Adolescent Self-Disclosure in the Context of Interpersonal Relationships in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The increase in the use of digital media by adolescents, which affects the way they express themselves and form social bonds, is a key driver of this study. The topic studied was the extent to which adolescent *self-disclosure* on social media affects interpersonal communication in the digital age. The purpose of this study is to understand the forms, factors, and impact of adolescent *self-disclosure* in digital interactions. Eight adolescents between the ages of 18 and 24 and a communication expert from the city of Denpasar participated in a qualitative study using phenomenological methods. In-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies were used to collect data. Research shows that teens selectively disclose personal information by considering the boundaries of privacy, emotional closeness, and trust. *Self-disclosure* helps increase interpersonal trust and foster positive social relationships. In conclusion, adolescent *self-disclosure* in the digital era is a form of adaptation of modern interpersonal communication that emphasizes the balance between social obligations, self-expression, and self-control.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of technology and digital media in the digital age has changed the way individuals interact, share information, and build social relationships. In the context of social life that is now increasingly connected globally, digital media is now an important part of the daily communication process (Azizah et al., 2024). In the past, long-distance communication relied on conventional correspondence and telephones which required a lot of time and money. Now with the development of internet technology, it is possible to have email and instant messaging applications that are able to send messages quickly, cheaply, and efficiently (Widjaja, 2025). In the digital age, this phenomenon not only affects the way people communicate, but also the way they express themselves and develop interpersonal relationships. In this context, *self-disclosure*, people's tendency to share personal information with others through digital media is the main form of self-expression (Sari et al., 2022).

Adolescents are in the stage of identity development, where they are looking for their identity and role in society. The digital era has enabled new forms of social interaction based on electronic technology (Ramadhani & Jatnika, 2025). Adolescents as active users of social media use digital space not only as a source of information, but also to build self-identity and establish social relationships (Yanti, 2023). Social media such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are one of the most widely used forms of digital media. This platform allows its users to share information, interact directly and even collaborate with others without distance and time restrictions (Maharani & Usiono, 2024). Indonesia has 185.3 million internet users and 139 million active social media users, according

to data from We Are Social (2024). With an internet penetration rate of 80% in Bali Province (APJII 2023) and 91.06% in Denpasar City (BPS 2024), teenagers in this region are very active in digital activities. These figures show how deeply involved Balinese youth, especially in Denpasar, are in the digital world, which makes the region an ideal location for research on the role of self-disclosure in facilitating interactions between individuals.

Self-disclosure is a form of interpersonal communication that a person uses to voice their personal information. Usually this information is confidential and explains a person's feelings (Rizqika et al., 2025). Conceptually, self-disclosure is defined as the process by which a person discloses personal information, either verbally or nonverbally, to another individual (Nur & Rusly, 2023). Devito (1986) explained that self-openness has several dimensions, such as quantity, honesty, intensity, and intimacy level. In interpersonal communication, self-openness serves to strengthen trust, increase emotional closeness, and create meaningful social relationships (Vijayakumar and Pfeifer 2020). In the midst of the development of digital communication, self-disclosure can be a means for adolescents to build healthy social relationships, both directly (face-to-face), and through the digital space. Digital developments with the emergence of social media, allow teenagers to instantly express themselves to their entire social network. This creates opportunities to engage in self-expression that is wider than ever before, but it also creates new barriers that are to consider the risks inherent in expressing oneself to a large diverse group of people (Mustafa et al., 2022) But without clear awareness and boundaries, it can pose risks such as privacy violations. Yosida (2024) even found the phenomenon of oversharing among teenagers, namely the tendency to share personal information excessively without considering the long-term impact.

Previous research has examined various dimensions of self-disclosure in adolescents, but most have focused on psychological or romantic relationship aspects. For example, Nurdin et al., (2023) through a systematic review found that self-openness has a positive impact on psychological well-being and social adaptability. Fitriani & Andriani (2023) identified a significant influence of self-disclosure on the interpersonal communication of adolescent Instagram users by 59.6%. Meanwhile, Mulyana (2024) highlights the relationship between self-disclosure and cyber romance tendencies in adolescents in cyberspace. Although useful, these studies have not addressed much about how self-disclosure plays a comprehensive role in the formation of adolescent interpersonal communication in various digital spaces, and has not explored adolescents' personal experiences in depth.

The novelty of this research lies in the use of the Johari Window theory developed by Luft and Ingham. Self-disclosure theory is often referred to as the "Johari window" theory. This theory was coined by Joseph Lutf and Harry Ingham in 1995. This theory emphasizes that "everyone can know and not know about themselves or others" (Parapat, 2023). This theory concept has four perspectives, each of which has a different term where each meaning contains a meaning that can affect an individual's view. This is about the feelings, awareness and behavior that the individual has can be understood by yourself, others, or both can understand it (Prihantoro et al., 2020). This theory explains that human self-awareness is divided into four areas: open area, blind area, hidden area, and unknown area. With this approach, this study aims to understand how adolescents consciously and unconsciously control the personal information they post on social media, as well as how the dynamics of openness affect digital interpersonal interactions. The theory may be relevant to analyze how adolescents' demands for self-disclosure and privacy awareness are balanced.

The problem studied in this study is how adolescents self-disclose on social media and the extent to which the process of openness affects the formation of interpersonal communication in the digital era. To understand this, this study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods

that aims to explore adolescents' subjective experiences in depth through interviews, observations, and document studies. The study focused on adolescents aged 18-24 years in Denpasar City, who are known to have the highest levels of access and engagement in social media use.

The results of this study are expected to enrich the study of interpersonal communication in the digital era by providing an in-depth understanding of how *self-disclosure* plays a role in building healthy social relationships among adolescents. The aim of this study is to provide a better understanding of how self-disclosure affects adolescents' social relationships through digital media. The results of this study are theoretically expected to improve communication research, especially in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication that occurs in the digital environment and how it affects the communication habits of adolescents today.

2. METHODS

This research uses a type of qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. This method was chosen because it was considered appropriate for understanding adolescents' subjective experiences of self-disclosure and how this process of openness affects interactions between individuals in the digital age. Researchers can also investigate the deeper meaning of adolescent communication behavior in the context of adolescents' daily digital media by using a phenomenological approach.

This research was conducted in Denpasar City, Bali Province, which is one of the regions with the highest internet penetration rate in Indonesia, which is 91.06 percent (BPS Denpasar City 2024). This condition shows that the community, especially teenagers in Denpasar, is very active in the use of social media such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp. Denpasar City consists of four sub-districts of South Denpasar, East Denpasar, West Denpasar, and North Denpasar which all have diverse social and cultural characteristics. An urban environment with extensive digital access makes Denpasar a relevant location to research the phenomenon of adolescent *self-disclosure* in the digital space.
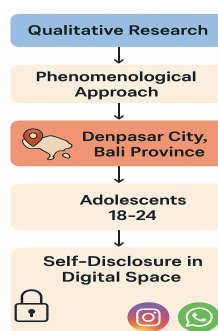

Figure 1. Methods

This research was conducted in Denpasar City, Bali Province, which has one of the highest internet penetration rates in Indonesia (91.06 percent) based on data from the 2024 Denpasar City BPS. This condition shows how active people are in using social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, especially among Denpasar youth. There are four sub-districts in Denpasar, including South Denpasar, East Denpasar, West Denpasar, and North Denpasar, each of which has unique social and cultural characteristics. Denpasar is a relevant place to research the phenomenon

of adolescent *self-disclosure* in the digital space due to the urban environment and wide digital access.

Adolescents between the ages of 18 and 24 who frequently use social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp were subjects in the study. The *purposive sampling technique*, which selects informants based on certain criteria relevant to the purpose of the study, was used to select informants in this study. These criteria include adolescents who are willing to discuss their experiences in terms of self-disclosure, actively share personal information on social media, and understand how to use digital media. To strengthen the research perspective, this study also involves one expert informant, namely a communication expert, namely a lecturer majoring in communication science. There were a total of nine informants, consisting of eight teenagers and one communication expert. In-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies were used as data collection methods to collect comprehensive information about the phenomenon of *self-disclosure* in adolescents. To better understand the meaning and experiences of informants, researchers actively participate in the data collection process. By informing informants of the purpose of the research, protecting the privacy of their names, and ensuring that their participation is voluntary, research ethical norms are maintained throughout the study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1 RESULTS

This study aims to find out how adolescents carry out *self-disclosure* in building interpersonal communication through digital media. Based on the results of interviews with eight adolescents and one communication expert, five main themes were obtained that described the patterns, factors, and impact of adolescent self-openness in interpersonal communication in the digital era. The data obtained was then obtained by dara analysis techniques according to Sugiyono (2020), namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and finally conclusion drawn.
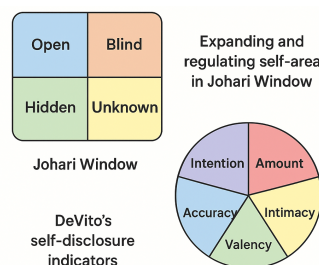

Figure 2. Result

The results of the study show that adolescent *self-disclosure* in digital media takes place in a controlled and selective manner, in accordance with the *self-disclosure indicators* in the Devito theory and the division of self-area in the Johari Window.

First, talking about daily activities, broad viewpoints, and subtle emotional expressions are the most popular ways for teens to express themselves. There are no social risks associated with the knowledge provided, which is often positive. The pattern shows how teenagers expand the open area of the Johari Window a part of themselves that is visible to themselves and others while maintaining boundaries to avoid revealing details that fall under the category of hidden areas. This shows that the message communicated has a shallow but broad depth (broad topic coverage) in the concept of *self-disclosure* by Devito.

Second, research shows that teens are very aware of the things they share. They use features such as personal accounts or close friends to select specific audiences. This shows their ability to manage their hidden areas, which are aspects of themselves that they hide from others. This behavior is related to *intention* in the dimension of self-disclosure by Devito, which is the conscious process of choosing what information to reveal and to whom. Selective content management suggests that teens consider risks and situations before they *self-disclose.*

Third, the results show that when relationships are built on emotional closeness and trust, the level of *self-disclosure* increases. Teens feel more comfortable sharing their ideas or emotions with others who they believe will respect, understand, and protect their privacy. This is closely related to the factor that influences *self-disclosure*, namely *the dyadic effect* by Devito, which states that individual transparency will encourage others to do the same. Interaction with trusted people expands the open area of the Johari Window theory due to the two-way flow of information that enhances understanding between individuals.

Fourth, the results of the interviews also show unfavorable interactions, such as misunderstandings or negative reactions to posts made by teenagers. Communication difficulties that affect their self-expression are reflected in this situation. According to Johari Wendow's Theory, this state may increase the blind area, which is information about oneself that is seen by others but not recognized by oneself. Examples include other people's impressions that are contrary to the intended meaning in the post. This has to do with the accuracy in *self-disclosure* by Devito, i.e. the extent to which the recipient can understand the message accurately. Teens become more cautious about revealing information in the future when accuracy is low.

Fifth, from the results of the interview, it is proven that *self-disclosure* can build interpersonal communication and strengthen relationships with others. Through digital communication, adolescents feel more connected, trusted, and able to build closeness. As more information is communicated and understood in the relationship, this process expands the open space. According to Devito (1986) view of *self-disclosure*, this transparency is a component of the process of developing interpersonal closeness through the sharing of relevant information and according to the situation.

The findings from the expert informants reinforce these results by stating that adolescents have the ability to determine the extent to which they want to be seen in the digital space. This shows an awareness of the limits of privacy and the role of digital media as a space for self-representation. This explanation is consistent with the concept of open–hidden area regulation in the Johari Window and the control indicator in self-disclosure, where individuals consciously manage self-information to maintain a balance between expression and self-protection. Overall, the narrative of the results showed that adolescents were able to self-disclosure adaptively while still considering aspects of belief, social context, and communication risks. The results of the study fully reflect the process of expanding and regulating the self-area in the Johari Window, as well as Devito's self-disclosure indicators such as intention, amount, intimacy, accuracy, and valence.

The results of interviews from communication experts show that adolescents are able to decide the extent to which they want to be accessible online. This demonstrates an understanding of the boundaries of privacy and the function of digital media as a platform for self-representation. This explanation is in line with the regulatory and control indications of open-hidden areas in *self-disclosure* in the Johari Window, where people deliberately manage personal data to strike a balance

between self-expression and self-protection. Overall, the interview results showed that adolescents were able to participate in adaptive *self-disclosure* while considering communication risks, social context, and trust. The process of expanding and regulating self-area in Johari Window, as well as Devito's self-disclosure indicators such as *intention, amount, intimacy, accuracy,* and *valency*, are fully reflected in the results of the research interview.

3.2 DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that adolescent *self-disclosure* through digital media is contextual and selective. Teens tend to keep intimate personal information private while sharing positive things like daily activities, hobbies, and light-hearted thoughts. This result is in accordance with the concept of *self-disclosure* according to Devito (1986) that self-disclosure is a voluntary process carried out with consideration of context, relationship, and communication goals. In addition, research found that the most important characteristics that influence teens' willingness to be open are trust and emotional bonding. When people feel safe and have a strong bond with others, they are more open. These results support the *depth* and *breadth dimensions* of Devito's theory, which states that the level of openness increases with the closeness of interpersonal relationships.

Nonetheless, unfavorable experiences such as misunderstandings and derogatory comments also appear as obstacles to self-disclosure. After experiencing misunderstandings or unexpected responses, some teens begin to upload content more carefully. This condition indicates the existence of communication barriers (*noise*), as explained by (Devito, 2013), which may affect the meaning of communication due to differences in individual perceptions. These results are in line with the results of the research of Husna & Chusniyah (2025), which found that although online interaction cannot completely replace the depth of face-to-face communication, self-disclosure can increase trust in interpersonal relationships. These results are also consistent with Yosida (2024) who explains that adolescents tend to display positive images on social media to avoid negative judgments from others. In terms of theoretical implications, this study strengthens the relevance of Devito's *self-disclosure* theory in the context of digital communication. Self-openness is proven not only to occur in direct communication, but also to be active on social media with the principles of awareness and self-control. Meanwhile, from the implementation side, this result emphasizes the importance of digital communication literacy for adolescents to be able to express themselves safely and wisely, without losing personal meaning and authenticity in interacting. Overall, adolescents' openness in digital media illustrates the form of adaptation of interpersonal communication in the modern era. Adolescents are able to balance the need for social recognition and the responsibility to maintain privacy, so that self-openness remains a means of building healthy and meaningful interpersonal relationships.

This research supports the application of Devito's *self-disclosure theory* in the context of digital communication from a theoretical point of view. Based on the concepts of self-awareness and self-control, it has been proven that *self-disclosure* occurs both actively on social media and in face-to-face interactions. From an implementation perspective, this study highlights the importance of digital communication literacy for adolescents so that they can express themselves wisely and safely without sacrificing their individuality or authenticity in social situations. In general, *adolescent self-disclosure* on digital platforms shows how interpersonal communication has changed in the contemporary era. Adolescents are able to balance the desire to be socially accepted and the obligation to protect their privacy, ensuring that self-disclosure remains a way to develop positive and fulfilling relationships with others.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that adolescents consciously and selectively share personal information on internet platforms or *self-disclosure* in digital media. Social media is used to express oneself, share experiences, and establish relationships with others while maintaining personal privacy and boundaries. *Self-disclosure* is tailored to the situation, the person concerned, and their comfort level, rather than being done impulsively. In addition, the study found that previous communication experiences, emotional closeness, and trust all influenced *self-disclosure*. Teens are generally more open to people they feel emotionally secure and trust. On the other hand, negative experiences such as misunderstandings or bad reactions make individuals more cautious and selective when sharing information on social media.

Overall, adolescents' openness in the digital space reflects an effort to strike a balance between personal expression and social responsibility. Adolescents demonstrate the ability to manage interpersonal relationships effectively in cyberspace by expressing themselves without neglecting privacy and respect for others. Thus, adolescent self-openness in digital media can be understood as a form of modern interpersonal communication that emphasizes awareness, self-control, and adaptability in building meaningful relationships in the digital era. Overall, adolescent *self-disclosure* in digital media shows an attempt to strike a balance between social obligations and individual expression. Teens show that they can efficiently manage interpersonal relationships online by expressing themselves without sacrificing the privacy or respect of others. Adolescent openness in digital media can be interpreted as a form of contemporary interpersonal communication that prioritizes awareness, self-control, and flexibility in building deep relationships in the digital age.

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