

SECOND ACCOUNT INSTAGRAM AS SPIRITUAL SPACES FOR URBAN SUFIS AND SELF-EXPRESSION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

The existence of social demands and ideal images that must be maintained on their main Instagram accounts limits students' interactions. To express their more honest personal sides, many students choose to create second Instagram accounts as a space for freer and more authentic expression. This study aims to understand how PAI UIN Palangka Raya students use their second Instagram accounts as a means of self-expression and personal spirituality. Using a mixed method with a Sequential Explanatory design, data were collected through questionnaires (Google Form) and in-depth interviews, then analyzed using SPSS 27. The research findings show that the use of Instagram second accounts and the level of self-expression of PAI students are in the moderate category, with an average of 36.75 and 35.50, respectively. Regression analysis shows a positive and significant effect of the second account on self-expression ($B = 0.585$; $p = 0.000$), meaning that the more active students in using their second account, the higher their self-expression on social media. Behind this data, it turns out that Instagram is not only a means of social communication, but also a space for reflection in line with urban Sufism values to integrate modern life with spiritual practices. Students post spiritual reflections, prayers, and feelings that cannot be displayed on their main accounts. These findings have implications for educational institutions, particularly Islamic Education Study Programs, to take advantage of this phenomenon as an opportunity to encourage students to express religious and humanitarian values creatively on social media, while maintaining academic ethics and norms.

Keywords: Second Account Instagram; Self-Expression; Spirituality; Urban Sufis

A. Introduction

The development of communication and information technology in the digital age has revolutionized the way humans interact, express themselves, and form identities (Sawari et al., 2022; Anwar et al., 2024; Ulfah & Surawan, 2024). Social media, as the main product of this transformation, has become part of the lives of the younger generation (Rogers, 2021; Raynauld & Lalancette, 2023). Among the various popular

platforms, Instagram plays a role not only as a medium for sharing visual content but also as a means of self-image formation and social validation (Goyal et al., 2024). However, not all aspects of one's personality can be openly displayed on their main account. Students, especially those with a religious background such as Islamic Education students, often face moral values and social expectations that limit their freedom of expression (Bilqis et al., 2024). In this context, the multiple account feature on Instagram is used to create a second account as an alternative space that is more private, secure, and free from social scrutiny (Goyal et al., 2024; Ng & Ray, 2025).

The phenomenon of second Instagram accounts can be understood as part of urban Sufism, which is a way of maintaining spiritual depth amid the rapid flow of digital technology. The term urban Sufism refers to the adaptation of Sufi values and practices in the context of modern society, where Sufi spirituality must be maintained amid the obstacles of urban life (Hidayatulloh et al., 2025; Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2024). Those who live in cities face many dynamics and demands (Dickson, 2022). A Second account Instagram becomes a means of modern contemplation where individuals can express their anxieties, gratitude, and search for meaning in life through spiritual writings, images, and videos. This shows that Sufi practices are now integrated into digital life without losing their depth of meaning.

Along with various changes taking place, modern society is increasingly fascinated by lifestyles that appear dazzling, but do not necessarily provide inner depth (Arroisi et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Islamic education students use second accounts to express a more honest and authentic side of themselves, including inner experiences that are difficult to express in public spaces. Especially for women, secondary accounts become a safe space to channel emotions and spiritual reflections without social pressure (Hamdanah et al., 2024). Through this second account, individuals are more free to express their personal side, including anxieties, interests, narratives of daily life, and even spiritual expressions that are considered too private to be published on their main account (Syaefulloh, 2023; Maulidya et al., 2024). In this context, the second account functions as a digital contemplative space that provides a place for the search for meaning and the strengthening of spiritual identity amid the hustle and bustle of the virtual world.

Interestingly, some second account users come from environments with strong Islamic spirituality, including urban Sufi communities. Islamic Education has long played a fundamental role in fostering the spiritual, cultural, and moral development of Muslim communities (Taufikin et al., 2025). Interestingly, some second account users come from environments with strong Islamic spirituality, including urban Sufi communities. In the context of digital society, the practices of *dhikr*, *muhasabah*, and self-reflection are now also expressed in online spaces. Second accounts serve as a flexible Sufi medium for channeling gratitude, anxiety, and spiritual reflection through content with a spiritual nuance. This reflects urban Sufism that is individualistic, contextual, and adaptive to the times, where spiritual practices are no longer confined to physical spaces but manifest as "digital *dhikr*" in the virtual world.

Previous studies have discussed second accounts in psychological and social contexts, such as their relationship with self-esteem, anonymity, and the need for privacy (Sutrisnawati et al., 2024; Paramesti & Nurdiarti, 2022). However, studies on second accounts as a medium for spiritual expression among students, especially those with an Islamic background, are still rare. This study aims to fill this gap by highlighting the dynamics of second account usage among Islamic Education students at UIN Palangka Raya, a group that lives in a religious academic environment and has an affinity for Islamic spiritual values. By examining this phenomenon, this study aims

to enrich the study of digital media, self-expression, and spirituality among young Muslims.

In addition, this study also offers new insights into how Sufi values can be actualized in a modern way through social media platforms, as part of the development of urban Sufism in the technological era (Hidayatulloh et al., 2025; Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2024). The uniqueness of this study lies in its focus on Islamic Education students in a religious academic environment, which allows researchers to see the interaction between digital identity, self-expression, and contemporary spirituality in greater depth. This research is also important because it not only enriches the study of digital media and self-expression among the younger generation, but also provides new insights into Sufi practices that have emerged in the modern digital space as “digital dhikr,” while showing how students balance social demands and personal spiritual development.

Thus, this study offers significant academic contributions and practical relevance for the development of urban Sufism studies, social media, and digital spirituality. These findings are expected to serve as an important reference for researchers, educators, and media practitioners in understanding the relationship between technology, identity, and spiritual expression among young Muslims

B. Methods

This study used a mixed method approach with a sequential explanatory design (Akla, 2021; Nasution et al., 2024). In the quantitative stage, data on second accounts Instagram and self-expression were explored (Sugiyono, 2020). The sample in this study consisted of 108 PAI students from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 cohorts who had second accounts Instagram.

Before distributing the main questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted on a small group of respondents with characteristics similar to the target research population to assess the validity of the instrument. The results of the validity test, as shown in Table 1, indicated that all statement items for both research variables—Second Account Instagram (X1.1 to X1.15) and Self-Expression (Y1 to Y14)—have calculated r-values greater than the table r-value of 0.197. This finding demonstrates that all items are valid and can be used for further data collection in the main study.

Reliability testing was carried out to assess the internal consistency of the research instrument using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient. The analysis, conducted with SPSS version 27, produced a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.748 for 15 items, as shown in the Reliability Statistics table. Since the obtained value exceeds the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.70, it indicates that the instrument has a high level of reliability and is consistent for measuring the intended variables.

This value indicates that the instrument used has met the requirements for good reliability, making it suitable for use in collecting primary research data. The primary data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS version 27 to see the general trends in the pattern of using second accounts as a medium for self-expression and spirituality.

Next, qualitative data collection was conducted using a phenomenological approach (Samad & Adi, 2025). Qualitative data collection was carried out using three techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of digital content from informants’ accounts. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of techniques and sources, as well as member checks to ensure the researcher’s interpretation was consistent with the informants’ experiences. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and

thematic conclusion drawing. This approach provides a comprehensive picture of how Muslim students in urban environments interpret spirituality through social media, as well as how second Instagram accounts function as reflective spaces that represent contextual and personal urban Sufism practices.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

The Level of Use of Second Instagram Accounts as a Form of Self-Expression

Using a second account Instagram is a way for someone to show their true self more confidently on Instagram (Nabilah & Jayanti, 2024). Based on the results of a descriptive analysis of 108 respondents, the following data was obtained:

Based on the results of descriptive statistical analysis processed using SPSS 27, it can be seen that the Second Account Instagram variable, with 103 respondents, has a minimum score of 16.00 and a maximum score of 49.00, with a mean value of 36.75 and a standard deviation of 5.44. Meanwhile, the Self-Expression variable shows a minimum score of 20.00 and a maximum score of 44.00, with an average value of 35.50 and a standard deviation of 4.48. These results indicate that respondents generally have relatively high levels of both Second Account Instagram use and self-expression, with moderate variability among responses.

Based on the results of the descriptive test above, the distribution of data obtained by the researcher can be described as follows:

- a. Second Instagram Account: from this data, it can be described that the minimum value is 16 while the maximum value is 49, the average value of the second Instagram account is 36.7476, which is in the moderate category, and the standard deviation of the second Instagram account data is 5.44080.
- b. Self-Expression: From the data, it can be described that the minimum value is 20, while the maximum value is 44. The average value of self-expression is 35.4951, which falls into the moderate category, and the standard deviation of the self-expression data is 4.48062.

The results of the linear regression analysis, as presented in the table, show that the Second Account Instagram variable has a significant positive effect on Self-Expression. The unstandardized coefficient (B) value of 0.585 indicates that each unit increase in Second Account Instagram usage leads to a 0.585 increase in Self-Expression. The standardized coefficient (Beta) value of 0.711 further demonstrates a strong relationship between the two variables. With a t-value of 10.149 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), the effect is statistically significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that Second Account Instagram usage has a substantial and positive impact on Self-Expression.

The regression analysis results show that the use of a second Instagram account has a positive and significant effect on the self-expression of Islamic Education students at UIN Palangka Raya, with a regression coefficient value of 0.585 and a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that the more actively students use their second accounts to share personal, reflective, and authentic content, the higher their level of self-expression on social media.

This finding is significant when linked to the religious background of students, where moral values, ethics, and social expectations of religious campuses form certain boundaries in managing public self-image. In interviews and observations, several students mentioned that their second Instagram accounts provided them with a safe and personal space to express their thoughts, activities, and spirituality that they could

not openly share on their main accounts. Some of them even developed these accounts into professional or thematic accounts, containing motivational quotes, self-reflections, and religious content such as digital *dzikir*, spiritual poetry, and excerpts from verses or prayers. A change in a person's way of thinking will affect how they understand and practice their religion (Ahida, 2020). his practice shows a tendency that is in line with the characteristics of urban Sufism, which is a form of Sufism that is practiced flexibly and personally by individuals in urban-modern environments (Supriyanto et al., 2022).

Second Instagram Account as a Platform for Self-Expression and Digital Spiritual Space

Spirituality is a form of belief and awareness of the relationship between humans and God as the creator (Rohman, 2022), as well as a profound experience that is universal in nature and drives religious fervor (Muhammad et al., 2022). Spirituality helps individuals understand the meaning of life and form beliefs that give value to the reality of life (Mubasirun & Sa'adi, 2021). Self-expression through Instagram allows a person to experiment with identity and explore various aspects of personality in a safe and supportive environment (Nurhayati, 2023). By using Instagram, individuals can express their identity, feelings, and emotions in a safe environment (Jukasni & Rorong, 2023; Natasyah et al., 2024). Second account Instagram are often used for more personal purposes (Paramesti & Nurdianti, 2022). Some students use second Instagram accounts to share experiences.

Qualitative data shows that the main motivation for using a second Instagram account for both informants was the need for a safe space to express their personal identities. As AY revealed: " *The purpose of creating a second Instagram account is to express myself, such as sharing hijab tutorial content and sharing daily activities.*" (Interview, 2025).

Meanwhile, CN stated that the second account was created as a private space: "*The main purpose of creating this account is to have a private space to share stories and religious videos without worrying about others' judgments*". (Interview, 2025).

Both informants felt more natural and confident because their followers were selected individuals. This practice facilitates a form of "digital dhikr" through captions, visuals, or short videos with spiritual and introspective themes. This more personal process is related to spiritual learning, while also involving the strengthening of self-discipline and the awakening of the heart, which is one of the main goals of Sufism (Nasser, 2022). The results of the study by Rohmatulloh et al., (2023) show that digital da'wah media, including images, videos, memes, animations, and podcasts, are becoming increasingly dominant among the online community. Thus, the second Instagram account functions not only as a space for social expression but also as a space for digital reflection that is in line with Sufi values such as sincerity and the search for inner meaning. The posts on the subject's second Instagram account are as follows:

Users create their first account as their main profile to represent themselves and display unstructured photos and videos, in contrast to their first account, which is more organized (Burhanuddin et al., 2024; Idaman & Kencana, 2021). The content on the second account appears more spontaneous and expressive, with photos that are not very focused, and some even feature portraits of people who are the subject of conversation (Iksandy, 2022).

Qualitative data shows that both feel that a second Instagram account helps them be more natural and authentic. AY states: "*I feel more comfortable and free because I can express myself honestly without worrying about being judged, thanks to the followers I have*

chosen myself." (Intreview, 2025).

CN then emphasized with her statement: *"I feel more confident sharing my personal reflections on the secondary account compared to the main account."*(Intreview, 2025).

The students interviewed showed a tendency to use their second Instagram account as a means of personal spirituality amid urban and academic life. This phenomenon reflects the characteristics of urban Sufi communities, where spiritual expression is not always carried out in formal spaces such as *zikir* assemblies or *halaqah*, but rather extends to digital spaces that are more fluid, flexible, and personal. The findings of Athoillah et al., (2023) show that the development of information and communication technology has been widely utilized in various aspects of human life, including in the religious sphere. This is in line with Umami, (2020) research, which shows that positive social interactions can also foster religious understanding among students who tend to be closed-minded and textual, giving rise to a feeling that they are the group that best understands God's teachings. Second accounts allow students to remain connected to Sufi values such as self-awareness (*muhasabah*), spiritual honesty, and the search for gnosis—without having to submit to the public expectations attached to their main accounts. Thus, the second account becomes a medium for self-actualization that is not only social or psychological in nature, but also spiritually valuable within the framework of Sufism that adapts to the challenges of the digital age.

2. Discussion

The Level of Use of Second Instagram Accounts as a Form of Self-Expression

The use of a second Instagram account is a response to social pressure on the main account to maintain a perfect image. A second Instagram account provides a free and authentic space for individuals to express themselves without social constraints (Nahari et al., 2022). This activity reflects a form of healthy self-control, strengthens self-confidence, and provides inner satisfaction (Kokkoris, 2024). Freedom of expression in the digital space includes the ability to speak, write, act, and convey beliefs without fear, as long as it does not harm others (Minhas, 2021). This phenomenon shows that self-expression has become an important value in digital society, where social media is used not only as a means of communication but also as an existential space to show who we really are (My et al., 2023).

According to Kramer, (2021), the term "expression" reflects a broad range of emotional and psychological activities that transcend legal or political boundaries. Self-expression includes the ability to convey feelings, views, and personal values through various media such as writing, images, and social media posts (Kim et al., 2020; Howie, 2023). In the context of Islamic Education students, self-expression not only reflects personal character, but also becomes a form of response to the social and religious values that shape their environment. These students not only strive to display their academic and religious sides in their formal lives, but also have a need to articulate more honest, reflective, and sometimes spiritual inner experiences.

Therefore, the use of a second account Instagram is not merely a digital escape, but a strategic medium that provides a safe, comfortable, and flexible space to express their innermost selves. This finding is in line with the results of research by Ardiesty et al., (2022) which shows that students see second accounts as a safe space to express themselves more openly, as well as the results of research by Thohirah et al., (2025) which confirms that second accounts provide opportunities for adolescents to show their true selves more authentically, regardless of the social pressures that exist on their

main accounts. Furthermore, in a deeper theoretical framework, this phenomenon is in line with the practice of urban Sufism. Urban Sufism is a form of Sufism that is practiced contextually in the midst of modern and urban life, where spiritual values such as sincerity, humility, asceticism, and self-reflection are no longer expressed solely through formal gatherings or orders, but through reflective and authentic daily activities, including digital practices.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of self-presentation, whereby a second account functions as a “backstage” where individuals can reveal their true personalities away from the social pressures of their main “frontstage” account. Thus, a second account becomes an important medium for maintaining self-integrity between social needs and emotional honesty (Goffman, 1956, p. 69). In this context, the second Instagram account functions as a digital contemplative space for PAI students to express their spirituality in a personal and profound way. They share religious quotes, self-reflections, and even personal prayers that are rarely posted on their main accounts due to their overly personal nature. This space becomes a form of modern seclusion where they can be alone spiritually with full control over their privacy and audience. The interview results show that students feel more free, honest, and comfortable revealing their inner selves without the burden of image or social judgment. This attitude reflects the spirit of urban Sufism, namely the search for spiritual authenticity in the midst of modern life. Thus, second accounts are not only a medium for social expression, but also a medium for digital spirituality that represents the transformation of modern Sufism in the form of a “personal order” in cyberspace.

Second Account Instagram as a Platform for Self-Expression and Digital Spiritual Space

One of the prominent phenomena in today's social media is the emergence of second Instagram accounts that are more private and personal as a platform for self-expression, where users can show their authentic side without the pressure of the social image attached to their main account (Sokowati & Manda, 2022; Widodo et al., 2024). The openness of the younger generation to various information on social media, including through second accounts, places them in a strategic position in building interfaith understanding and creating spiritual peace in the digital space (Taufik, 2020). In this context, an important aspect to consider is social identity, which plays a role in shaping how individuals present themselves, interact, and negotiate spiritual values in the virtual world (Syafi'i & Yusuf, 2021).

Second accounts generally have characteristics such as a more limited audience, fewer followers, and a more anonymous user identity (Nabila et al., 2024). Users utilize them for various purposes, such as posting more free and spontaneous content in the form of daily stories, casual photos, and personal stories (Saidah & Trianutami, 2022; Dayanti & Yulianita, 2024). This becomes a means of channeling honest expression and improving psychological well-being (Ariyadi et al., 2025). Second accounts are usually only followed by close friends or selected people, so users feel safe sharing personal things without fear of misuse (Azizah et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2023). This privacy is also closely related to the need to maintain mental health amid the complex dynamics of social media (Girsang, 2023). Research by Damayanti & Sugandi, (2024) and Ridwan & Damaiyanti, (2025) reinforces that control over the audience and a sense of comfort are key to openness on second accounts.

For Islamic Education (PAI) students, a second account serves not only as a social communication medium, but also as a space to negotiate identity and spirituality. This

account provides a platform for them to express themselves more honestly and reflectively, including sharing personal spiritual experiences. According to research by Hussain & Wang, (2024) these findings provide deeper insights into how social media influences the experiences of pilgrims and supports their spiritual development. This phenomenon reflects the practice of urban Sufism, where activities such as *muraqabah* (awareness of God's presence) and *muhasabah* (self-introspection) are present in the form of contemporary digital expressions (Primarni et al., 2025). Posts in the form of reflective captions, short videos, or visual journals on secondary accounts become a form of digital dhikr that emphasizes spiritual authenticity amid modern busyness.

Strict privacy management creates small communities akin to digital circles of remembrance, whose members share similar levels of trust and spiritual sensitivity. This pattern reflects the inclusive yet intimate character of urban Sufism. Relationships between members are built on the basis of shared inner experiences and beliefs, rather than formal status. This also shows that women are more active in using second accounts to express their emotions and inner spirituality (Hasibuan et al., 2023; Fabien & Prastira, 2024). According to research by Prusak & Schab, (2022) our respondents faced the dynamics of religious struggle in three main aspects, namely interpersonal, intrapsychic, and their relationship with God. These struggles are complex and profound, to the extent that they can be categorized as a form of spiritual trauma. Therefore, most students use a second Instagram account so that they can channel their inner struggles and religious experiences more honestly, safely, and without social pressure.

D. Conclusion

This study shows that second Instagram accounts play an important role as a space for self-expression and spirituality for Islamic Education students at UIN Palangka Raya. Quantitative analysis of 108 respondents shows that the majority feel that second accounts allow them to express themselves more authentically, with a significant positive effect on self-expression ($B = 0.585$, $p < 0.05$). Qualitative findings confirm that second accounts provide a safe space for sharing reflective and spiritual content, in line with flexible and personal urban Sufism practices. Therefore, Instagram second accounts make an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of digital identity and social media behavior among the younger generation.

However, this study has limitations, primarily because the sample only involved Islamic education students at UIN Palangka Raya, so the results cannot be generalized to a wider group. Further research with a broader scope is expected to produce appropriate educational policies and strategies to encourage healthy and responsible social media use. Furthermore, it is important for users to utilize this platform wisely, maintain privacy, and filter content to ensure it aligns with academic norms and ethical standards.

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F. Author Contributions Statement

This article is the result of an analysis related to the use of second accounts on Instagram as a forum for self-expression and spirituality space among students. All

parts presented, starting from the background of the problem, the research methods used, the findings obtained, data analysis, to the conclusions drawn, are the original work of the author.

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