounts can be understood as a response to the limitations of primary accounts. When primary accounts become too public, too broad, and too tied to image, Generation Z creates alternative spaces more suitable for managing emotions and closeness. However, second accounts cannot be called fully private spaces, because users still communicate with particular audiences. They are more appropriately understood as semi-private spaces, located between the public and the private.

Dramaturgical Self-Presentation and Image Management on Social Media

To understand the difference between primary accounts and second accounts, (Goffman, 1959) theory of dramaturgical self-presentation is highly relevant. Goffman explains that social life can be understood as a performance, in which individuals present themselves before particular audiences. In social interaction, individuals attempt to manage impressions in order to appear in accordance with the expectations of the situation and audience. The concepts of "front stage" and "back stage" can be used to read Instagram users' behavior.

The primary Instagram account can be understood as the "front stage," a space where users present a neater, more ideal, and broadly acceptable self-image. On primary accounts, users tend to choose the best photos, craft captions, pay attention to aesthetics, and consider how posts will be judged by others. By contrast, second accounts can be understood as more backstage-like spaces, where users feel freer to express emotions, complaints, imperfections, or personal experiences that do not fit the primary account.

Nevertheless, second accounts are not spaces without performance. Even when users feel more honest and freer, they still choose audiences, select content, and consider social responses. In other words, second accounts do not present pure authenticity, but rather curated intimacy. (Marwick & boyd, 2011) explain that in social media, users always imagine particular audiences when communicating. Therefore, self-disclosure on second accounts is still influenced by the "imagined audience," namely the user's imagination of who sees the content and how they will interpret the post.

In this context, second accounts show that Generation Z does not simply "become themselves" spontaneously, but also manages different versions of the self according to the digital social spaces they construct. Primary accounts and second accounts are not merely two technical accounts, but two social stages that enable users to perform different forms of identity.

Communication Privacy Management and Privacy Calculus

The practice of self-disclosure through second accounts is also closely related to privacy management. Communication Privacy Management, or CPM, developed by (Petronio, 2002), explains that individuals manage private information through certain boundaries. Personal information is not shared randomly, but regulated through decisions about who may know, how far information may be opened, and how that information should be treated by others.

In the context of second accounts, privacy boundaries are built through follower selection, private-account settings, audience restrictions, and norms of trust within friendship circles. Users choose who may enter the second account and who remains outside. Thus, privacy does not depend only on Instagram's technical features, but also on social relations and trust. (Zhang et al., 2020) show that privacy management on social media is closely related to decisions to engage in self-disclosure and is influenced by users' psychological conditions and social contexts.

In addition to CPM, the privacy calculus perspective is also important. (Trepte et al., 2020) explain that social media users calculate benefits and risks when deciding whether to disclose personal information. Benefits may include emotional support, relief, validation, closeness, or opportunities to receive positive responses. Risks may include information dissemination, misinterpretation, negative judgment, or damaged relationships. In the context of second accounts, users feel that the benefits of self-disclosure are greater because the audience is perceived as safer and more trustworthy.

(Zhang et al., 2025) extend this perspective through the concept of self-other privacy calculus, the idea that privacy on social media concerns not only the user but also other people who may be involved in the post. In the practice of online venting, a person may share conflicts, experiences, or problems involving others. Thus, privacy risk is not only individual but also relational. This is highly relevant to second accounts, because venting that appears safe within a small circle can still cause problems if it involves others or if the information leaks beyond the circle.

Context Collapse, Context Restoration, and Audience Segmentation

One of the main reasons for the emergence of second accounts is the pressure caused by context collapse. (Marwick & boyd, 2011) explain that context collapse occurs when different audiences merge into one digital space. On a primary Instagram account, users may have followers from diverse backgrounds: close friends, family, acquaintances, lecturers, organizational colleagues, and even strangers. This convergence of audiences makes it difficult for users to determine the appropriate communication style.

Context collapse creates pressure because each post must be acceptable to multiple audience groups at once. A post suitable for close friends may not be suitable for family.

An emotional complaint that a best friend can understand may be considered inappropriate by a lecturer or professional colleague. As a result, users become more cautious and tend to reduce self-disclosure on their primary accounts. In such a situation, the second account becomes a strategy for separating audiences again.

(Li, 2024) refers to this process as context restoration, namely users' efforts to rebuild social boundaries that have collapsed because of audience convergence on social media. Second accounts are one form of context restoration because they allow users to create communication spaces that are more limited, more homogeneous, and more suited to the type of expression they wish to convey. In other words, second accounts are not only spaces for venting, but also mechanisms for restoring social context that has been lost on primary accounts.

This concept is important because it helps explain why Generation Z does not merely use the privacy features available, but creates separate accounts. They do not simply want to hide information; they want to build different social spaces. Through second accounts, users can distinguish between formal and informal audiences, public and intimate spaces, image and vulnerability, and general relationships and close relationships.

Self-Disclosure, Social Support, and Peer Interaction

The practice of self-disclosure through second accounts is also closely related to social support and peer interaction. Generation Z often uses second accounts to share complaints, sad experiences, disappointment, or personal conflicts in the hope of receiving responses from trusted people. These responses may take the form of comments, private messages, emoji reactions, or simply indications that the post has been seen. In many cases, such responses provide a sense of being noticed, understood, and not alone.

(Valkenburg & Peter, 2011) explain that online communication can strengthen adolescents' interpersonal relationships when used to deepen communication with friends they already know. This means that social media does not always replace face-to-face interaction, but can expand and strengthen existing relationships. In the context of second accounts, self-disclosure to close friends can strengthen trust and emotional closeness.

However, social support on social media can also turn into dependence on validation. (Chu et al., 2023) show that the impact of self-disclosure on well-being strongly depends on the quality of social responses. If users receive positive responses, they may feel better. However, if expected responses do not appear, they may feel ignored or become more vulnerable. (Hossain et al., 2023) also emphasize that social support is an important link between self-disclosure and subjective well-being.

Therefore, second accounts have a dual impact on social interaction. They can strengthen closeness, but they can also create expectations of response. They can be safe spaces, but they can also become spaces where users depend heavily on peer attention. This is the ambivalence of second accounts as spaces of digital social interaction.

Controlled Intimacy Spaces as a Conceptual Framework

Based on the theories and studies discussed above, this article proposes the concept of controlled intimacy spaces. This concept refers to semi-private digital spaces that enable users to disclose themselves in more personal and emotional ways, while remaining within the limits of audience control, privacy calculation, and social selection. Instagram second accounts can be understood as such spaces because they combine the need for intimacy with the need to control risk.

The concept of controlled intimacy spaces integrates several major theories. From Social Penetration Theory, it takes the idea that self-disclosure is a path toward relational closeness (Altman & Taylor, 1973). From dramaturgical self-presentation, it explains that openness in digital space remains within the logic of performance and impression management (Goffman, 1959). From CPM and privacy calculus, it emphasizes that self-disclosure always involves boundaries, risks, benefits, and trust (Petronio, 2002; Trepte et al., 2020). From context collapse and context restoration, it shows that second accounts are strategies for separating audiences and restoring social contexts that are too mixed on primary accounts (Li, 2024; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Thus, second accounts are not merely media for online venting, but Generation Z's social strategy for managing vulnerability in digital spaces full of visibility pressure. They allow users to remain connected and open, but not fully exposed. This is what makes second accounts sociologically important: they show how intimacy, privacy, and social interaction are renegotiated in digital society.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a structured scoping review design to examine how Generation Z utilizes Instagram second accounts as spaces of self-disclosure, why these accounts are perceived as safer than primary accounts, how privacy and audience boundaries are negotiated, and how such practices reshape social interaction. This design was chosen because the study does not aim to test causal relationships statistically, but to synthesize and interpret existing literature in order to build a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of second-account use as a socially meaningful digital practice. As (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) explain, a scoping review is particularly suitable for mapping key concepts, identifying gaps in the literature, and clarifying working definitions when the body of evidence has not yet been comprehensively reviewed.

The data in this study consist of secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, academic books, and scholarly reports relevant to self-disclosure on social media, Instagram second-account practices, privacy management, privacy calculus, context collapse, audience segmentation, and digitally mediated social interaction. Literature selection was based on its relevance to the research objectives and theoretical framework. Sources were included if they directly addressed at least one of the following aspects: self-disclosure in the context of social media, the use of second or alternative Instagram accounts among young people, privacy negotiation and boundary management, or the implications of selective openness for interpersonal interaction and peer relationships.

Data collection was conducted through a focused literature search using keywords such as self-disclosure, Instagram second account, Generation Z, privacy calculus, communication privacy management, context collapse, audience management, digital intimacy, and social interaction. The selected literature was then analyzed using thematic analysis. According to (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data, offering flexibility while maintaining theoretical coherence. In the first stage, the studies reviewed were read to identify recurring themes related to emotional disclosure, perceived safety, privacy negotiation, audience segmentation, and interactional consequences. In the second stage, these themes were grouped into broader analytical categories. In the final stage, the findings were interpreted through the lenses of Social Penetration Theory, dramaturgical self-presentation, Communication Privacy Management/privacy calculus, and context collapse/context restoration. Through this interpretive process, the study formulates the concept of controlled intimacy spaces as an analytical framework for understanding Instagram second accounts as Generation Z's social strategy for managing vulnerability amid digital visibility pressure.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Use of Instagram Second Accounts as a Medium of Self-Disclosure

The synthesis of the literature shows that Generation Z uses Instagram second accounts as spaces for more personal, emotional, and selective self-disclosure. These accounts are used to share complaints, personal problems, interpersonal conflicts, anxieties, everyday experiences, and aspects of the self that do not always align with the ideal image displayed on primary accounts. (Beatrice & Damastuti, 2024) show that second accounts become media that enable Generation Z to express themselves more freely. (Zayana et al., 2025) also found that second accounts have different functions from primary accounts, particularly in terms of personal openness and relationships with closer audiences.

The use of second accounts as spaces of self-disclosure shows that Generation Z does not avoid openness, but manages it strategically. They still want to share stories and emotions, but not with everyone. Their openness is directed toward certain people who are perceived as understanding, nonjudgmental, and trustworthy. This shows that self-disclosure on social media is not universal, but selective and contextual. This finding is consistent with Social Penetration Theory, which emphasizes that relational closeness is built through deeper self-disclosure to trusted others (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

From a dramaturgical perspective, primary accounts and second accounts can be understood as two different spaces of self-presentation. The primary account functions as a "front stage," where users present a neater, more aesthetic self-image that can be accepted by many people. By contrast, the second account functions as a more "backstage-like" space, where users are freer to display emotions and imperfections. However, as (Goffman, 1959) argues, every social space still involves impression management. Therefore, the second account is not a space of pure authenticity, but a space where users engage in more intimate and limited curation.

(Huang & Vitak, 2022) findings on the distinction between Rinsta and Finsta strengthen this argument. They show that Instagram users distinguish their content-sharing practices based on account type and audience. Primary accounts are used for more curated posts, while alternative accounts are used for more spontaneous, personal, or imperfect content. Thus, the second-account practices of Generation Z in Indonesia can be read as part of a global pattern in youth social media culture, namely the creation of alternative spaces to reduce the pressure of self-presentation on primary accounts.

Picture 2. *The Use of Instagram Second Accounts as a Medium of Self-Disclosure*



Source : Generate by AI

Perceived Safety in the Use of Second Accounts

The review shows that second accounts are perceived as safer than primary accounts because their audiences are more limited, more familiar, and more trusted. This sense of safety does not only come from technical settings such as private accounts, but also from closer social relations between users and their followers. In this context, safety is relational. Users feel safe not because risks disappear completely, but because they feel they have greater control over who sees and responds to their posts.

The perspective of Communication Privacy Management explains that individuals manage private information through certain boundaries (Petronio, 2002). In second accounts, these boundaries are built through follower selection, access restriction, and unwritten rules of trust. Users make second-account followers "co-owners" of the personal information they share. However, as CPM suggests, shared ownership of information also contains risk because information can be misused or disseminated outside its original context.

From the perspective of privacy calculus, the decision to disclose oneself in a second account occurs because users perceive the benefits to be greater than the risks. These benefits include emotional relief, peer support, acceptance, and the opportunity to speak more honestly. Risks such as negative judgment, conflict, or information leakage remain, but they are considered smaller because the audience is selectively chosen. (Trepte et al., 2020) explain that decisions about self-disclosure on social media are strongly influenced by benefit-risk calculations contextualized by platform features.

Picture 3. Perceived Safety in the Use of Second Accounts



Source : Generate by AI

This perceived safety must also be read critically. A second account can indeed provide a sense of safety, but it does not guarantee absolute privacy. (Zhang et al., 2020) show that privacy management on social media remains vulnerable to social pressure, emotional conditions, and relationship dynamics. Moreover, (Zhang et al., 2025), through

the concept of self-other privacy calculus, emphasize that information disclosure on social media often concerns the privacy of others as well. In the context of online venting, users may discuss conflicts or problems involving other parties, so privacy risks are not only personal but also relational.

Thus, the sense of safety in second accounts is the result of negotiation among trust, audience control, emotional benefits, and social risks. This indicates that Generation Z is aware of digital risks, but does not always avoid them. Instead, they develop strategies to make risks feel more manageable.

Privacy Negotiation, Audience Segmentation, and Context Restoration

The review shows that second-account use involves an active process of privacy negotiation and audience segmentation. Generation Z chooses who may follow the second account, what content can be shared, and how far personal information can be disclosed. This process shows that the second account is not a space of unlimited disclosure, but a space constructed through careful social regulation.

Audience segmentation becomes important because primary accounts often experience context collapse. (Marwick & boyd, 2011) explain that context collapse occurs when different audience groups merge in a single digital space. On a primary Instagram account, users may face family, close friends, lecturers, organizational colleagues, and acquaintances at the same time. This condition makes it difficult for users to tailor messages to each audience group, making them more cautious and less emotionally open.

Picture 4. *Privacy Negotiation, Audience Segmentation, and Context Restoration*



Source : generate by AI

In this situation, the second account functions as a mechanism of context restoration. (Li, 2024) explains that social media users do not only adapt to context

collapse, but also develop strategies to restore social-context boundaries. Second accounts allow users to separate audiences that are too mixed on primary accounts. By moving venting or personal content to the second account, users can build spaces more suited to the type of expression they wish to make.

This finding shows that second accounts are not only technical features, but social mechanisms for regulating visibility. Generation Z creates smaller and more controlled digital spaces to adjust communication to social closeness. Thus, second accounts become a form of digital social literacy because users actively understand that each audience requires a different communication style.

However, audience segmentation may also generate social consequences. When only certain people are granted access to a second account, boundaries are formed between "insiders" and "outsiders." These boundaries can strengthen closeness with certain groups, but they can also create exclusion for those who are not included in the circle. Therefore, second accounts do not only resolve privacy problems, but also reshape the structure of social relations.

The Impact of Self-Disclosure on Social Interaction

The synthesis shows that self-disclosure through second accounts reshapes Generation Z's social interaction ambivalently. On the one hand, this practice strengthens relational closeness because users share personal information with audiences considered close. Disclosing personal problems can signal trust and open space for empathy. This is consistent with Social Penetration Theory, which explains that relationships become closer when individuals share more personal information with one another (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

In addition to strengthening closeness, second accounts can also provide emotional support. Users who share sadness, disappointment, or anxiety may receive responses from peers in the form of messages, comments, or attention. Such support can provide a sense of acceptance and reduce feelings of loneliness. (Chu et al., 2023) show that self-disclosure on social media can be related to psychological well-being when such disclosure receives supportive social responses. (Hossain et al., 2023) also show that social support can be an important mediator between self-disclosure and subjective well-being.

However, these impacts are not always positive. Online venting on second accounts can increase dependence on peer validation. When users become accustomed to receiving responses from trusted audiences, they may begin to measure the emotional value of posts based on the number of responses, attention, or support received. If responses do not meet expectations, users may feel ignored or become more vulnerable. Thus, emotional support can turn into a need for social validation.

Furthermore, second accounts can create social exclusion. Because access to second accounts is limited, users indirectly distinguish between those close enough to see their personal side and those who are not. This forms a hierarchy of relationships in digital friendship networks. (boyd, 2014) explains that young people's social lives in digital media always involve negotiation among visibility, privacy, and peer relations. In this context, second accounts become spaces that show how social closeness is organized selectively.

Thus, self-disclosure through second accounts has a dual impact on social interaction. It can strengthen closeness and support, but it can also increase dependence on validation and reinforce social boundaries. This impact shows that second accounts are not merely personal spaces, but arenas where social relations are negotiated, deepened, and limited.



Source : generate by AI

Controlled Intimacy Spaces as a Synthesis of Findings

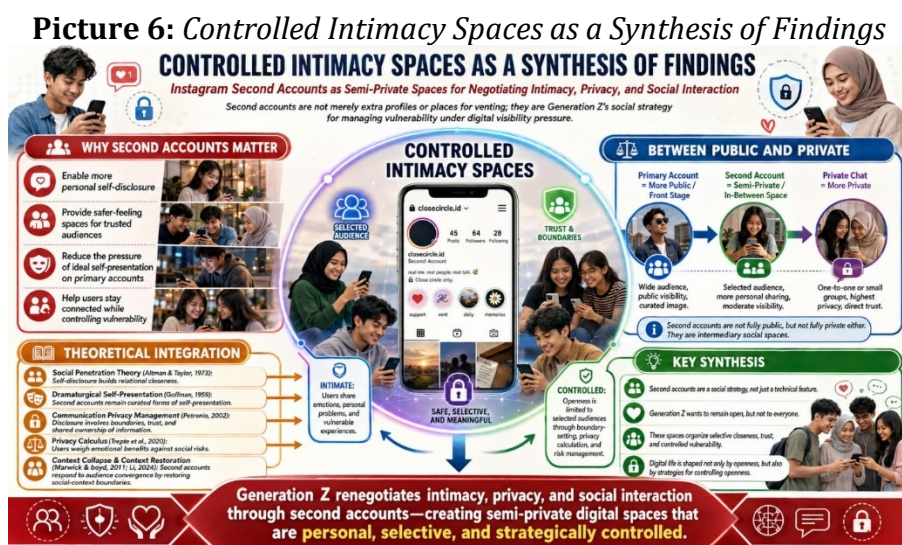
Based on all findings, this article formulates the concept of controlled intimacy spaces to explain Instagram second accounts. This concept refers to semi-private digital spaces that enable users to disclose themselves more personally, while remaining within the control of audience boundaries, privacy calculation, and social-risk management. A second account is called "intimate" because it enables users to share emotions and personal problems; it is called "controlled" because such openness is directed only to selected audiences.

This concept integrates the theories discussed in the literature review. From Social Penetration Theory, it explains that self-disclosure becomes the basis for relational closeness (Altman & Taylor, 1973). From dramaturgical self-presentation, it shows that

openness in second accounts remains a form of self-presentation, although more relaxed and limited (Goffman, 1959). From CPM and privacy calculus, it explains that self-disclosure always involves boundaries, trust, benefits, and risks (Petronio, 2002; Trepte et al., 2020). From context collapse and context restoration, it shows that second accounts emerge as a response to audience convergence on primary accounts (Li, 2024; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Thus, second accounts cannot be understood merely as additional accounts or places for online venting. They are Generation Z's social strategy for managing vulnerability amid digital visibility pressure. Generation Z wants to remain connected and able to disclose itself, but also wants to maintain control over who can access its vulnerable side. This is the core of controlled intimacy spaces.

This concept also shows that the boundary between public and private on social media is increasingly blurred. Second accounts are located between the two: not entirely public, but not entirely private. They are intermediary social spaces in which Generation Z renegotiates intimacy, privacy, and social interaction. Thus, second accounts show that young people's digital life is not only marked by openness, but also by strategies for controlling openness.



Source : generate by AI

Political Perspective Analysis: Platform Power, Privacy, and Digital Citizenship

From a political perspective, the practice of self-disclosure among Generation Z through Instagram second accounts can be understood not only as a phenomenon of interpersonal communication or sociology but also as part of broader power relations within the digital platform ecosystem. Instagram is not a neutral space; rather, it is an arena shaped by corporate interests, algorithmic governance, data commodification, and digital regulatory structures that largely remain beyond users' direct control. In this

context, second accounts can be interpreted as a micro-political strategy through which young users attempt to reclaim a degree of control over visibility, audience management, and personal information.

The widespread use of second accounts demonstrates that Generation Z is not entirely passive in the face of platform power. Young users recognize that their primary accounts are often connected to broad audiences, social expectations, performative pressures, and reputational risks. Consequently, they create alternative spaces that are more restricted and controllable, allowing them to manage vulnerability more effectively. However, this control remains relative rather than absolute. Although users can limit followers and selectively curate audiences, they continue to operate within a platform infrastructure driven by data collection, behavioral tracking, and algorithmic content distribution. Privacy within second accounts, therefore, is not absolute privacy but rather a negotiated form of privacy embedded within broader digital power structures.

From the perspective of the political economy of digital media, second accounts may also be understood as a response to surveillance capitalism. According to (Zuboff, 2019), digital platforms generate economic value through the extraction and analysis of users' behavioral data, including interactions, emotional expressions, preferences, and social relationships. Consequently, even highly personal and intimate disclosures become part of broader processes of datafication. When Generation Z shares frustrations, anxieties, or emotional experiences through second accounts, such information circulates not only within a trusted social circle but also within technical systems capable of mapping behavioral patterns, interests, and psychosocial tendencies. This highlights a fundamental political issue: digital intimacy takes place within environments that are economically controlled by platform corporations.

A political analysis also reveals asymmetrical power relations between users and platforms. Users may decide who can follow their accounts, but they have limited knowledge of how algorithms operate, how data are collected, and how content visibility is determined. (Gillespie, 2018) argues that platforms exercise political power because they establish the rules governing visibility, moderation, information circulation, and the boundaries of public expression. Therefore, second accounts should not be viewed merely as personal spaces but as components of a broader political ecology of platforms, where young users continuously negotiate with systems whose governing mechanisms are often opaque.

Within the framework of digital democracy, the phenomenon of second accounts suggests that privacy should be understood as a matter of citizenship rather than merely an individual preference. The ability to control personal information, select audiences, and manage self-expression constitutes an important aspect of citizens' rights in digital societies. When users feel compelled to create second accounts because their primary

accounts are overly public, highly surveilled, or burdened by social pressures, this indicates structural shortcomings in platform design. Social media platforms encourage extensive connectivity and visibility but often fail to provide adequate protection against social vulnerability, psychological pressure, and privacy-related risks.

Political analysis further highlights how second accounts are associated with exclusion and social hierarchy. Users determine who is granted access to their intimate digital spaces and who remains outside them. Although this appears to be a personal choice, it simultaneously reflects the politics of social boundaries in digital environments. Access to personal information becomes a marker of trust, intimacy, and social status. Those included within the second-account circle gain symbolic recognition as "insiders," whereas those excluded may experience symbolic distance. Consequently, second accounts do not merely create safe spaces; they also produce new forms of social differentiation within Generation Z's digital communities.

Another important political implication concerns the governance of digital platforms. Regulatory frameworks should extend beyond technical data protection and address users' rights to audience transparency, algorithmic accountability, protection from manipulative platform design, and meaningful control over personal information. In this regard, digital literacy policies should move beyond teaching technical competencies and instead foster critical awareness of the power relations embedded within digital platforms. Generation Z must be equipped to recognize that seemingly simple actions—such as creating a second account—are part of broader negotiations involving platform infrastructures, data economies, and the politics of visibility.

Therefore, Instagram second accounts can be understood as both social and political practices. They represent strategic efforts by young users to regulate self-disclosure, reduce exposure, and preserve intimate spaces within digital environments characterized by high visibility and constant connectivity. Nevertheless, these strategies remain embedded within platform structures that users cannot fully control. For this reason, the concept of controlled intimacy spaces may be further developed into the notion of controlled but platform-dependent intimacy spaces—spaces of intimacy that appear to be governed by users themselves yet remain fundamentally dependent upon platform architectures, algorithmic systems, and the economic and political interests of digital corporations.

Theoretical Implications

This article provides three main theoretical contributions. First, it shows that self-disclosure in digital environments should not be understood only as individual expression, but as a relational strategy shaped by audience architecture and visibility

pressure. This shifts the focus of analysis from openness as a personal trait to boundary work conditioned by platforms.

Second, this article connects Social Penetration Theory with CPM/privacy calculus. The former explains why self-disclosure is important for the formation of intimacy, while the latter explains why online intimacy is always related to boundary control. Together, they show that digitally mediated intimacy is both expressive and regulative.

Third, by integrating context restoration, this article expands the understanding of young people's social media practices. Second accounts are not only spaces for venting, but also tools of audience repair, namely means of rebuilding differentiated social worlds within networked publics. The concept of controlled intimacy spaces may therefore be useful not only for Instagram, but also for examining close friends lists, private story circles, finstas, or other selective-sharing environments on other platforms.

Practical Implications

For educators and universities, the findings show that digital literacy should not focus only on cybersecurity and misinformation. Digital literacy should also address privacy-boundary management, emotional disclosure, audience awareness, and the social consequences of selective online intimacy. Young users need to be helped to understand that spaces that feel "private" on social media remain socially risky spaces.

For mental health practitioners and youth counselors, second accounts should not be immediately interpreted as negative or deceptive. These accounts may perform important functions as spaces for emotional release, peer support, and identity processing. Nevertheless, practitioners must also be sensitive to the risks of dependence on validation, relational exclusion, and conflict arising from breaches of trust.

For platform policymakers and social media governance discussions, the findings emphasize that young people's privacy concerns are often relational rather than purely technical. Users do not only want protection from platform companies, but also from unwanted audiences in their immediate social environments. Therefore, designs that support selective sharing, audience clarity, and boundary management are highly important.

Novelty and Limitations

The novelty of this study lies in the development of the concept of controlled intimacy spaces to understand Instagram second accounts as semi-private digital spaces in which Generation Z negotiates self-disclosure, privacy, and social interaction. Unlike previous studies that generally discuss self-disclosure, second accounts, or privacy separately, this article integrates Social Penetration Theory, dramaturgical self-presentation, Communication Privacy Management, privacy calculus, and context

collapse/context restoration into a single analytical framework. Thus, second accounts are not only understood as media for online venting, but as social strategies for managing vulnerability, building closeness, obtaining emotional support, and regulating relational boundaries in digital life.

This study has several limitations. First, it uses a structured scoping review design based on secondary literature, and therefore does not present direct empirical data from second-account users. Second, the literature specifically addressing Instagram second accounts in Indonesia remains relatively limited, so this synthesis combines local studies with relevant international literature. Third, the focus of this article is only on Instagram, so the findings cannot yet be generalized to other platforms. Fourth, this article does not differentiate users' experiences based on gender, social class, location, or cultural background. Fifth, the concept of controlled intimacy spaces remains conceptual and needs to be tested through in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, surveys, or mixed methods in future research.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the use of Instagram second accounts by Generation Z is a digital social phenomenon far more complex than merely creating alternative accounts or using online spaces for venting. Based on the literature synthesis, second accounts function as semi-private spaces that enable Generation Z to engage in self-disclosure concerning personal problems, emotional experiences, interpersonal conflicts, anxieties, and aspects of the self that are not easily displayed on primary accounts. In this regard, second accounts become spaces that allow users to express themselves more personally, while remaining within the boundaries of selected and controlled audiences.

The main findings of this study affirm that Generation Z uses second accounts as a strategy for managing openness. They do not entirely reject social media visibility, but they also do not want all personal aspects of themselves to be exposed to overly broad audiences. Primary accounts tend to be positioned as more formal, curated self-presentation spaces open to diverse social groups, while second accounts become more intimate, spontaneous, and limited spaces. Thus, self-disclosure through second accounts shows that digital openness is not unrestricted, but selective, contextual, and strongly influenced by perceptions of the audience.

This study also finds that second accounts are perceived as safer than primary accounts because they provide greater control over audiences and the circulation of personal information. This sense of safety does not arise solely from technical features such as private accounts, but primarily from relations of trust between users and selected followers. Referring to Communication Privacy Management and privacy calculus, it can be concluded that Generation Z does not engage in self-disclosure randomly, but weighs the benefits and risks of disclosure. They open themselves when they feel that emotional

benefits, social support, and acceptance outweigh the risks of judgment, information dissemination, or relational conflict.

In addition, this study shows that second-account use is closely related to the processes of privacy negotiation, audience segmentation, and social-context restoration. On primary accounts, users often face context collapse, namely the merging of various audience groups in one digital space. This condition makes users more cautious and tends to restrain them from expressing personal matters. Second accounts emerge as a form of context restoration, an effort to rebuild social boundaries that better suit personal communication needs. Thus, second accounts are not only spaces of expression, but also social mechanisms for reorganizing visibility and closeness.

In terms of social interaction, self-disclosure through second accounts has ambivalent effects. On the one hand, second accounts can strengthen relational closeness, increase trust, open space for emotional support, and make users feel more understood by peers. On the other hand, this practice can also create dependence on social validation, reinforce boundaries between “insiders” and “outsiders,” and produce relational exclusion within digital friendship networks. In other words, second accounts do not only deepen certain relationships, but also reshape the structure of closeness and social distance among users.

The main contribution of this study is the formulation of the concept of controlled intimacy spaces. This concept explains that Instagram second accounts are semi-private digital spaces that enable more emotional and personal self-disclosure, while remaining controlled through audience selection, regulation of openness boundaries, and calculation of social risks. This concept brings together several important theories, namely Social Penetration Theory, dramaturgical self-presentation, Communication Privacy Management, privacy calculus, and context collapse/context restoration. Thus, second accounts can be understood as Generation Z's social strategy for managing vulnerability in digital life marked by intense visibility pressure.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of digital self-disclosure by showing that self-disclosure on social media is not merely an individual psychological matter, but also a sociological practice involving audience management, privacy, identity, and social relations. Practically, the findings affirm the importance of digital literacy that focuses not only on data security, but also on audience awareness, the ethics of sharing personal stories, emotion management, and the risks of digital validation. Generation Z should not be understood as passive users of social media, but as social actors who actively create alternative spaces to balance the need for openness with the need for protection.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations because it uses a structured scoping review design based on secondary literature and therefore does not present direct empirical data from second-account users. Future research is therefore encouraged to use in-depth interviews, digital ethnography, surveys, or mixed methods to further test the concept of controlled intimacy spaces. Future studies should also compare second-account practices based on gender, social class, location, culture, and different digital platforms in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Generation Z's digital intimacy.

Thus, it can be concluded that Instagram second accounts are not merely media for online venting, but social spaces that reflect how Generation Z negotiates privacy, intimacy, and social interaction in digital society. Amid a platform culture that demands high visibility, Generation Z does not stop seeking closeness, but creates new forms of intimacy that are more selective, more measured, and more controlled. This phenomenon shows that in the digital era, the boundary between public and private does not disappear, but is continuously renegotiated through creative and adaptive social practices.

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