K-Pop Fans' Main and Priv Accounts: Impression Management, Searchability, and Imagined Surveillance on Twitter

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Abstract

Social media provides a rich arena for self-presentation, aided by platform features that facilitate complex and nuanced impression management. This study explores the use of multiple SNS accounts by a single user as a means for impression management on Twitter. Members of the Korean pop (K-Pop) fan community use both a main (public) and priv (protected) account simultaneously. Through interview data and analysis via the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software of a corpus of their tweets (605,066 words) on both accounts, this study finds significantly more negative emotion and tone language, as well as anger and anxiety, on the private accounts. Interviews suggest that fans engage in self-filtering and reserve contentious opinions for their private account due to community norms. Users express keen awareness of the searchable nature of tweets from their main account and fear that their negative tweets might be stumbled upon and sanctioned. Imagined surveillance as a result of the searchability of main account posts motivates users to hide posts on the priv account that could threaten their symbolic capital in the fan community. This contribution thus illustrates the enmeshed processes of searchability, imagined surveillance, and impression management on SNS.

Introduction

On most social networking sites (SNS), users can maintain multiple accounts simultaneously (Tao & Ellison, 2023; van der Nagel, 2018). This makes possible diverse manners of self-presentation, and it is this topic to which the present study attends. While there has been a great deal of academic work on users' thoughts about showcasing certain aspects of themselves on SNS (e.g., Marwick & boyd, 2011; Pitcan et al., 2018; Tao & Ellison, 2023), most of this research has not examined users' language use, nor has it made use of quantitative methods. Through a corpus analysis of tweets from nine members of the Korean pop (K-Pop) fan community, each of whom uses two accounts simultaneously, this article provides quantitative linguistic evidence for the different identity presentation strategies, supplemented by interview data from the same users. These dual accounts, named by the K-Pop fan community as *main* and *priv*, correspond to the two main privacy modes available to X (formerly, and henceforth, Twitter) users: public and protected accounts. Tweets made from public accounts are viewable by anyone, even those users not signed up to Twitter, and are indexed by search engines. Meanwhile, protected accounts require account holders to approve all followers manually, and the tweets on those accounts are not visible to anyone other than those given explicit approval, nor are they indexed by search engines.

The corpus in this study provides an opportunity to analyse differences in linguistic self-presentation amongst users posting to both public audiences and bounded audiences during the

same approximate timeframe. Thus, it is possible to examine linguistic aspects of self-presentation via a quantitative approach, demonstrating the uniformity of users within the K-Pop fan community and thus the role community membership plays in impression management on SNS. The aims of this study are (1) to explore why this dual account configuration is in use, and (2) to discover the differences between the linguistic aspects of impression management in these accounts. In addressing these questions, the study demonstrates how the affordance of searchability (boyd, 2010) motivates users' adoption of dual accounts, and how this is tied to potential losses or gains of symbolic capital (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009) within the Korean pop fan community the users identify with.

The next section reviews previous research on self-presentation and impression management, as well as the role of the online world in shaping and creating opportunities for self-presentation, especially on SNS. Next, the phenomenon of multiple simultaneous accounts on SNS and its relation to self-presentation strategies and the mediating impact of searchability is discussed. The Methods section explains participant recruitment, data collection, and the analysis methods. The findings are then presented from both the interviews and the corpus analyses, followed by a discussion and conclusions.

Previous Research

Self-Presentation

As social beings, we attempt to present the optimum version of ourselves to others in interaction (Goffman, 1959). The dramaturgical framework put forward by Goffman (1959) explains social interactions as performances, in which we do social work to influence others' perceptions of us. He defines the 'front stage' as the arenas in which we perform our idealised version of ourselves in some role, adhering to perceived norms and laws of the society in which we act. Meanwhile, the 'backstage' comprises the moments at rest where we cease this performance, free of social pressure. Goffman does not attend to language specifically in his dramaturgical framework, but language clearly plays a crucial role. As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue, language is the most flexible and pervasive tool through which we can present identity. In the world of social media, language is rendered even more central to our self-presentation in the frequent absence of other paralinguistic cues.

Self-Presentation Online

Self-presentation, "the process of controlling how one is perceived by other people" (Leary, 1995, p. 2), mediates what disclosures we make in interactions (both online and offline) in order to make a positive impression on our interlocutors. In Goffmanian terms, self-presentation facilitates the projection of the best impression of ourselves for the situation at hand. SNS continuously facilitate interaction with large numbers of people, and thus they pose unique challenges and opportunities for impression management (e.g., Bazarova et al., 2013; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Tong et al., 2008; Vazire & Gosling, 2004). SNS facilitate both the textual and graphical representations of

the self (Walther & Lew, 2022), with image and video playing an important role via embedded photographs or other media. While this study focuses on text, as this is the primary form of representation on Twitter, it is important to acknowledge that this is not the only form of self-presentation on SNS.

An important mediator is the context and the community within which we present ourselves. Users curate their self-presentation online according to their goals, whether those be to fit into a group or to differentiate oneself as an individual (Schwämmlein & Wodzicki, 2012), via methods like the creation and maintenance of social connections (boyd & Heer, 2006) or self-censorship (Vitak et al., 2015). It is desirable to present a version of oneself on SNS profiles which meets community-contingent norms, and the ubiquity of SNS in contemporary life means this presentation has consequences for self-esteem (M. R. Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and potential career advancement (Pitcan et al., 2018), amongst others. Posts that indicate behaviour which defies community norms are cause for embarrassment or humiliation. For example, Wang et al. (2011) found that Facebook posts about socially stigmatised subjects, such as the use of illegal drugs or missing school, caused regret on the part of the posters. In addition, there is often motivation to adapt to community-level linguistic norms to fit in with online communities one wishes to enter (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al., 2013). It has been proposed that SNS have a bias towards emotional positivity as users attempt to present a happy version of themselves to their networks (Pentina & Zhang, 2017).

A key aspect of impression management is an understanding of one's audience. Audience design (A. Bell, 1984) is a framework that details how interlocutors mediate their linguistic style, or the intraspeaker variation in language use, in attempts to accommodate to their interlocutors. Accommodation to potential overhearers through mediating linguistic style also occurs, albeit to a lesser extent. SNS, where public posts can be seen by almost anyone, are saturated with overhearers. Bell notes that mass communication is particularly prone to instances of referee design, distancing oneself from the addressee and aligning with an absent group instead. This is borne out in patterns of use on social media, where users tend to ambiently affiliate with groups based on their interests, hobbies, nationalities, etc. (Zappavigna, 2011).

Audience design is complicated, however, by context collapse (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Wesch, 2009), wherein users' SNS feeds are comprised of multiple social circles (with potentially different expectations for their constituents) combined into a single audience. Users' posts are directed to different subsections of their audience based on what they believe the audience may be interested in (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Accordingly, users on SNS can be said to engage in *impression management*, "the goal-directed activity of controlling or regulating information in order to influence the impressions formed by an audience" (Schlenker, 2006). Thus, it is pertinent to attend to how impression management is achieved through language on SNS, as an example of self-presentation strategies online. This study examines impression management amongst members of a specific community, K-pop fans, in order to elucidate the role community norms play in impression management and self-presentation.

Several dimensions of audience design applied to SNS have been explored, such as the phenomenon of language choice as audience design in multilingual SNS contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2014), retweeting as audience design (Rudat et al., 2014), and the selection of audiences to which to disclose distress in times of crisis (Zhang et al., 2021). It has been argued that Facebook users adopt a "lowest common denominator" approach, creating an online presence or varying their linguistic style (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018) to appear inoffensive to the largest sector of their potential audience. Conversely, Colliander et al. (2017) argue that users do not appeal to the lowest common denominator, but rather to the members of their audience with the greatest socio-economic influence. Such regard for the audience's social positioning also influences which posts users feel comfortable "liking," suggesting that context collapse effects extend beyond the creation of online posts to the use of various platform affordances, such as likes (Marder, 2018). Another strategy for managing self-presentation in the face of multiple distinct audiences is the use of multiple profiles (Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012).

The myriad SNS platforms give users considerable control over how they present themselves (Choi & Sung, 2018). The wide range of options and capabilities (known as *affordances*) provided by SNS, such as multimodality (Walther & Lew, 2022) and extensive privacy settings (Vitak, 2012) means that impression management can take place in many ways. boyd (2010) identified a set of affordances characteristic of SNS: persistence (content posted online might remain visible for a long time after its creation), replicability (content posted online can be duplicated), scalability (information posted online has the potential to 'go viral' and be shared countless times) and searchability (content posted online can be found via search). Although searchability has the potential to complicate self-presentation through expanding the imagined audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011), the relationship between the two has seldom been explored. The searchable nature of SNS renders users beholden to the possibility that their posts could be seen, and further that those who see their posts could be combative, rude, or otherwise hostile.

Imagined surveillance, a term coined by Duffy and Chan (2019), refers to "how individuals conceive of the scrutiny that *could* take place across the SNS ecology" (p. 121). This ties searchability to the process of impression management, as users imagine that some of their posts could reach a wide and unpredictable range of others. The current study examines how searchability, imagined surveillance, and impression management interrelate to engender differences in language use between two accounts operated by the same user at the same time.

Multiple Accounts as Self-Presentation

Most SNS platforms make it simple to create multiple profiles, either using alternate email addresses or even the same address, and it is becoming common to maintain dual or multiple simultaneous profiles per platform. According to van der Nagel (2018), 17% of Americans maintained multiple profiles on a single social networking site as of 2009, and this number has likely increased due to the proliferation of SNS and the increasing ease of creating multiple accounts. The simultaneous use of two or more accounts has been attested on platforms such as Reddit (Lenhart, 2009; Triggs et al., 2021) and Instagram (Kang & Wei, 2020), as well as Twitter

(Reynolds, 2015). Van der Nagel (2018) analysed 'alt' Twitter accounts as a form of automediation, through which users can compartmentalise their self-presentation. Kang and Wei (2020) studied users' creation of two accounts on Instagram: the rinsta (real Instagram), a standard account, and the finsta (fake Instagram), a space free of the pressures found on mainstream Instagram accounts. On the finsta, users share photos showcasing unflattering aspects of their life, such as embarrassing or humiliating moments, or humorous posts that do not obey the social norms on the rinsta to present as conventionally attractive (Patterson, 2016). There is debate amongst scholars on whether the finsta constitutes a backstage (Huang & Vitak, 2022) or front stage space, or some liminal space between the two (Tao & Ellison, 2023). However, scholarship has not examined 'alt' accounts much beyond the aforementioned studies, likely due to issues of ethics and data access. For example, accessing protected accounts requires permission from the user not just to follow, but also to scrape tweets, as in order to obtain the tweet data, the Twitter API requires a linked Twitter account that has been granted permission to follow the protected account.

Moreover, most previous studies have used survey or interview methods to gauge how self-presentation is conducted in different SNS contexts (e.g., Kang & Wei, 2020; Tao & Ellison, 2023). Quantitative methods are seldom used (Hollenbaugh, 2021). This study contributes a corpus analysis of language use on Twitter. Corpus studies are valuable in that their findings can be assessed using statistical measures to demonstrate significance, and triangulation with qualitative observations enhances the generalisability of both sets of findings. For example, Huang and Vitak (2022) conducted a quantitative analysis of images from Instagram to support their interview findings. This study follows a similar analytical sequence with language, first interviewing dual-account users about their experiences and then quantitatively analysing how those experiences are reflected in their language use. Quantitative methods also enable comparison of rates of use across users and account types, in order to examine the extent to which these factors mediate changes in language use. Since language plays an important role in impression management, particularly in online contexts, which are largely devoid of paralinguistic cues and facial expressions, there is a need to examine the linguistic dimension of identity presentation on SNS. Furthermore, as community norms also influence impression management, this study grounds the language of dual account users in a specific online community: the K-Pop fan community.

The K-Pop Fan Community

Korean pop (K-Pop) music is a genre of popular music that began in the late 1990's and combines Korean musical styles with various global influences such as US Hip-Hop, Panamanian Reggaeton, and a variety of other genres (Lenhart, 2009; Lie, 2012). K-Pop's fan community cultivation takes many cues from Japanese idol music, in which performers are portrayed as constantly accessible to fans, including bans on idols having personal romantic relationships in order to maintain the illusion of their availability and cultivate parasocial (Ozge, 2021) relationships between performers and fans.

The 2010's saw a rise in the global popularity of K-Pop and the emergence of Twitter as a popular arena in which the fan community grew to be one of the largest subcultures on the platform

(Twitter, 2020). Though this group appears loosely organised, scholars have argued that K-Pop fandom on Twitter is a speech community (Ayuni Jenol, 2020; Kang et al., 2019; Malik & Haidar, 2020). Due to the platform structure of Twitter, fans do not congregate in technologically bound spaces such as separate forums or websites, but community embedding takes the form of mutual connections amongst users (Pawening, 2023) and circulation of the same information and content amongst them. K-Pop fans regularly congregate in group chats using Twitter's direct messages (DM) feature and also interact through retweets and replies to each other's posts.

While hashtags (#) are used to filter the massive stream of tweets by topic or other label, the use of # presupposes a certain (wider) audience. This study is also interested in what users do *not* tag, as it attends to the mediating power of searchability on tweets by account type. Thus, all tweets from both account types will be considered regardless of the inclusion of hashtags.

The reasons for selecting the K-Pop community are threefold: first, the author has significant experience as a member of the community, so is able to gain access to fan spaces and understand the community-contingent registers and lexis in the data from an insider, emic, perspective. Second, the K-Pop fans community shows a strong sense of normativity (e.g., Chun, 2017; Lee, 2004; Roslan et al., 2024; Suikkanen, 2023). These norms are constructed both by the K-Pop industry itself, such as the regulation of fan behaviour at meet-and-greets by K-Pop management companies, and also by fans. As Lu (2024) notes, "fans are always subject to the judgment of others, including general audiences, non-fans, rival fans and anti-fans" (p. 150). Significant symbolic capital (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009) is at stake, and thus this community is one in which impression management is paramount. This makes K-Pop fandom a useful community for studying processes of imagined surveillance and impression management.

Another reason why the K-pop fandom was selected is because it has been very influential on other fandoms, as well as on internet culture in general. For example, K-Pop fans have been an influential player in notable acts of collective online activism (e.g., Kang et al., 2019; Pawening, 2023) and also the source of a number of trends and memes (Haasch, 2018), as well as the so-called "K-Popification" of other areas of entertainment. For example, Formula 1 car racing (C. Bell, 2025) has already adopted some of the tropes of K-Pop fandom for itself: Fans can now win a short video call with drivers from the Mercedes F1, inspired by K-Pop's near-ubiquitous video calls between fans and performers. K-Pop fans are dedicated users of SNS, and due to community valorisation of social norms and sanctioning of rebellious members, those in the community have a strong impetus to conduct impression management. The ritualised online practices of this fan community are thus a potential precursor to wider patterns of SNS use, or discourse around such use.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study address the motivations behind multiple account use on Twitter and also address quantitative evidence of linguistic style as identity presentation on SNS.

RQ1: What reasons do users have for using a priv account on Twitter?
RQ1a: Do these reasons resemble reasons given for maintaining multiple accounts on other platforms in existing scholarship?

RQ2: How does language use differ across the two accounts?
RQ2a: How does this link to identity presentation strategies?

Method

Participants and Data

Participants were recruited via Twitter, making use of snowball sampling from the author's existing networks within K-Pop fandom. The author posted tweets inviting fans to participate, which were then shared by other users to their own networks. This sampling method poses some limitations, such as selection bias (Parker et al., 2020). However, due to the potentially sensitive nature of protected accounts, snowball sampling increased the likelihood that participants felt a sense of trust in the author (with whom they were either personally familiar or knew of via trusted intermediaries) to handle their posts. Further, as Noy (2008) argues, snowball sampling is apt for the investigation of organic social networks such as fandoms on Twitter (Kang et al., 2019).

Users gave informed consent through reading a description of the study and clicking a box to confirm their understanding of the methods to be used. Data was stored on a password-protected USB drive in a locked cupboard at the university. The interviews were mostly (8/11) synchronous, but three users were interviewed asynchronously due to outside commitments. All interviews were conducted using Twitter's Direct Messages tool. Eleven participants participated in the interviews, although only nine consented to the scraping of their tweet data.

Posts were collected in May 2021 using the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) Full Archive Search feature, and the Rtweet package for R (Kearney, 2019). The Full Archive Search is able to scrape the 3,200 most recent posts from an individual account, or all the posts if the total number is less than that limit. Thus, the time period over which posts were collected varies by how many posts were made (main: December 2020-May 2021; priv: April 2020-May 2021). In total, 44,097 posts were collected, which represented 605,066 words. Although most posts were in English, some posts in other languages (Brazilian Portuguese, Russian, and Korean) were removed. The mean number of posts per account was 2362 (main:2455; priv:2270), reflecting a similar level of activity across the two account types for each participant. Only one account reached the maximum of 3200 tweets in the scrape, suggesting that the data collection captured almost all the posting history of the participants.

While the Twitter API facilitates the collection of large amounts of data, it is not without limitations. Multimodal data, such as embedded video, image, or links, are not always collected properly. Even if collected, they require manual downloading, which is unfeasible for large datasets. Similarly, information collected by the API is presented in a manner completely removed from what users on the platform see, devoid of usernames, function buttons, etc. The API also

renders conversation threads (via Twitter replies) difficult to track and follow compared to the experience on the platform itself. A crucial limitation with regard to the replicability of this study is the recent elimination of the Academic API, rendering data access near impossible (or prohibitively expensive) for researchers. Despite these issues, the API was deemed appropriate for this study, given the focus in this study on text as opposed to multimodal data, and given the author's extensive emic community knowledge, which compensated for platform presentation differences.

Users were interviewed between 5-28 May 2021 using Twitter Direct Messages (DMs), a private messaging feature within Twitter where users can directly interact with either another individual or a group. DMs are a tool frequently used by K-Pop fans for chatting or distributing private or potentially sensitive information. DMs are thus an ecosystem participants were comfortable and confident in using. Users were asked a series of questions (see Appendix) in the same order and allowed to respond freely. At the end of the interview, users were allowed to ask any questions or make any additional statements they felt were relevant, and lines of communication with participants remained open afterwards if they had additional questions. Participants were updated on the progress of the study and offered the chance to read the work if they wished.

The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC-22) (Pennebaker et al., 2022) calculates the percentage of words in a document that correspond to a number of predetermined dictionaries. These dictionaries consist of words corresponding to various categories, both linguistic and psychological, such as function words, affect, or words to do with family. The scores that LIWC-22 generates can be said to reflect the tendency for language of a certain type to be used within a text. This tool was chosen for its valid and reliable performance assessing lexis related to psychological states (McDonnell et al., 2020; Pennebaker, Booth, et al., 2015) and the fact that it has proved useful in other studies of emotional disclosure (Landoni et al., 2023). The LIWC variables are nested: All *sadness* words, for example, belong to the Negative Emotion and the overall Affect category (Pennebaker, Boyd, et al., 2015). Thus, through examination of both elements of the overall tone score (in both positive and negative dimensions), it is possible to examine whether users talk generally about negative events or experiences, or whether their negativity centres around their emotions. This is a useful distinction for understanding users' self-presentation, as mental state is an important element therein.

However, LIWC-22 is not without its drawbacks. Like all dictionary-based text analysis programmes, it is blind to context (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010) and struggles with short social media texts (Zhao et al., 2016). These limitations were mitigated through the combination of interview and textual analyses, and the use of LIWC across a user's entire post history rather than on individual tweets. Overall, the psychometric orientation of LIWC-22 (Pennebaker, Boyd, et al., 2015) was determined to be a major advantage, while its drawbacks can be mitigated (though not eliminated entirely) through study design.

Variables were chosen based on previous findings about differences in impression management across dual Instagram accounts. These studies identified a bias towards emotional positivity (e.g.,

Darr & Doss, 2022; Kang & Wei, 2020), as well as the unfiltered and unedited nature of posts on the finsta (private) accounts (Huang & Vitak, 2022; Xiao et al., 2020). Due to the image-first platform structure of Instagram, in comparison to the text-first structure of Twitter, lexical categories were selected for inclusion based on their relevance to the notion of emotions and emotional filtering (or lack thereof). To further findings from Instagram on the degree and nature of impression management due to the impacts of imagined surveillance (Duffy & Chan, 2019), the following linguistic variables were selected: the Tone variable, in addition to its sub-variables (Positive Emotion, Negative Emotion, Anger, Anxiety, and Sadness). Tone refers to the degree of positivity of emotional tone in the text (a value of 50 is perfectly neutral, and 100 is entirely positive). Given findings from Instagram (Kang & Wei, 2020) we might expect higher positivity on the priv, as alternative Instagram accounts (finsta accounts) host jokes and humour deemed too silly for the main account.

Results

Participant Data

Participants were between 18 and 30 years of age, and all self-reported as living in the United Kingdom, the United States, or the Republic of Ireland. Participants skewed female, with nine participants identifying as such, and two identifying as non-binary. This is not particularly surprising given the high female presence in K-Pop fandom as a whole (Kim, 2017). Participants had spent an average of 5.5 years (standard deviation = 2.58 years) using their main accounts, and on average 3.86 years (standard deviation = 3.16 years) using their priv accounts, so they had maintained their dual account usage for some time.

Participants had a mean of 189 followers on their main and 52.7 on their priv, meaning the audience was smaller on the priv, but both account types had fewer followers than Twitter accounts on average. Previous studies found that the average Twitter account has 707 followers, with this average falling to 453 when accounts with over 100,000 followers are removed (Smith, 2020), so this difference between the main and priv followings among participants appears small relative to the standards of the platform.

82% of participants (9/11) stated that most or all the followers on their priv were also followers of their main account. Thus, it appears that the composition of the audiences on the two accounts (i.e., context collapse) is not the primary factor mediating differences in impression management. As I discuss later, the main influence may be the searchability of tweets posted to the main account, and the possibility that they may be stumbled upon by someone else and result in conflict, mockery, or other loss of symbolic capital.

While some studies attest a difference in SNS language use according to gender (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009), the highly skewed nature of the sample in this study makes the exploration of this aspect of the corpus impractical. Besides, some studies suggest that it is not gender but rather network homophily that is primarily responsible for posting style (Bamman et al., 2014).

Due to the high degree of similarity amongst the participants in this study (partly due to the use of snowball sampling), it is inferred that network homophily is a strong factor in their patterns of language use.

Interview Findings

To address RQ1 and lend emic value to the quantitative findings of this study, as well as to ensure that the participants in this study are afforded agency in their navigation of identity processes on SNS, findings from interviews are included in this study. In this section, the primary findings from the interviews are discussed.

Motivations for using a priv account. When asked about why they started their priv account, 10/11 (90%) participants (denoted by the letter P) explained that their priv account served as a space where they could conduct free expression in a way they felt unable to do on their main account. The kinds of expression they mentioned included discussions of negative emotions they were experiencing, discussions of topics deemed 'personal' such as work, and negative opinions about K-Pop groups or songs, which they felt were unacceptable to post to their main due to community stigma.

> P1: it originally started as just a rant account, venting on shit that I couldn't say on my kpop [Twitter account], [complaining] about work or [K-Pop fan community] drama or if my [offline friends] were annoying me!
>
> P2: you can make friends having a main but on priv you can just be comfortable and relaxed and not feel pressure to tweet about specific things
>
> P6: i was going through a very rough patch with my friend and honestly i just wanted a place to vent about it 🤣

These responses indicate that participants feel that what they can express on their main account is subject to restrictions or 'pressure,' and yet they still desire to express the stigmatised sentiments. Thus, the priv account serves as a space free of the community-level restrictions, where participants can express something closer to their actual-self rather than the K-Pop fan community contingent ideal-self that they feel they must convey on their main account.

Posts across accounts. When asked about what determines whether a post ends up on a user's main or priv account, users responded that both topic and emotional content determine where they make their posts. Participants reported that they feel the need to keep their main account mostly around K-Pop or the community to which they belong, and that posts about their personal life or negative emotions would be inappropriate for a main account. Although participants feel friends can be made on the main account through connecting with new users, there is also pressure that comes with that space that they can shirk on their priv account. Participants mentioned that they also considered how interesting a post might be when deciding whether to post on their main or priv.

> P4: my general thought process though tends to be […] how much of myself am i willing to let a lot of people see in comparison to just the ones i trust and who know me well, but it does vary depending on mood! for example if my mood is super low and i'm less bothered about how i'm coming across, i won't consider my audience and i'll just tweet freely
>
> P8: For me, if a tweet is about something pretty personal/related to my daily life I usually post it on private. Like if I'm venting about my job for example. Or occasionally if i have an opinion about kpop that isn't positive/popular I usually post it on private.
>
> P9: i tend to think about the "interestingness" of it! as well as the privacy aspect! i tweet only in vague terms about my job/life on main, but in priv i can be as open and uncensored as i want (names, places, job titles, etc). usually i think about "will people care?" when i go to tweet, and if it's more of just a ram.bling inner thought that's mostly relevant just to me, it goes on priv

From the interview portion of this study, it emerges that the participants have a clear notion of the differences in visibility between posting to a public and private account, even if the core base of followers of the two accounts is the same. Users tailor their content to the account to which they post based on the potential spread of their posts beyond their immediate audience, e.g., through another user searching for a word and stumbling across their post. This imagined surveillance (Duffy & Chan, 2019) leads to differences in impression management across the two accounts. They adhere to community norms on the main account, namely, unqualified positivity about the K-Pop media participants consume, as well as tweeting about K-Pop primarily to provide content that is sufficiently 'interesting' for one's followers. Potentially controversial opinions about K-Pop are strictly avoided on the main account, and negative emotional expressions are also avoided, for fear amongst some users of appearing annoying or making posts that users will not care about. This indicates the importance of wider visibility on SNS, including searchability (boyd, 2010).

By way of answering RQ1, participants in this study maintain a priv account as a way to share posts that they feel do not meet the standards for posting to the main account within K-Pop fandom. These standards include both topic (tweeting about K-Pop) and affect (tweeting *positively* about K-Pop). Users often refer to the priv account as a place to 'vent' or to share negative feelings and see the space as one with less pressure than their main account. These reasons resemble findings from other studies about multiple simultaneously maintained accounts, in that the main account features what users see as restrictions on their expression.

In contrast to the findings of Stutzman and Hartzog (2012), however, audiences are not segmented. The priv contains a subset of the audience of the main (much like the distinction between the finsta and rinsta on Instagram). Further, unlike the Finsta discussed by Kang and Wei (2020), the priv is not a space for humour, it is a space for the expression of negativity. On the priv, the far smaller audience and the knowledge that posts cannot be found by users other than those approved followers allows participants greater freedom in their self-presentation.

Quantitative Findings

To address RQ2, quantitative analyses via LIWC-22 were carried out. Table 1 shows the mean LIWC scores for each account type subcorpus and the corresponding p-value. These significance values were obtained via the Mann-Whitney U test, as the data is not normally distributed. Despite similarities in mean word count per tweet and words per sentence, statistically significant differences between the account types emerged for the Tone variable, as well as the sub-variables Negative Emotion, Anger, Anxiety, and Sadness. The other non-significant variable was Positive Emotion, which was almost equal across account types.

	Mean LIWC score		
	main	**priv**	**p-value**
Word count per tweet	34,878	38,243	0.796
Words per Sentence	35.36	48.63	0.931
Tone	56.45	33.66	0.00123**
Positive Emotion	3.06	3.02	0.858
Negative Emotion	1.43	2.63	0.0244*
Anger	0.50	1.00	0.0315*
Anxiety	0.18	0.31	0.0192*
Sadness	0.36	0.52	0.0418*

Table 1. LIWC Scores for both subcorpora and relevant p-values

$*p \leq 0.05$, $**p \leq 0.01$

Tone and emotion. Figure 1 shows the Tone variable scores by participant and account type, demonstrating notably higher Tone scores on main for eight of the nine participants (89%), while no priv account reached the median 50 score denoting neutral tone. Figure 2 shows the scores for Positive and Negative Emotion by account type in the corpus. Negative emotion consistently occurs more in the priv, in seven of the nine users (78%). Meanwhile, positive emotion occurs more in the main account, in six of the nine users (67%). In keeping with K-Pop fans' self-reported trend towards negative emotional disclosures in their priv accounts, these findings demonstrate that the fans' priv accounts also feature negativity in language use. Conversely, their priv accounts are less likely to express positivity than their main accounts, and positive emotion is expressed somewhat more often than negative emotion in both accounts. This finding can be considered as limited evidence for the bias towards positive affect that has been previously documented on SNS (sometimes referred to as toxic positivity; Lew & Flanagin, 2023).

While negative emotion showed a statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$) between account types, differences between the accounts in positive emotion were not statistically significant ($p=0.858$). This might suggest that rather than projecting a positive version of the self on the front stage of their main account, users in fact self-censor negative disclosures, saving them for the backstage of their priv account.

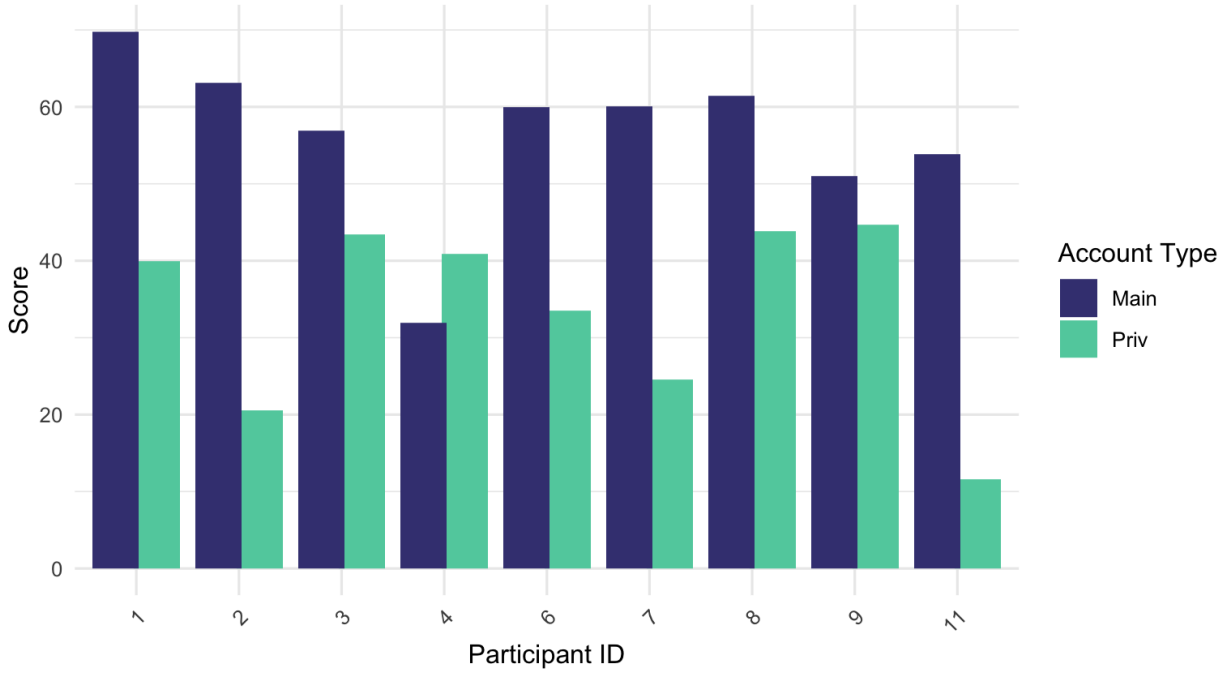

Figure 1. Tone (Summary Variable) by account type

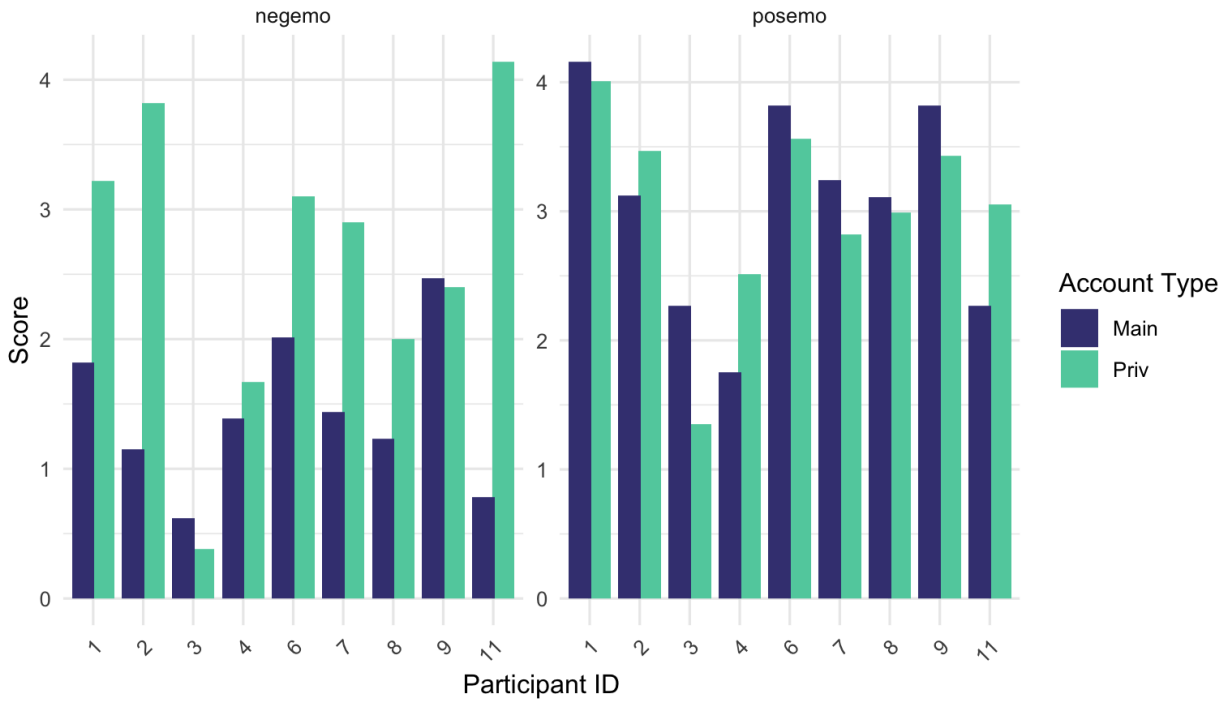

Figure 2. Positive and Negative Emotion scores by account type

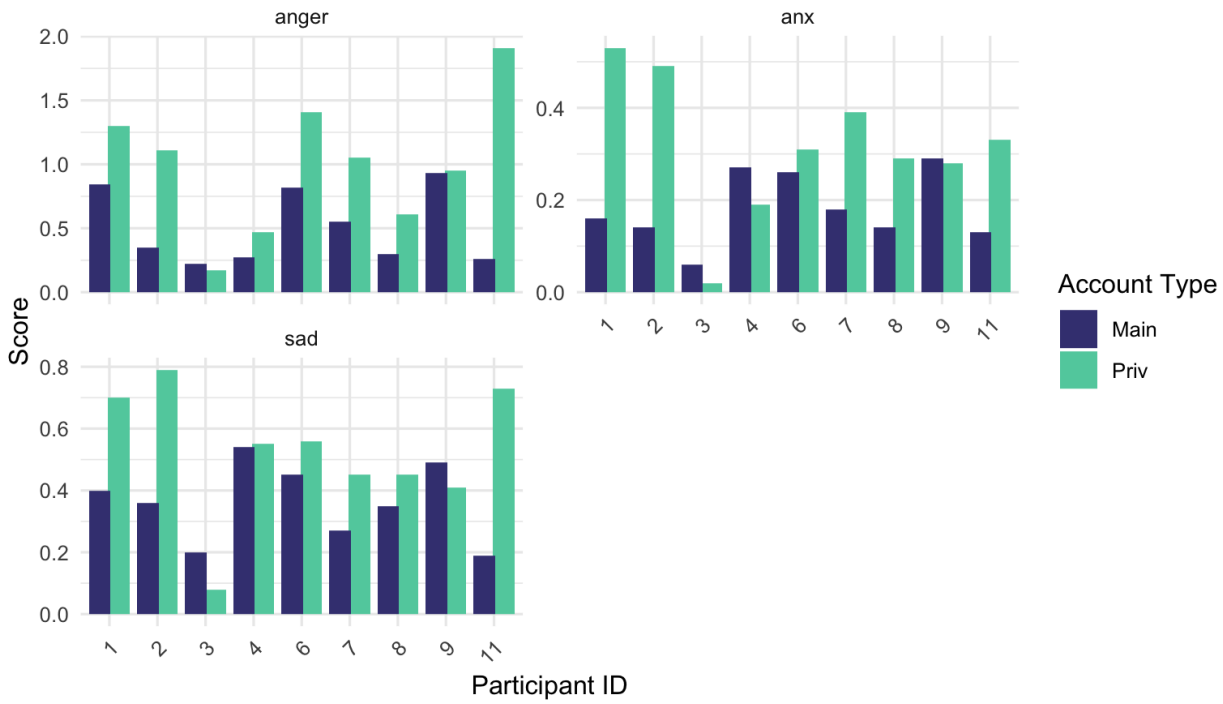

Figure 3. LIWC Anger, Anxiety, and Sadness scores by account type

Anger and anxiety. Figure 3 shows the scores by user and account type for the Anger, Anxiety, and Sadness variables, all of which are significantly more frequent in the priv account.

The Anger variable includes words such as "hate," "mad," and words starting with "frustr-," such as "frustration." Anger scores were higher in the priv account for eight of the nine users (89%). The Anxiety variable includes words such as "worry," "fear," and "nervous." Anxiety scores were higher in the priv account for six of the nine users (67%). The Sadness variable includes words such as "disappoint*" and "cry" and showed higher scores for seven of the nine users (78%). All three of these variables showed statistically significant ($p<0.05$) differences between their scores for the main and priv.

Discussion

Addressing RQ2 through a triangulation of findings from the interview and corpus analyses, participants in this study used their main account as a site for self-presentation in line with the expectations of the K-Pop fan community. The priv account helps fans to circumvent norms expected of them as members of the K-Pop fan community, providing a place where they can make negative emotional disclosures with reduced fear of losing symbolic capital in the fandom. The priv thus functions as a site in which norms that apply to the main account can be relaxed or even outright flouted, similar to Goffman's (1959) notion of the backstage. Notably, negative affect, including anger-, anxiety-, and sadness-related language, was used significantly more on priv accounts.

While the negative emotion variable showed statistical significance between the account types, its positive equivalent did not. This finding poses interesting questions about the projection of affect in self-presentation. It appears that users do not construct more positivity to share on their front stage (main) accounts. Rather, it seems they are suppressing negativity in their presentation on their main account and using the backstage as a place to express those sentiments. The findings that negative emotions and tone are to be hidden away in a fan's private account may be due to a broader positivity bias on SNS in general (Masciantonio et al., 2025).

It is important to contextualise the use of these dual accounts within other scholarship on multiple simultaneous accounts on other platforms. Kang and Wei (2020) suggest that the Finsta acts not as a backstage but a secondary front stage in which users are under pressure to display a different version of the idealised self, but the idealised self, nonetheless. The findings from this study suggest that among K-pop fans on Twitter, in contrast, the priv account does act as a backstage space, where SNS affordances like searchability can be mitigated, and users feel comfortable to display negative feelings.

Marwick and boyd (2011) suggested that context collapse leads users to post different content to different subsections of their audience, an explanation that could be extended to the use of dual accounts. However, in the present study, there is less a collapse of multiple social circles than an overlap of followers on the main and priv, with the priv featuring a subset of users' followers from the main. Rather than addressing different audiences, the motivation is fear of being stumbled across posting in a manner that might negatively impact one's symbolic capital (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009) by *members of the same fan community*. The potential for tweets from the main account to reach larger audiences due to their searchability leads fans to adopt the priv as a space to air the negativity they avoid on the main (as part of their impression management in that space). On the main account, they can accrue symbolic capital through posting consistent content around K-Pop that their followers will find interesting. Fans mitigate the loss of symbolic capital associated with negative stances towards K-Pop acts by posting criticisms only on their priv account.

This trepidation is an example of the consequences of imagined surveillance (Duffy & Chan, 2019), made possible due to the highly searchable (boyd, 2010) nature of tweets made on public accounts. The findings of this study support those obtained by Costa (2018), who demonstrated that people in a city in Turkey use SNS media privacy settings with great fluency to control the disclosure of information. The adept use of dual simultaneous accounts discussed here is a good example of the phenomenon described by Costa's term *affordances-in-practice*, "the enactment of platform properties by specific users within social and cultural contexts" (p. 3651), which acknowledges the influence affordances such as searchability have on the decisions made concerning SNS use.

Another contribution is the link this study makes between the theoretical frameworks of impression management, searchability, and imagined surveillance, in addition to the role of symbolic capital. This advances understanding of how the searchable nature of SNS shapes users' experiences and illustrates that the mere potential of being stumbled upon strongly influences where users post.

The study also contributes findings from a large-scale textual analysis to scholarship on self-presentation through dual accounts, which has previously explored the process through interviews, surveys, and images (e.g., Darr & Doss, 2022; Huang & Vitak, 2022; Tao & Ellison, 2023). The possibility that impression management as documented in the aforementioned studies likely also has a linguistic component (as shown here) opens the door to further studies that examine other linguistic variables.

The strong sense of normativity and explicitly delineated rules in the K-Pop fandom (Lu, 2024) illuminate the role of social capital in this community. However, the influence of the K-Pop fandom on other fan communities, as well as on SNS more generally, suggests a need for attending to how this community uses SNS and the processes that engender such manners of use (searchability, imagined surveillance, symbolic capital). These patterns of use may diffuse to other online spaces, as some aspects of K-Pop fandom already have done (C. Bell, 2025).

This study has a number of limitations. Firstly, there are notable doubts as to the effectiveness of LIWC, particularly when used with large datasets (Franklin, 2015; Hunter & Grant, 2025). However, Hunter and Grant suggest that LIWC is effective as a signposting tool. As the present study combines the use of interview data with LIWC analyses, the findings from this dictionary program have some means of validation, and indeed, the experiences referenced by participants are borne out in the LIWC findings.

Secondly, the number of participants in this study was limited due to difficulties with obtaining permission to access private accounts. Future studies could examine larger corpora to see if the results of this contribution are replicable. Though the number of individuals from whom data was obtained was small, the number of posts that was obtained was large. It is regrettable that studies will be more limited in their capability to obtain such data from the Twitter (X) API in future.

A third limitation is the focus on a single community and the use of snowball sampling. Participants in this study might merely show patterns that reflect personal networks rather than K-Pop fan community affiliation. While K-Pop fans might not be typical Twitter users, they "play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' identities and experiences" (Parsakia & Jafari, 2023), and fandoms have a great impact on online culture more broadly (Borgen, 2022; Costello & Moore, 2007). Future studies might benefit from examining users from across separate subcultural spaces online, and at more recent times.

This study did not attend to multimodal or visual aspects of the SNS experience, as such pursuits were outside of the scope of the study. The increasing encroachment by artificial intelligence, as well as wearable virtual or augmented reality technology such as the Apple Vision Pro, poses more questions for the strategies we use for self-presentation online, and thus continuous examination of these processes is critical.

Conclusion

This study explored why some K-Pop fans maintain two simultaneous Twitter accounts, and how these help fans control their self-presentation online. Community-contingent expectations within the K-Pop fan community and the searchability of tweets on the main account, an example of imagined surveillance, mediate this self-presentation. Motivated by their desire for symbolic capital within the fandom, fans feel they must remain positive and refrain from critique of K-Pop artists on their main. However, the likelihood of another fan stumbling across a tweet from the priv is greatly reduced, as those tweets are not searchable. Thus, the priv acts as a 'back stage' (Goffman, 1955) where fans can disclose things that they fear would cause a loss of symbolic capital (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009) within the fandom. Accordingly, lexis relating to negative emotion, particularly anger, anxiety, and sadness, was used significantly more on the priv account.

The findings suggest a link between impression management and symbolic capital (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009), namely, the notion that using the appropriate linguistic register in a community allows people to accrue capital in the linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1977). In the K-Pop fan community, skill in managing the types of disclosures appropriate for each account could be considered a type of symbolic capital. Certainly, fans fear repercussions from other fans (and thus loss of social capital) if their negative opinions about a K-Pop performer or fan base were to be inadvertently discovered via searching for keywords. Participants also displayed an awareness of the 'general interestingness' of a post when deciding whether to post it to their main or priv, further suggesting an awareness of the potential gains or losses in symbolic capital through gaining (or losing) the perception of being interesting to other fans.

This study thus adds to a growing literature on the differences in self-presentation and impression management across dual accounts, expanding work that has thus far focused primarily on Instagram to include Twitter. It also expands on previous work via its focus on K-Pop fans, suggesting that future work could also gain useful insights into online self-presentation via the examination of fandom communities.

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Appendix

Interview Questions:

How long have you been a K-Pop fan?
How long have you been on K-Pop Twitter?
How long have you had a priv?
Why do you have a priv account?
Who do you let follow your priv?
For you, what determines whether a post goes on your main or your priv?
Are there any disadvantages/ advantages for you with having two accounts?
What sort of social pressure do you feel when posting on your main account, if any?
How do you think you talk on your main/ priv?
What if you make a post on the wrong account by mistake?
Can you think of a time when you were shocked or surprised by something someone posted on their main account?
Which account do you consider your primary account?
What differences were there in how you tweeted about Kingdom on your main and priv?
Do you think people have different styles of tweeting on priv accounts and main accounts?
Can you give me an example of something you'd never say on your main account?
Do you think K-pop fans have specific rules about priv and main accounts compared to locals [non-K-pop fans]?
If so, how did you learn these norms?

Biographical Note

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