

# Social Media Naming as Part of Teenager Constructed Identity

Dwi Wulandari <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Department, faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University. Jl. Prof. Soedharto, S.H. Semarang, Indonesia

**Abstract.** This study aims at finding how teenagers reveal their identity by naming their social media accounts. There are many factors contributing to the construction of identity, both from the self-concept and also from the social environment. Social media naming is used by teenagers to introduce themselves to the world. This way they can seek confirmation of their identity by confirming their proper names or find themselves new identities, by creating new names. This study is carried out by observing the Instagram accounts of 55 students of *Madrasah Aliyah Berstandar Internasional Ammanatul Ummah* and taking notes on their names. A guided questionnaire was then given to the students confirming the proper names and motivation behind the creation of the accounts. The result shows that almost all of the students are using their own names in naming their Instagram accounts showing that they are confirming their identity in the real world with the identity in cyberspace. Most of them prefer to use their first name or nickname for the account names, many others use their last names though their last names are not their family names. They also use numbers and punctuation to show their creativity in creating names

## 1 Introduction

Teenagers are seen as humans at the stage of entering adulthood whose identity is undergoing construction. There are many factors contributing to the construction of a teenager's identity. At one point, teenagers experience what is called self-constructed identity as when they grow, they are also developing a concept of their inner self [1]. At the same time, the social environment also influences this development. Such social effects may be associated with the exposure to the culture where they live, and also may be associated with values brought by society hoped to be internalized in themselves as the result of a learning process [2]. This concept of the inner self and socially constructed values are forming the identity in reciprocal ways.

The formal environment of teenagers' schools are places that are not only used as the sites for learning knowledge, but they are also sites where learners socially interact with others, where they learn values and norms, and also where they get to know a foreign culture and global world. In foreign language subject, for example. This subject is indeed given to train students to use the language for communication, but at the same time during the proses of

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\* Corresponding author: [dwiwulandari@lecturer.undip.ac.id](mailto:dwiwulandari@lecturer.undip.ac.id)

learning, students will also be exposed to a foreign culture which is tangible such as food or dress form, or the intangible ones such as ideologies or norms. With such exposures, foreign language learning will surely influence the identities of the learners, though the degree and the forms of the influence is different.

The teenagers, the students of *Madrasah Aliyah Berstandar Internasional Ammanatul Ummah* (hereinafter referred to as MBI AU) learn Arabic language and English as foreign languages simultaneously. The school claims of using communicative teaching methods in delivering the lessons. Aside from teaching the language formally in the class, the teachers also assign students to use both languages outside of the class on particular days. With such exposure, it is interesting to see whether Arabic language learning and English learning influence the construction of the learners' identities.

One of the forms of teenagers' identities is language identity. The pictures of such identity can be seen in teenagers' utterances which are categorized into indexicality, relationality, and partialness [3]. In the indexicality category, we can observe typifying utterance, quoted speech, voice quality, explicit assessment, affective markers, labeling [4], and code-switching [5], while in *relationality* we can observe adequation, distinction, authentication, denaturalization, authorization, and illegitimation, and within the category of partialness, there are perception dan ideology [3].

To be able to have clear pictures of teenagers' identities, all of the categories written above should be looked upon and analyzed. However, the identity may be reflected through one of the aspects, although it is in partial view. Such analysis can be done to see part of the identity by analyzing the form of labeling. One form of labeling analysis that can be done is by taking a look at self-naming. In this case, it is interesting to see how teenagers names their social media account, because unlike their genuine names, these social media account names are created by themselves as a reflection of how they perceived themselves, by relating them to their personal proper names.

Previous studies on self-naming are mostly done on the proper names [6], nick-names [7], and the disguised names on Facebook [8]. Those studies show that names show the identity they want to refer to, for example, they want to show that they are Muslims, or that they are Javanese by ethnicity. Meanwhile, nick-names are more related to the attribution that the persons want to be associated with. The previous studies have not shown how teenagers, in particular, use their proper names, not their disguised names, as a reference to show their identities on their social media, especially on Instagram, as more teenagers are using Instagram more than other forms of social media. Based on that thought, I carried out this study to see how the students of MBI AU name their social media accounts. Furthermore, this study is also aimed to see whether such naming will be influenced by the process of foreign language learning.

## 2 Research Method

This study is a descriptive study conducted qualitatively by using a naturalistic paradigm. The naturalistic paradigm is based on the concept of plural and holistic data, in which the researcher is closely related to the objects being researched. In this paradigm, the possibility to generalize covers only the cases being researched, and usually we can find a complex concept of cause and effect, and the research result is very much bonded by the norms [9]. This study is qualitative as it uses linguistic data as the base for the analysis. The linguistic data used are in the forms of letters, words, phrases, and clauses showing how the teenagers reveal their identity by naming their social media accounts.

Data to be analyzed are the names of MBI AU students' Instagram accounts. There are 55 names from both male and female students. MBI AU is used as the location of the research because it is a high school, so its students are considered teenagers. Furthermore, MBI AU

offers English and Arabic language as the school subject which is taught in a communicative method, thus the students are enforced to use them for communication. Aside from the inside classroom learning where the students are asked to participate to communicate in those languages, the students are also asked to use the languages to communicate outside of the classes on particular days. In addition, the school has declared its internationalization by conducting special programs on learning English and Arabic language and sending its students to participate in various competitions both on national and international levels. Therefore, the students get positive exposure and encouragement toward foreign languages, English and Arabic language.

Sampling is done purposively by adapting the predetermined categories. Data is collected by examining respondents' Instagram accounts and taking notes on their names. Afterward, guided questionnaires are given to the students checking on their proper names, their motivations in creating their accounts' names, and also other things related to the topics.

### **3 Finding and Discussion**

The self-naming or proper name refers to the name of a person, a place, or a thing [10]. As a name of a person, a proper name has a clear reference and therefore proper name becomes one and the foremost clue for a person's identity. However, sometimes the same name may refer to two different persons, or two different names may refer to one person [11]. Therefore, today's proper name has become created creatively by using not only just one word, but it may also use more than two compound words.

In Indonesia, the choices of proper names have changed significantly, not only in the number of words being used but also in the identity they refer to. Let us see, for example, the Javanese people. In the 1940s, before the independence, most of the person's proper names were taken from Javanese names and were mostly composed of one word, such as Suharto, or Sutari. If such names were composed of more than one word, mostly because it included the family names or 'trah' in Javanese, which is like a surname in English but functions a little bit differently. An example is Sutarno Wongsodirejo. After Indonesia claimed its independence, many names were showing more national identity although most names are still taken from their ethnic background. Some Javanese people use names taken from Old Javanese such as Paramita or Kusumawardani as such names suggested more 'Nusantara'[national] identity rather than solely being Javanese. Moreover, only a few proper names are composed of one word, mostly composed of two or three words. The sources of words used as the proper names are also more various, and some events are used as the base of proper naming, for example, names are related to the month of the birth such as Agus for boys who are born in August, of Novi for girls who are born in November. In the 1990s, proper naming sounds more modern by taking the western names such as Gladis, Donna, or Albert.

Entering the new century, the year 2000 proper naming has been shifted to take names showing Islamic identity by using words from the Arabic language. Actually, names from the Arabic language have been used for years before, even as early as the use of the traditional ethnic-based name. However, the names used were mostly one-word names bearing traditional forms, such as Ahmad, Muslih, or Asiyah, while the present-day names taken from the Arabic language use more than one word, and some of which also combine such words with Javanese or Indonesian words. It should be noted as well that the names taken from the Arabic language also sound more modern such as Haikal, or Zaffran [12].

In this study, the students of MBI AU also have longer names, which consist of more than two words, and almost all of the names have words taken from the Arabic language. Some students have names composed of Arabic language only such as Fayyad Faza Muhammad, or Ahmad Taufiqurohman Ridlo; some use the mixture of Arabic language with the Javanese

language such as Gilang Ramadhan, or Ardiansyah Rais Pratama. Only very few students have names without adding the Arabic language such as Angga Dwi Kurniawan.

For Muslims, a name is not just a name. The name given by the parents is considered a word of prayer, and that is why it is suggested to call someone with a good name [13]. Therefore, the MBI AU students' names are not words with no meaning, yet they contain a good prayer. For example, Taufiqqurohman means the one who is always guided by God, the Most Caring, Sibghotallah which means within Allah's coverage, Amrullah which means within Allah's help, Akbar which means the great, and so on.

### **3.1 Names Categorization**

The naming of an Instagram account undergoes similar proses to a person's proper naming, that is it is arbitrary; it is up to the person who creates the name. There is only one difference. If a person's proper name can be similar to or even duplicate the other person's name, the name of the Instagram account must not similar to or duplicate any account created earlier. That is why, some people creatively create different account names by adding non-letters such as numbers, a hyphen, or other punctuation in creating slightly different names. The same strategy is also applied by MBI AU students in creating their Instagram accounts names; some students add numbers and other punctuation along with the letters bearing their names. However, such numbers and punctuation are used not only because the names that they are aimed at using have been used by earlier accounts, but also because they have particular reasons to add those numbers and punctuation in their names.

In general, the naming of Instagram accounts is still based on the element that existed in the students' proper names. In other words, students are still maintaining their own names as the names on social media, so the identity created on Instagram is similar to their self-identity. All students know the meaning of their names either by being informed by their parents or by others, including teachers or other relatives, and they feel proud of the meaning of their names. Such feeling increases their self-esteem and considers themselves in the right Muslim environment. This suggests that they confirm their Muslim identity which is revealed through their names. Many of the students have funny and unrelated nicknames, yet they are not using such nicknames as the names of their accounts. 83% of the students say that they use their account names as same as their proper names simply because they want the account names to follow their proper names.

The foreign languages they are learning at schools do not show an exact influence on the naming of their account names. It is difficult to say that the Arabic language learning affects their behavior in naming the Instagram account because their names are already in the Arabic language. We may suspect that the English learning may influence students in using their last names for the names of their Instagram accounts in the same as the western people use their family names. In the later section of this study, we will see how students use their last names in naming their Instagram accounts. Though such knowledge is quite a common one, and students may take that information not only during the language learning, the fact that they take such notion shows some degree of influence towards the western world which was exposed by English learning.

#### *3.1.1 Using first names*

Most names used in naming Instagram account is by using the first name, either exactly the same or slightly different. The exact first names used in the Instagram account among others are @abistha\_nabiel (Abistha Nabiel Nayaka Fatta), @fayyadhfaza\_ (Fayyad Faza Muhammad), @naufal\_maula- (Naufal Maula Nabil), @ahadinwildan (Ahadin Wildan Amin), @atafahmi\_ (Ata Fahmi Azhar). The use of the first name as the account name is

suiting to their nicknames because most of the nicknames are taken from the first names. The middle name is used as part of the account name to give an addition with a clearer reference to their own names as the proof of revealing their self-identity.

There are also some cases, where the account is named as the following @miqdardz (Muhammad Miqdar Dzulfikar), and @maliksuit (Muhammad Malik Suit Zidan). Proper names starting with the word Muhammad usually are not used as the nickname, because there are so many teenage boys whose names start with the word Muhammad. Thus, the middle name is usually used as the nickname, and this name as well is then taken as the name of Instagram accounts. When the nickname is slightly different from the first name, some students also prefer to use the nicknames rather than the first name, for example, @mumun\_dida (Mujaddida Sibghotallah), @amrulh\_ (Amrullah Azzaky), and @robit.a (Robithul Arif Abdullah).

### 3.1.2 *Using last names*

The next most common way in naming the Instagram account is by using the last name, either the exact the same names like @hikamsultan (Ahmad Sultan Hikam), @assariyofiq (Yusuf Assariy Rofiq), or @raflisurega\_ (Sulthan Irsyad Rafli Surega) or slightly different such as @egkurnia (Muhammad Ega Kurnia), @achnadjib\_ (Fawwaz Achmad Nadjib), or @agimrffna\_ (Adam Hafid Agim Riffana). In addition, there are also many names based on last names added with other elements such as @ernada.n (Nauval Dzakwan Ernada), @a.t.ridlo (Ahmad Taufiqurohman Ridlo), @yudhissey (Ahmad Yudhistira Putra), or @firdausp (Aura Firdaus Putra).

The use of the last name in naming Instagram accounts shows the reference to the western culture where the last name is referred to the family names. In Indonesia, however, the family names are not acknowledged, except for particular ethnicities such as Batakese. Therefore the last name in one's name is actually his/her own proper name. The use of the last names explicitly on their Instagram account can be considered as their response to the fact that Instagram is a worldwide platform, and thus they want to show similarity with the world population, that is by showing last names. This is in line with what is called a construable concept [14], which is using the same concept in different ways. Knowing the concept that the last name refers to the family name, the teenage students use their last name on their Instagram accounts although their last names are not their family names.

### 3.1.3 *Using number and punctuation*

Some Instagram account is named by using number and punctuation along with the letters used. The use of underscore /\_ / and full stop ./ are the most common punctuation used by MBI AU students. The punctuation is mostly used to replace the use of space between the first and the middle names, therefore when they are using two words as the name of their account, the exact name can be preserved by using an underscore or full stop as the following examples @abistha\_nabiel, or @a.t.ridlo.

The use of numbers on the Instagram account is also meaningful. Most of the numbers used by MBI AU students on their Instagram accounts refer to the year when they were born, as shown by the following account names @05\_rayhan (Rayhan Naila Majid), and @x.abyyu05 (Sulthan Abiyyu A.M) which show that they were born in the year of 2005. Some other accounts show more than just the year when they were born. For example, account @gilang.2705 (Gilang Ramadhan) shows that 2705 represents the date when he was born, that is on the date 27 the year of 2005. Another account uses a number to show the account holder's age when he/she created the account. For example, @ilhamw16- (Muhammad Ilham Wardhana) uses the number 16 to show that he was 16 years old when

he created that account. The use of a particular number in Instagram account names can be seen as a symbol representing a similar letter. For example, the account of @ngg4 (Angga Dwi Kurniawan) uses the number 4 as the symbol representing the letter /a/ as the last letter of his first name (Angga), as the number 4 is closely similar to the letter /a/. This account also skips the first letter /a/ and let the Instagram recognition symbol of /@/ read as /a/ simultaneously. This shows the creativity used by teenagers because without using the middle names it will be difficult to use simply /Angga/ as the account name, as such name has been used by another account.

### 3.1.4 Using creative forms

In addition to using numbers to replace letters, students' creativity in naming their Instagram accounts can also be seen through several forms, for example by taking the second syllable of the first name and attaching it to the first names like @bilabqbil (Aqbil Ihsanal Ali) which then sounds like the syllable is being repeated as in /bil/ and /aqbil/, or on the account @dhimasdim (Dhimas Setya Adi Nugraha) which sounds like repeating the first syllable of /dim/ after the word /dhimas/. Another student uses two-syllable like @adistira\_adi (Farrel Absor Adistira Wijaya) which repeats the syllable /adi/ after the word /adistira/

Sometimes it is also difficult to find the reason behind the creation of particular names, as the students themselves are not very much aware of why they are creating such names. Such names are @azka\_cheng (Azka Robby Fuady), @andiinr1 (Andiny Nurul Syifa), @bilal\_11280 (Bilal Fauzi Alamsyah), @\_skimnlq (Esqi Kukuh Immanuel Qolbi). In those accounts' names. Although they still bear the first names of the holders, some additions are added arbitrarily. The name holder himself does not consider any particular meaning in creating it, and it is simply because he finds it different from the earlier account. Some other names are difficult to see whether it relates to the identity of the name's holder. Such accounts as @fdfnjyaa\_ (Fariel Dio Fanjaya), @raytiif\_ (Tsurayya Nasyana), or @mhbnz.caminkz\_ (Muhammad Maula Mahbi Akmal ZAin) are difficult to see whether the account names are related with the person proper names. In @fdfnjyaa\_ (Fariel Dio Fanjaya) we can see that the first three letters are taken from the initials of the names and are added to the word /jyaa/ which at a glance can be read as /jaya/, hence it is representing the proper names. However, such a relation can only be seen when we pay close attention to both names, the account name, and the person's proper name.

## 4 Conclusion

The analysis of this study focusing on the naming of Instagram accounts is based on the person's proper names owned by teenagers. The teenagers' proper names in this study are at least composed of three words. Besides being unique, in the sense that nobody will have the exact same name, their names also sound more modern, especially because the words chosen as names sound more modern. The element composing the names are mostly taken from Arabic languages, and some are a mixture of Arabic language and Javanese languages. Almost all of the names of Instagram accounts are representing the person's proper names, thus the revealing of personal identity in cyberspace is similar to the identity in the real world. This is especially true in the case where the Instagram account name uses the first proper name, which is also used as the nickname. The fact that students are proud with their names confirms their Muslim identity. In addition, the account naming also uses the last name which is associated with the family names although for many of the teenagers in this study their last names are part of their names, not their family names. Another common form of naming the Instagram account is by adding numbers and punctuation along with the letters used. Such

practice bears meaningful reasons though some others only show the creativity of the account creators.

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