Social media’s visibility features drive users to create second accounts

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Social media users can find themselves managing the impressions of friends even when they have little intention of sharing anything personal. For some, a second account has become a way to regain control over that part of their lives.

On a social media platform that makes likes visible to friends, an interaction with a video about divorce can invite speculation about someone’s marriage. The person who liked it may simply have found the subject interesting. As platforms use the activity of social connections to help people discover content, even casual engagement can reveal personal interests to an audience the user would never have chosen to share them with.

A study by **ReverseLookup**, which surveyed **10,840 adult social media users** across the **United States, United Kingdom, European Union and Latin America**, found that **43%** had created at least one secondary account that people in their everyday lives could not easily associate with their real identity.

The reasons for creating these accounts suggest that being recognizable online can interfere with some of the most basic uses of social media. Among secondary account owners, **64%** cited wanting to browse or interact with content without attracting attention from acquaintances as a reason for creating another profile. More than half (**58%**) rarely or never published original content through these accounts, using them primarily to browse.

An established social media profile carries a history that can shape how other people interpret its owner’s activity. Someone exploring a different political perspective may be interested in understanding an argument that conflicts with their own views. Friends familiar with that person’s beliefs might interpret the same activity as evidence of a change in opinion. The possibility of having to explain a passing interest can discourage an interaction that would otherwise require little thought.

Among secondary account owners, **67%** had previously avoided interacting with content because someone they knew might discover their activity. For **52%**, features that made these interactions more visible had contributed to their decision to create another profile.

Perhaps the clearest indication of what users gain from a separate account is how little their behavior sometimes changes after creating one. **46%** of secondary account owners reported largely similar browsing habits across their profiles. For these users, an additional account can function as a privacy setting in its own right, reducing the likelihood that familiar people will associate particular interests with them.

This use of anonymity complicates the way unidentified accounts are perceived. Across the full sample, **39%** considered anonymous profiles suspicious, and **34%** of those respondents had created

one themselves. Someone may appreciate the discretion of browsing under an unfamiliar username while feeling uneasy about receiving a message from an account whose owner they cannot identify. Both experiences can inform a person's attitude toward anonymity, depending on the circumstances in which they encounter it.

For social media platforms, the findings suggest that users' willingness to engage with content depends partly on how much control they have over the audience for that engagement. Among secondary account owners, **62%** said they would be less likely to use these profiles if they had greater control over the visibility of their interactions.

Privacy settings typically allow users to restrict access to what they publish, but the experience of consuming content presents a different challenge. A person may be comfortable reading a public discussion while preferring that their interest in it remain private. Secondary accounts offer a practical way to preserve that distinction. For users whose browsing habits remain largely the same across profiles, the value of having another account lies in the opportunity to explore a subject without having that interest become part of their social identity.

About ReverseLookup

ReverseLookup is a multi-input verification platform for phone numbers, emails, and images. Built for everyday use, ReverseLookup.com enables users to assess unfamiliar contacts, investigate questionable profiles, and identify potential fraud across key digital channels. It combines reverse search methods with open-source intelligence (OSINT) to offer a direct, accessible way to review digital identities and make informed decisions online.

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