

The Phenomenon of Online Gender-Based Violence Among Instagram Second Account Users

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Abstract

The rapid growth of internet users in Indonesia not only has positive impacts but also increases the risk of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV). Inadequate digital literacy increases the vulnerability of social media users to violence and privacy violations in the digital space. The study aims to explore the potential for KGBO and identify various forms of violence experienced by Second Account users on Instagram. A qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was employed to explore the subjective experiences of Second Account users who were victims of violence, through various Instagram features such as direct messages, comments, or the sharing of inappropriate content. The findings of this study reveal that the digital space is not entirely safe, control over self-image is vulnerable to manipulation, and the risk of violence is experienced across genders, by both women and men. The impact of KGBO manifests itself in the form of psychological disturbances in the real world, including chronic anxiety, depression, loss of a sense of security, and fear of self-expression.

Keywords: Digital Space, Instagram, OGBV, Second Account, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

Over the past year, internet usage in Indonesia has increased rapidly, facilitated by improved access in remote areas and the widespread availability of smartphone devices. Social media is no longer merely a means of entertainment but has become the primary space for interaction in daily life. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok have created new ways to socialize, build communities, and express oneself openly. This transformation has reshaped social interactions, virtually eliminating the constraints of space and time, creating a “hyper-connected society” where people can communicate instantly without geographical boundaries. However, this limitless connectivity is a double-edged sword:

while it facilitates open expression, it also comes with unprecedented digital risks. Despite all the benefits and conveniences offered by the digital space, new vulnerabilities have emerged. One of the main reasons for this is the rapid growth of the number of internet users, which has not been matched by an increase in digital literacy, leading to a rise in cybercrime (Moulita, 2023).

The lack of digital security is primarily reflected in the growing number of gender-based threats, the forms of which are becoming increasingly diverse and dangerous. According to data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan, 2022), various forms of violence occur in cyberspace, including: cyber

grooming, approaching and deceiving victims, using technology to deliberately seek out potential victims (based on education, age, physical condition or economic status) to be exploited or deceived; cyber hacking, the illegal use of access systems with the aim of obtaining personal information, altering it, or damaging the victim's reputation. Cyber harassment: the use of technology to contact, disturb, or humiliate victims. Cyber recruitment: the use of technology to contact, invite, or involve victims in certain actions. Cyber surveillance/stalking/tracking: the use of technology to stalk victims through direct observation or by tracking their movements. Cyber trafficking: recruiting victims through social media for the purpose of human trafficking (Yelvita, 2022). These findings demonstrate that digital transformation without adequate user rights and security protections poses new challenges. Without digital literacy, gender-responsive regulations, and victim protection mechanisms, new forms of violence may proliferate.

The Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) phenomenon on social media is a form of the unstoppable development of information technology. Society has become both consumers and users of communication technology developments. Social media represents one aspect of this technological development. Through social media, individuals can build extensive social networks. These networks serve as means through which people build relationships between individuals or between individuals and groups –a practice which has become increasingly prevalent today. Social media serves as a means for individuals to communicate with others without direct interaction. This emboldens social media

users to express themselves through the available features and applications (Saimima, 2022).

Social media users often maintain a second account, also known as an alter account, which typically differs from their primary account. The primary account typically uses a real-life or pseudonymous identity. Meanwhile, alter accounts often assume a new identity, making it difficult to identify the real owner of the account. In other words, a second account often functions as either a fake or anonymous account. Furthermore, because identities on social media are modified versions of real-world identities, significant differences likely exist between the real and virtual worlds. This phenomenon often arises from the ease with which users can construct their own identities. From the creation of accounts not requiring real identities, to various editing features and a wide variety of filters (Setiawati & Agustini, 2022). Second accounts serve as media of expression because they are considered safe spaces (Hayatul Nisa, 2025).

Various types of violence exist in online media, extending beyond cyber harassment and cyber surveillance/stalking/tracking. Such violence may also include the dissemination of personal data, constituting a violation of privacy, particularly in public spaces (Violin & Nafi, 2022). Abusive and aggressive behavior on social media has raised serious concerns regarding the negative impacts of online activities on personal and social well-being. The proliferation of false information and propaganda, the emergence of AI-manipulated media, the prevalence of AI-automated accounts, and the emergence of harmful content represent only some of the dangers that social media users may encounter often unknowingly, in the online ecosystem.

During crises, these issues become particularly pressing, with heightened threats to everyday social media users (Ferrara et al., 2020).

Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) represents a new form of violence emerging from technological developments. Indonesian society continues to misunderstand the concept of gender-based violence, particularly online gender-based violence. Many individuals remain unaware of the forms of violence that can target gender identity in digital realms, particularly against women and other gender minorities (Komunikasi & Padjadjaran, 2020). Conversely, the Internet Governance Forum has elaborated further on OGBV, encompassing various forms of violence such as stalking, intimidation, sexual harassment, hate speech, defamation, and exploitation. Violence that initially occurs in virtual worlds may, often unwittingly, affect victims psychologically. More formal than “On the other hand”.

Comprehensive reviews of social media provide exploratory data on hate speech and cyber hate. These studies examine the internet and social media as spaces for online hate speech, types of cyber hate, terrorism as a trigger for online hate, expressions of online hate, and common methods for assessing online hate. There is general consensus that cyberhate constitutes the use of violent, aggressive, or offensive language targeting specific groups who share common characteristics, such as religion, race, gender, or political affiliation, through internet and social network usage, based on power imbalances, and may be repeated, systematically and uncontrollably through digital media and is often ideologically motivated (Su & Andr, 2021).

The findings of this study represent an important systematic continuation of previous research on digital identity. Earlier studies, such as “The Use of Anonymous Student Identities in Online Learning” (Titin Setiawati & Vilya D Agustini, 2021) and “Background on the Use of Anonymous Accounts” (Setiawati & Agustini, 2022), used quantitative approaches to identify common patterns and motives behind the use of an anonymous identity. Those studies found that the use of “second accounts” is primarily driven by the need for freedom of self-expression, privacy preservation, and the avoidance of social stigma associated with primary accounts. While previous quantitative research mapped the “what” and “why” of these behaviors, a gap exists in the literature regarding the actual impacts and consequences of such behavior. to the qualitative dimensions of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), particularly within this “pseudo-anonymous” space. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this study goes beyond common motives to reveal the profound experiences of users who, despite seeking privacy through anonymity, were targeted by digital violence. This approach provides deeper comprehension of how second accounts’ perceived security may be paradoxically linked to real-world traumatic psychological effects, such as anxiety, depression, and suppressed personal expression. The phenomenological approach centers not only on primary data but also prioritizes the experiences of second account users and victims. This study aims to uncover and provide contextual understanding regarding the vulnerabilities associated with using second accounts on social media, thereby lending previous quantitative findings

a more humanistic and contemplative dimension.

METHODOLOGY

To gain a comprehensive understanding, this study employs a qualitative approach, allowing for both breadth and depth of analysis in examining the research subject. This approach enables the exploration of social realities redundant.

This study employs phenomenological research as its philosophical framework, focusing on how individuals describe their life experiences with OGBV phenomena. Specifically, this study uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its framework. It focuses primarily on the life experiences of informants and was therefore selected as the preferred method, allowing researchers to undertake a double interpretive process, to understand participants' interpretations of their traumatic encounters with OGBV. This interpretive depth is essential to reveal how individuals navigate the psychological contradictions of seeking protection through anonymity while facing threats in their real-world digital environment. These descriptions led to the essence of experiences of several individuals who have experienced these phenomena. This design has strong philosophical foundations and involves conducting interviews (Jhon. W. Creswell, 2021).

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with six students based in Jakarta. Informants were purposively sampled to ensure they met specific criteria relevant to this phenomenological study. These requirements included: being an active user of a secondary Instagram account; having personally experienced online gender-based violence on

their account; and being able to share and discuss their experiences in detail and were aged between 18 and 25 years. To ensure a comprehensive perspective, the selection criteria strictly followed gender equality principles, resulting in three male and three female participants. This balance was crucial to demonstrate that OGBV is a widespread issue affecting individuals across the gender spectrum. Secondary data were collected through literature reviews from research and journals related to OGBV and the effects of social media. Through in-depth interviews, this study sought to explore victims' experiences comprehensively, including their motivations for creating second accounts, their processes of constructing digital identities, their experiences of violence, and their processes of interpreting OGBV events. This included emotional responses, coping mechanisms, digital identity negotiations, and decisions to close accounts. The obtained data were then reduced, grouped into themes, and analyzed. This approach allowed researchers to understand OGBV from victims' perspectives, with a focus on their social experiences. Phenomenology does not merely describe events. Rather, it seeks to reveal meanings experienced by victims in facing violence. To ensure data validity, data triangulation was employed, comparing interview results, with observations, documentation, and literature reviews to validate data consistency. Regarding research ethics, informants' identities were disguised using initials. This was done to protect informants' confidentiality and safety, given the sensitivity of the research topic. Informed consent was obtained by assuring participants that the data obtained would be used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Second Accounts as Spaces for Social Construction

Face-to-face communication and virtual communication through social media represent two distinct forms of communication. In everyday life, individuals may refrain from openly expressing their opinions for various reasons. However, through social media, individuals can easily engage in activities that they would otherwise consider taboo. They can write freely or comment on anything presented by others. Social media has become a place for establishing communication and interaction with others. Within social media, users can create or adopt identities that differ from their real-world identities. According to Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959/1990), every individual constructs identity through self-presentation (self-performance). Self-presentation is fundamentally formed to satisfy audience or social environment expectations, rather than originating from the self or created by the individual. In digital environments, communication and interaction primarily occur through text, which directly influences how individuals communicate their identities in virtual contexts, with each text becomes a representation of self-identity. In face-to-face interactions, individuals understand others' identities through gender, race, clothing, and other nonverbal characteristics. However, many of these characteristics are difficult to convey in virtual interactions. Internet technology Such identities are often deliberately constructed by individuals (Nasrullah, 2014). Instagram is one of the

social media platforms that allows users to maintain multiple accounts, in addition to primary accounts. Based on Goffman's theory, the internet enables individuals to create identities they wish to present publicly. Goffman highlights the importance of self-presentation on social media, through which individuals attempt to present idealized versions of themselves to specific audiences. Consequently, some individuals consciously maintain multiple accounts on the same social media platforms. This phenomenon of multiple identities creates opportunities for users to engage in actions difficult to realize offline, such as bullying, stalking, and data theft.

The inability to express one's authentic identity triggers a search for new spaces in which to construct desired identities. Wood and Smith (2004) counter the argument that individuals choose different online identities because their offline identities lack place in their social lives (Nasrullah, 2014). Wood and Smith's conceptualization of identity in modern contexts explains that second accounts serve as shields for identities constructed for specific purposes, rather than merely as technical features. This represents a form of communication intermediation that actively creates and constructs identities over which users maintain complete control. They recognize social media as performative spaces in which they negotiate their public personas within private contexts (Hanan et al., 2025) As expressed by one informant;

"I mostly post selfies on my feed. If I were to upload them on my main account, I would feel insecure, so I upload them on my second account instead. Regarding my Instagram stories, I mostly upload my daily activities, such as campus activities

and photos with my boyfriend.” (AZ, 21).



Figure 1. Second Account Content
(Personal documentation of the informant)

Users create personal accounts to build networks with others in virtual contexts. Personal accounts may be authentic accounts representing users' true selves to represent themselves publicly for social networking. Meanwhile, anonymous accounts are used for specific purposes, such as remaining unrecognized by friends when commenting on social media (Hayati, 2021). Secondary account users seek private spaces in which they can express themselves without fear of judgment or bullying.

B. Second Accounts and Online Gender-Based Violence

The idea of second accounts as spaces for sharing content without fear of social judgment has not rendered them immune to violence. Social media can function as a semi-private space in which users maintain authority to share content, photos, and links, thereby presenting themselves to society virtually. Self-expression in virtual spaces remains vulnerable to online gender-based

violence. Violence occurring on social media parallels that in offline contexts.

One informant recounted experiencing violence from an anonymous account:

“Once, a fake account sent me a direct message accusing me of cheating on my boyfriend. At first, I responded, but eventually I grew tired of it, so I just ignored it. Other than that, I've not experienced anything else, only that one incident.” (AZ, 21).

This raises the question of whether only women experience violence in online media. In fact, in digital media, men have equal opportunities to experience OGBV, although forms and contexts may differ. The dynamics of OGBV blur conventional boundaries of gender-based victimhood. The following statement from one male informant who acknowledged experiencing violence illustrates this:

"My experience using social media related to online gender-based activities (OGBV) occurred when I posted an Instagram story on my second Instagram account regarding current news or trends, and someone judged me using the term FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). This caused me psychological distress, specifically anxiety about posting such content on Instagram again, ultimately making me very careful when posting stories on Instagram to prevent such incidents from recurring." (VT, 19).

VTs acknowledgement demonstrates that men who experience violence also suffer psychological trauma. They are also not immune to cyberbullying, harassment, or threats. Although the general public associate gender-based violence primarily with women,

these informants' experiences demonstrate that men are also vulnerable to OGBV. Therefore, this phenomenon emphasizes that OGBV victims are not exclusive to one gender but across genders. Violence experienced by second account users creates feelings of insecurity; spaces originally considered value-free are not, in fact, value-free. Some forms of OGBV that second account users acknowledged experiencing included cyberbullying, harassment, outing (the active humiliation of victims in public forums, chat groups, etc.), cyberstalking, fraud (data theft), use of fake profiles, dissing trickery and posting provocative content (trolling) (Junaedi, 2019). An example of fraping experienced by one informant:



Figure 2. Fraping

(Personal documentation of the informant)

Furthermore, one informant acknowledged that their name was used as collateral for online gambling. This case demonstrates that OGBV does not always involve negative or derogatory comments; it may also take the form of digital identity extortion, with serious financial and psychological consequences for victims. Victims experiencing data theft experience panic and social pressure for being considered negligent in protecting their privacy and personal data.

1. Forms of Online Gender-Based Violence Against Second Account Users

Various forms of violence against second account users span genders, as confirmed by one male second account victim who acknowledged experiencing various forms of OGBV such as cyberbullying, cyber harassment, and misuse of personal data, as recounted by one informant:

"In early 2022, I first used a second Instagram account, whereas previously I had a primary Instagram account. However, I was persuaded by a friend to create a second account. The purpose being to more freely and flexibly upload whatever I wanted, because second Instagram accounts can more effectively limit interactions or followers through prior filtering. I created it because my friend persuaded me, and I was free to upload whatever I wanted. It turned out that I had mistakenly filtered people, and the content I uploaded on Instagram became information for them to spread hatred toward me, claiming I was 'that kind of person and so on. This harmed me personally by negatively influencing how others perceived me, potentially leading to verbal abuse through the dissemination of information based solely on my posts

on my second Instagram account.” (MZ, 19).

This demonstrates that vulnerability to OGBV is universal across digital spaces, although psychological and social impacts on victims may vary depending on individual circumstances and social environments. Several informants experienced a form of violence known as trickery, a method of manipulating victims through deception to obtain their personal information. As experienced by male informant BG (19 years old), who acknowledged experiencing violence on Instagram in the form of data theft, which caused him to experience psychological trauma and eventually to delete his second account.

"The form of violence I experienced in the virtual world was cyber harassment. I chose to use a second account because I felt more comfortable posting photos/videos there, as my second account's followers were only my closest friends. This occurred because, during school, I once received sarcastic reactions from people who saw my posts and commented in ways, I considered overly playful. For example, when I posted about an outdoor activity, they commented with mocking laughter, and when we met in person, they said, 'You're always camping, so you must rarely shower; that's why you're so dirty.' That made me realize it was a jab. Therefore, I now feel more comfortable using a second account that few people know about. I also do not want to disrupt my relationships with friends who may hold different views. I feel more free and comfortable expressing myself. (BG, 19)

The research findings provide an overview of the OGBV phenomenon across genders, wherein both men and women share equal vulnerability as victims or perpetrators of violence. In this context, second accounts are selected as manifestations of spaces for personal expression and interests. These spaces afford users full autonomy to construct their identities according to specific roles they wish to perform and present. Second accounts function not merely as secondary accounts but as features that technically play socially constructed and controlled roles.

DISCUSSION

As social media becomes increasingly accessible, with a wide range of features allowing users to freely engage in various activities on their personal social media accounts, social media is now used for entertainment and interaction. Individuals cannot escape the presence and influence of media technology. The first assumption emphasizes that in their lives, people cannot avoid or escape the media. The second assumption emphasizes the idea that media directly influence humans (Yulita & Andi, 2024). As with a physical home, social media accounts can be customized according to owners' preferences. Maintaining a second account on a social media platform provides a space to share stories without feeling restricted, comparable to a secret room in a main house, where owners can limit who visits that secret room. However, secondary accounts users are not exempt from various forms of Online Gender-Based Violence. Various forms of violence on social media are also experienced by secondary account users; based on interviews and observations, the impact of violence experienced by victims of OGBV ranges from psychological pressure,

anxiety, depression, to withdrawal from virtual and social worlds, to material losses in the form of defamation and even crime, such as victims' personal data being used to secure online loans. Additionally, victims of OGBV are not limited to one gender; male secondary account users also experience OGBV on their secondary accounts and acknowledge experiencing the same effects as female users. Communication security on social media platforms has not yet been prioritized; even though effects experienced by victims extend beyond virtual spaces to their daily lives and social circles.

A statement from one of the informants indicates that second accounts are not only additional or alternative accounts, but also serve personal functions, including spaces for self-documentation, emotional expression, and ideal identity construction. Second accounts serve as digital archives that store life experiences honestly and impulsively. Primary accounts are considered inadequate spaces for personal storytelling, not aligned with images users wish to project on primary accounts, or simply not wishing to share information publicly. Other informants view second accounts as spaces for emotional release where they can freely express their feelings, concerns, and ideas without demands for social validation. On second accounts, they do not need to construct perfect images often cultivated on primary accounts. This phenomenon demonstrates that users consciously segment their digital identities. Primary accounts serve as spaces for self-representation, while second accounts constitute more selective personal spaces. The internet provides spaces for identity construction, wherein individuals can perform various identities; or what is known as multiple roles (Hanan et al., 2025). Users

select identities based on target audiences and establish boundaries between private and public information. Digital identities become fluid and negotiable according to the users' social or psychological needs. In this context, second accounts serve as spaces for users to experiment with identities distinct from their primary identities. However, the internet flexibility also poses threats to users. When the boundaries between private and public spheres become blurred by violence, identities deliberately constructed on the second accounts collapse. Second account users typically configure settings such as audience (close friends), followers, and privacy. However, when they experience OGBV, wherein content is disseminated without permission, accounts are hacked, and personal data are stolen. Victims who previously felt they had control over their self-image lose that control and become vulnerable to stigmatization, revictimization, and gender-based moral judgment. Spaces that were once for expression have turned into spaces for surveillance and social control. Furthermore, there is bias against victims who experience violence persists.

The research found that forms of violence experienced by respondents comprised verbal violence, including cyberbullying and cyber harassment; with direct comments posted on victims' Instagram feeds and stories. Indeed, some of the cases extended into real-world bullying. Users who feel pressured by OGBV will immediately close their second accounts and withdraw from their social environments. However, based on interviews conducted, no OGBV victims have reported perpetrators or taken legal action against them; even though they are well aware that they are experiencing OGBV. As with cases of sexual violence

offline, the number of OGBV cases that have been recorded and resolved represents only a fraction of the total number of cases. A situation further exacerbated by the resolution of OGBV cases being limited to the ITE Law and Pornography Law. Currently, still no specific regulations governing this issue. This study concluded that, first, obstacles and challenges in resolving OGBV include the legal vacuum resulting in inconsistencies regarding court decisions. Second, establishing a legal mechanism for resolving OGBV in Indonesia requires classifying penal and non-penal mechanisms (Adkiras et al., n.d.). Nonetheless, shortcomings of these regulations explicitly demonstrate failure to recognize power relations, stigma, and psychological and social impacts on victims. As a result, victims not only face violence in digital spaces, but also contend with systems that lack impartiality and protection for victims. This occurs despite new internet-based media have the potential to build new societies that recognize diversity. Using media to address gender issues (Siswanti et al., 2024).

On the surface, OGBV cases involving second account users appear calm; they are not urgent, disruptive, or requiring follow-up. However, impacts on victims are quite serious; both psychologically and materially. Psychological pressures include anxiety, depression, and loss of security. In addition, material losses, such as one victim whose theft of personal data misused for online loans (PINJOL), as well as dissemination of personal content threatening reputational damage. This study found that various factors contributing to OGBV cases receiving less attention. At least two categories emerged: internal and external factors. Internally, victims feel ashamed, afraid of being blamed,

or stigmatized, making it difficult for them to reveal their experiences. Externally, low digital literacy among the public, lack of information about steps that victims can take, and weak legal protection. This experience illustrates how victims' perceptions of social risks they face amid legal uncertainty lead them preferring to withdraw. As a result, cases of OGBV become more widespread due to no decisive action against perpetrators. Thus, important for public, stakeholders, and policymakers to strengthen gender-responsive regulations, create victim protection mechanisms, and improve digital literacy. To date, OGBV mostly focused on forms of violence, whereas OGBV cannot be treated as not an isolated issue. Understanding digital media, literacy levels, and interests and purposes ultimately create loopholes for OGBV.

Second account users' willingness to remain active in their social circles by consciously segmenting their identities between their primary and second accounts reflects their active construction of reality. This occurs as users perceive social media as an online facilitator which strengthens relationships between users forming social bonds (Kutanto et al., 2023). Primary accounts serve as more measured formal presentation spaces, while secondary accounts function as special zones for displaying authentic, personal, and emotional selves. However, paradoxically the more constraints users face in constructing their identities, the greater vulnerability when control of these accounts is hijacked, misused, or violated. From a theoretical perspective, findings reinforce that digital spaces are not neutral, value-free spaces, but are influenced by power relations, norms, and social structures in worlds. Violence on second accounts

illustrates how thin boundaries between public and private spaces are. When content shared within a limited scope is easily disseminated without consent, illusions to control semi-private spaces disappear. This situation reflects that data security issues are not only technical, but also entail ethics, collective awareness among users, and proportional regulation.

OGBV patterns among identity, freedom, and vulnerability in digital spaces. Therefore, toward creating safe spaces requires cooperation among users, platform owners, and communities to create safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive digital ecosystem. Thus, this may further provide opportunities for advanced studies on dynamics of digital identity, roles of algorithms, social relationship structures, and OGBV risks. Through an interdisciplinary approach, studies on OGBV are not limited to identifying forms of violence; but also examine how advanced research can provide systematic and sustainable solutions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that use of second accounts, which were initially intended as safe private spaces for self-expression, are ultimately not truly safe. Although users of second accounts implemented various settings, ranging from audience restrictions, specific identity construction, and follower management; the risk of OGBV remains high. Violence occurring in social media spaces includes cyberbullying, cyber harassment, cyber grooming, hacking, cyberstalking, and data theft. This study found that OGBV victims are not limited to one gender; both men and women share the same vulnerability and similar psychological impacts. Furthermore,

social constructs still unfavorable to victims remain a major obstacle to reporting and handling cases. From a legal policy perspective, this study highlights the urgency of revising regulations to be more responsive and detailed regarding OGBV in digital spaces. To date, there have been no specific mechanisms for addressing OGBV cases; case handling still refers to UUITE, which does not accommodate gender perspectives. As a result, victims face obstacles in reporting violence they encounter, both regarding lack of legal protection and of understanding of OGBV among law enforcement officials. Establishing a victim-oriented reporting mechanism, providing psychological support and ongoing literacy training, is essential. Improving digital media literacy is crucial for prevention. Technical skills in using social media platforms alone are not enough; understanding of ethics of communication in digital spaces, strategies to protect personal data, awareness of risks in digital environments, and sensitivity to issues of gender-based violence. Education should not only be provided in educational and community settings, but also focus on smallest social units, such as families. Thus, efforts to prevent OGBV will not only be responsive, but also anticipatory.

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