

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The rise of digital communication has fundamentally reshaped how individuals construct, perform, and negotiate identity. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have become central arenas for identity work, social positioning, and audience management. As of 2024, Instagram hosts more than two billion active users worldwide (Statista, 2024), functioning not merely as a photo-sharing application but as a complex social ecosystem. Within this ecosystem, naming practices, especially the choice of usernames, play a crucial role in how users present themselves and are recognized by others. Unlike offline personal names given at birth, Instagram usernames are chosen by users and created with a specific purpose in mind. This act of self-naming represents onomastic agency, in which individuals exercise control over how they are identified in digital spaces.

Behind its simplicity as an account name, the username on the second Instagram account holds a complexity of meaning that reflects hidden identities, personal emotions, and the user's social strategies. In the context of social media, identity is no longer singular and stable, but rather dynamically negotiated through various forms of self-representation in the digital space (Boyd, d., 2014). Social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a space for self-representation that allows individuals to strategically manage their image, emotions, and social relations (Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A., 2015). Research results across platforms, such as Facebook, show that users face a dilemma between projecting an ideal image and expressing themselves authentically (Bailey, E. R., et al., 2020). In this context, digital identity is flexible and can be reconstructed according to platform norms and user communication goals (Marnita, R.,2022).

The development of digital technology has encouraged the emergence of the practice of using second accounts as an alternative space for individuals to present themselves more authentically and selectively. This phenomenon is related to the online disinhibition effect, which is the tendency of individuals to express

themselves more freely in online environments (Suler, J., 2004). Additionally, anonymity in the digital space encourages increased self-disclosure, allowing users to present a different side of themselves from their offline identities (Qian, H., & Scott, C. R., 2007). Users tend to use their real names on their main accounts, while their secondary accounts more often use creative, symbolic, or anonymous names. The use of multiple accounts is also related to social gratification motives and users' need for different spaces for expression (Kircaburun et al., 2020). Several studies show that self-presentation practices on social media are influenced by social norms and platform expectations. Users actively construct an impression of authenticity thru communication strategies that align with specific digital cultures (Barta, K., & Andalibi, N., 2021). Moreover, digital interactions also encompass a dimension of social support mediated by features such as likes and comments, which serve as social signals in online communication (Carr et al., 2016). Expression norms also vary across platforms, making the platform context a determining factor.

Onomastics is the systematic study of proper names, including personal names (anthroponyms), place names (toponyms), and other named entities has long recognized that names are never merely arbitrary labels but linguistic forms carrying etymological, cultural, and social significance (Algeo, 1973). Traditional onomastic research focused primarily on documenting name origins and morphological patterns. However, the field has evolved toward socio-onomastics, which examines how naming practices function within social contexts, reflecting and constructing social identities, community values, and power relations (Van Langendonck, 2007). Crucially, Van Langendonck argues that conventional proper names such as personal given names typically exhibit "semantic poverty" they function primarily as identificational labels with no active descriptive content in contemporary use. By contrast, when individuals engage in self-naming practices, semantic content becomes central (Van Langendonck, 2007, pp. 92–98). Digital usernames exemplify this shift: names such as @anxious.overthinker or @unfiltered.thoughts explicitly signal emotional states and stance, making them semantically rich in ways traditional anthroponyms are not.

Socio-onomastics views names as social practices that reflect identity, values, power relations, and cultural norms within a community. According to Sjöblom and Aldrin (2020), naming is always shaped by social context, meaning that naming choices are influenced by factors such as group membership, social background, and interactional purposes. Recent socio-onomastic research has begun examining digital naming practices, demonstrating that online pseudonyms serve expressive, relational, and identity-constructing functions (Hämäläinen, 2022; Leibring, 2022).

Socio-onomastics is a branch of name studies that focuses on the relationship between names and society. It views names not merely as linguistic labels, but as social practices that reflect identity, values, power relations, and cultural norms within a community. This study adopts that framing to treat second Instagram account usernames as a species of nickname: names produced by their bearers for a chosen audience, as a deliberate departure from the identity performed on the main account. Read alongside the socio-onomastic view of naming as a socially co-constructed practice (Sjöblom & Aldrin, 2020; Tagg & Seargeant, 2021), this distinction allows the present study to examine not only the structural form of these usernames, but the motivations behind their creation and the social work they perform within a bounded, trust-based follower network. According to Sjöblom and Aldrin (2020), naming is always shaped by social context, meaning that name choices are influenced by factors such as group membership, social background, and interactional purposes. In this sense, names function as social signals: they show how individuals position themselves and how they want to be recognized by others. Therefore, socio-onomastics helps explain why naming practices including digital usernames can reveal meaningful aspects of social identity.

Digital socio-onomastics is an emerging branch of onomastic inquiry that examines naming practices within computer-mediated communication (CMC) and social media environments. Unlike traditional anthroponymy, which deals with assigned personal names operating within institutional or cultural conventions, digital naming involves pseudonyms that users select for themselves and can revise at will. It is this voluntary, expressive quality that makes digital naming such a rich

site for socio-onomastic investigation (Hassa, 2012). In her study of usernames in a Moroccan online chatroom, Hassa (2012) showed that digital names function as social practices through which users project and reveal the self in digital spaces evidence that onomastic analysis extends productively into CMC contexts.

Puzey and Kostanski (2021) unpack this disruption along three lines. The first concerns the boundary between proper names and common nouns, which blurs once users are free to select emotionally descriptive words, phrases, and unconventional combinations as self-identifying names. The second concerns the traditional onomastic assumption of semantic poverty – the idea that proper names function purely as labels, without descriptive content – which does not hold for digital pseudonyms, chosen as they often are precisely for their semantic richness and expressive potential. The third concerns platform-specific affordances and constraints: character limits, algorithmic searchability, and community norms shape naming conventions in ways that have no equivalent in traditional naming systems. Androutsopoulos (2014) adds a further dimension, arguing that social media users must design their self-presentation for multiple audiences at once, a condition he terms "context collapse." This pressure is, in part, what drives users to create second accounts under different names – spaces reserved for a smaller, trusted audience who can access a more authentic side of the user's identity.

Within the Instagram context specifically, digital socio-onomastics draws attention to how the platform's dual-account culture has produced a recognizable subcultural naming system. Users who share this space learn to read certain username conventions as markers of the second-account genre: an informal tone, emotionally charged vocabulary, references to privacy or authenticity, creative orthographic modifications, and deliberate departures from main-account naming norms (Schellewald, 2021; Park, 2022). Second-account names, in other words, are not simply individual expressions; they are participation in a collective digital naming practice with recognized conventions, social purposes, and identity stakes of its own.

Within Instagram, a distinctive phenomenon has emerged: maintaining multiple accounts with different naming conventions, each serving a different social purpose. Many users operate a primary account often using real names or recognizable variations and a secondary account, commonly called a "finsta" (fake Instagram) or private account. Research indicates that second accounts serve as more intimate spaces for authentic, vulnerable, or less-curated self-expression (Mahajan & Tiwari, 2023; Zahra et al., 2023). Popular media coverage reinforces this scholarly observation; a recent feature in The Jakarta Post's Weekender section reported that many young Indonesian Instagram users now experience their second account as the space where they behave most genuinely, while their main account functions as a curated, audience-managed persona reserved for acquaintances, coworkers, and professional contacts (Kose, 2026). Unlike main accounts, which tend to prioritize recognizability and social visibility, second accounts often employ creative, metaphorical, and emotionally expressive naming strategies. This shift is significant from a socio-onomastic standpoint: second account names frequently extend beyond identification toward description, expression, and stance-taking, operating as expressive resources rather than neutral identifiers.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to second accounts, detailed socio-onomastic analysis of their naming practices remains limited. Existing studies on dual identity performance (Mahajan & Tiwari, 2023) and digital authenticity (Zahra et al., 2023) acknowledge differences in account naming but do not systematically examine the linguistic strategies employed, the ways social meanings are indexed, or how naming operates as identity work within specific communities. This represents a significant gap in both digital communication research and onomastic scholarship.

This study addresses that gap by examining the naming of second Instagram accounts among the followers of the researcher's own second account, @mandskii_. The data are drawn from this bounded follower network because second accounts are typically private and accessible only to selected audiences. Studying this specific community allows for a more contextualized and personal approach to social meaning. As socio-onomastic theory emphasizes, meaning emerges through

shared knowledge and social interaction. By examining naming practices within an identifiable social network, this research shows how social meaning is co-constructed rather than imposed individually (Tagg & Seargeant, 2021; Androutsopoulos, 2023).

To analyze not only what naming patterns exist but also what meanings and social functions they perform, this study integrates two complementary theoretical perspectives: digital socio-onomastics and virtual onomastics. Digital socio-onomastics examines how naming practices operate within online and digitally mediated environments, where users self-select names as deliberate acts of identity construction, audience management, and social positioning (Hassa, 2012; Puzey & Kostanski, 2021). Unlike traditional onomastics, which documents name origins and forms, digital socio-onomastics focuses on the pragmatic and social functions of self-assigned digital names within specific platform contexts and community conventions. Second Instagram account names are ideal objects for this perspective because they are freely chosen, semantically motivated, and embedded in a recognizable subcultural practice.

Virtual onomastics, as advanced by Kisel, Mikhailov, Savinova, and Bosik (2018), treats self-given digital names termed *nickonyms* as artistic or fictional images users construct for themselves, distinct from the community-bestowed nicknames of offline naming practice. This perspective foregrounds the motivations behind self-naming: psychological drives such as self-empowerment or the search for an identity distinct from the offline self, adaptive-communicative pressures tied to a specific platform or community, and formal considerations such as graphic play, derivation, or transliteration. Applied to second Instagram account usernames, this framework reframes the object of study away from names as static identifiers and toward the deliberate, motivated act of self-naming itself asking not only what a name means, but why a user chose to construct it in that particular way. The integration of digital socio-onomastics and virtual onomastics thus provides a multidimensional framework for uncovering how second account names function as complex, motivated products of self-presentation rather than mere identification labels.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background presented above, this study aims to explore the social meaning reflected in the naming practices of second Instagram accounts from a sociolinguistic perspective. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the following research questions are formulated:

1. What are the linguistic structures characterize second Instagram account names among Gen Z users?
2. What semantic meanings are reflected in the second Instagram account names?
3. What are the social functions do second Instagram account names perform?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to analyze second Instagram account naming practices from a socio-onomastic perspective. Specifically, it seeks to (1) identify the linguistic and onomastic patterns used in second account names, (2) explain the semantic domains and meanings reflected in these names, and (3) interpret the social meanings and functions categorized through the naming practices.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research offers both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to socio-onomastic scholarship by systematically documenting and analyzing second Instagram account naming as an emerging anthroponymic phenomenon. The study advances understanding of how digital pseudonyms challenge and extend traditional onomastic frameworks, particularly with respect to semantic function and naming motivation. It also demonstrates how socio-onomastic frameworks developed for traditional naming practices can be adapted for digital contexts, addressing questions about name typology, onomastic function, and the relationship between naming and social identity in online environments. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for further investigations into digital onomastics and computer-mediated communication.

Practically, this research provides concrete analytical frameworks and empirical examples applicable to students and scholars in linguistics, communication studies, and digital media. It illuminates user motivations for creating multiple accounts with distinct naming conventions, which can inform

platform policies and digital literacy curricula. Educators can utilize the findings to develop curricula that address online identity management, while communication professionals gain a deeper understanding of generational communication patterns and evolving norms around social media authenticity among Generation Z.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research examines the naming practices of second Instagram accounts from a socio-onomastic perspective, using 99 account names collected from young adult users aged 18–29 who follow the researcher's own second account (@mandskii_). The selected account names are primarily in English or contain substantial English elements, as the onomastic analysis focuses on English-language naming patterns; multilingual and translingual naming practices are acknowledged where they appear in the data.

This study is situated within socio-onomastics, a field that examines names as social and communicative phenomena. To explain the data, this thesis draws on Van Langendonck's (2007) theory of proper names, which accounts for how a linguistic form functions as a name, and Kisel et al.'s (2018) concept of nickonym, which explains digital self-naming and the motivations behind it. These two frameworks are used complementarily: Van Langendonck (2007) addresses the linguistic status of names, while Kisel et al. (2018) address their social and psychological functions in digital contexts. The virtual onomastic framework proposed by Kisel, Mikhailov, Savinova, and Bosik (2018) is applied to reveal how second account names function as self-given nickonyms, distinct from community-bestowed nicknames, shaped by psychological, adaptive-communicative, and formal motivations behind their creation. The analytical approach is qualitative descriptive method: qualitative analysis of interview data is used to interpret the social meanings and motivations behind naming choices.

Several limitations apply. First, the findings are platform-specific to Instagram and may not be directly generalizable to other social media platforms. Second, the focus on English-language names may not fully capture multilingual naming practices. Third, the sample drawn from the researcher's follower network, while providing authentic data, may not fully represent the diversity of second-

account naming practices across subcommunities or regions. Fourth, onomastic interpretation necessarily involves analytical inference and cannot claim complete access to individual users' subjective intentions. Fifth, social media naming conventions evolve rapidly, and the findings represent a temporal snapshot during the data collection period. Finally, as a primarily qualitative study, this research does not claim causal relationships between onomastic features and social outcomes; rather, it provides a rich, contextualised understanding of naming as a meaningful social practice.

