

The Effect of Self-Disclosure Behaviors in Social Media on Peer Dynamics among University Students

Tak Jie Chan¹, Amania Reezayana Haris Zulkarnain², Adlyna Nailya Zamsury², Miew Luan Ng³, Yuliyanto Budi Setiawan⁴, Ming Hui Chen⁵

¹Faculty of Business and Communications, INTI International University, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

²Faculty of Applied Communication, Multimedia University, Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

³Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts, INTI International University, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

⁴Department of Communication, Fakultas Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi, Universitas Semarang, Indonesia

⁵Faculty of Foreign Language, Hainan Normal University, Haikou, China

Correspondence: Tak Jie Chan, Faculty of Business and Communications, INTI International University, Malaysia.

Received: September 19, 2025

Accepted: December 29, 2025

Online Published: January 3, 2026

doi:10.11114/smc.v14i2.7974

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v14i2.7974>

Abstract

With the advancement of technology, self-disclosure has become a trend on social media platforms. Most previous studies have mainly focused on the breadth and depth of the disclosure, leaving gaps in its extension. Thus, this study aims to examine the effects of self-disclosure behaviors (breadth, depth, appropriateness, and intent) on the peer dynamics among university students by using Social Penetration Theory (SPT) as the underpinning theoretical framework. The study applied a quantitative survey method and gathered 175 valid respondents. The results showed that depth, appropriateness, and intent have a positive and significant impact on the peer dynamics; however, breadth does not. This study contributed to the interpersonal communication scholarship by testing the extension of the SPT, which includes appropriateness and intent. The study provides implications for the educator, social media users, policy makers, and NGOs on advocating a safe digital environment and online interaction for self-disclosure on relationship maintenance and well-being.

Keywords: self-disclosure, peer dynamics, interpersonal communication, social penetration theory, psychological well-being

1. Introduction

In the contemporary digitalized world, social media is part of everyday life (Marzo et al., 2024). As of 2025, there were 5.24 billion active social media users, marking a 4.1% increase from the previous year (Kemp, 2025). Globally, the age group with the highest Internet usage is 15 to 24 years old, with an average penetration rate of 79% (Petrosyan, 2025). In Malaysia, as of January 2025, there were 25.1 million social media users, which made up 70.2% of the national population (Kemp, 2025). A Nielsen-backed survey highlighted by Zulkifli et al. (2023) also showed that 99% of Malaysian youth aged 15–24 are active social media users. This means that for many university students, social media is heavily relied on and used for connecting and maintaining peer relationships.

The act of sharing personal information about oneself with others, better known as self-disclosure, is not alienating in social media platforms (Shi & Khoo, 2023). Social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) make it easy for users to post about their lives—whether it's good news, opinions, struggles, or even daily thoughts (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2022). These actions fall under the domain of self-disclosure and are common in the online discourse (Fitzgerald et al., 2024).

However, as students become more open and comfortable sharing about themselves online, concerns have started to arise. When personal information is shared too freely, it often crosses a line that is called oversharing (Susilo et al., 2025). To solidify this, a study by Susilo et al. (2025) found that sharing information on social media often leads to misunderstandings among users, particularly Generation Z, who are most of the university students. Moreover, Brammer et al. (2022) also supported this notion and believed that oversharing can negatively affect peer relationships, making it more emotionally complicated for Generation Z.

Previous research has explored self-disclosure and its impact on peer relationships from various angles. Some studies highlight its benefits, such as increased connection and closeness among peers (Chu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023; Swirsky et al., 2021). In contrast, other studies emphasize its negative effects, such as oversharing or disclosing unsuitable information that eventually leads to discomfort and conflict in peer relationships (Chen et al., 2021; Desjarlais, 2022). Despite the volume of research available, the findings remain inconsistent. While some scholars view self-disclosure as a powerful tool for building connections, others suggest it increases loneliness or harms interpersonal relationships. Hence, these contradictions point to a clear evidence gap, as more research is needed to explore the conditions under which self-disclosure strengthens or weakens peer dynamics within social media contexts.

Additionally, most of the existing research tends to focus on the traditional dimensions of self-disclosure, namely breadth and depth (Lv et al., 2022; Papneja & Yadav, 2025; Sari, 2023). While these dimensions are the foundation of self-disclosure, they do not fully capture the motivations or contextual appropriateness behind the disclosures. Dimensions like intentionality and appropriateness, which focus on why and how suitable the disclosure are still very much underexplored (Masur et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2021). This knowledge gap has been acknowledged by several scholars, who suggest future studies include more nuanced dimensions beyond breadth and depth, which will be addressed in this study (AlRabiah et al., 2022; Masur et al., 2023; Yan et al., 2024).

In the Malaysian context, an empirical gap becomes evident. For instance, Yew et al. (2024) conducted a quantitative study among students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) that investigated self-disclosure and its connection to digital privacy. While the study found that students tend to share personal information without fully understanding the risks, it did not assess the intention or appropriateness behind such disclosures. Similarly, Sidek et al. (2018) studied peer interactions on Facebook but limited their understanding of self-disclosure to just three categories, which are information, thoughts, and feelings. Kasmani et al. (2022) also explored disclosure behaviors among students at a vocational institute in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, through qualitative interviews, but did not support their findings with measurable data. Although these local studies contribute insights, they did not explore self-disclosure in more detail. Thus, this study aims to test the effect of self-disclosure behaviors (breadth, depth, appropriateness, intent) and peer dynamics in social media among university students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Underpinning Theory

This research study utilized Social Penetration Theory (SPT) by Altman and Taylor (1973). The SPT states that human connection depends on the amount of self-disclosure and how deeper and broader disclosure over time builds closeness and maintains relationships (Low et al., 2022). The onion model is used to describe the process of self-disclosure in SPT, where layers are peeled to reveal oneself until they reach the other's "core self," resulting in a deeper relationship (Tran et al., 2022). Most studies explore the two existing dimensions under SPT, namely breadth and depth (Brody et al., 2024; Punyanunt-Carter, 2022; Shabahang et al., 2022). Breadth refers to the variety of topics shared, which are often surface-level in the beginning of interactions, whereas depth is the degree of intimacy in a disclosure that may include central details of one's life (Pennington, 2021). Our conceptual framework measures different disclosure behaviors, underpinned by the two core dimensions of SPT (breadth and depth), along with the extension (appropriateness and intent), to see if they have any effect on peer dynamics.

2.2 Peer Dynamics

Peer dynamics refer to how people form similar groups, interact, form interpersonal bonds, and support one another socially (Wang & Hu, 2021). Peer dynamics directly link to university students, as these dynamics go beyond social interactions and have a role in shaping their educational outcomes as well (Gul et al., 2024). Peer dynamics offer personal and emotional support and encourage identity development (Crocetti et al., 2023). In the context of social media, peer dynamics are shaped by the digital environment through frequency of engagement and peer influence on behaviors (Nesi et al., 2018).

2.3 Hypothesis Development

According to the social penetration theory (SPT) by Altman and Taylor (1973), breadth is the first dimension of self-disclosure, referring to the range of topics or variations an individual discloses, which may include hobbies and educational and personal backgrounds (Carpenter & Greene, 2016; Karmakar, 2020). At the early stages of self-disclosure, breadth is heavily influenced by an individual's evaluation of potential benefits, which may include personal interests or opinions (Low et al., 2022). In line with the SPT, the relationship deepens as a larger variety of subjects becomes open to discussions (breadth of disclosure increases) (Punyanunt-Carter, 2022). With social media, breadth through the sharing of topics happens more quickly as users often have more than one type of disclosure (information) in each post (Haq et al., 2025). Therefore, breadth is crucial in the formation of relationships, and the way

it shapes peer dynamics can be studied. Most research states that an increase in breadth positively affects social engagement among peers (Pennington, 2021; Low et al., 2022). Hence, this study hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive effect of breadth of self-disclosure and peer dynamics.

The second element of self-disclosure, according to the SPT, is depth, which refers to the degree of intimacy of the shared information, which is personal or private, such as personal thoughts and feelings (Zhang et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023). The theory suggests that the increase in depth of self-disclosure through personal information further deepens the relationship between individuals (Finkenauer et al., 2018; Koponen & Julkunen, 2022). According to Casale (2021), the sharing of intimate and personal information (depth of self-disclosure) results in a higher level of trust and closer relationships, which aligns with the study of Satyaningrum and Jamalullail (2025). In social media, depth in disclosure can be achieved via texts written with emotional captions and posts (Xu et al., 2023). It is noted that the increase in the degree of intimacy (depth) in disclosures facilitates deeper connections between individuals, resulting in a positive association with social interaction and emotional well-being among peers (Brody et al., 2024; Demetre, 2024). Therefore, this study assumes that:

H2: There is a positive effect of the depth of self-disclosure and peer dynamics.

Appropriateness of self-disclosure refers to the suitability of self-disclosure within a specific social context (Leite et al., 2024; Yew et al., 2024). There are various complex variables influencing the appropriateness of self-disclosure, including individual-level factors (age, gender, emotional state, privacy) and external factors (disclosure context, cultural background, size of online platform) (Ye & Gao, 2025). All these variables play a part in whether the information disclosed is appropriate for the situation and the people involved. In social media, context and appropriateness are crucial before disclosing information online. Appropriateness in disclosing personal information results in higher perceived credibility, making one seen as more trustworthy (Leite et al., 2024). As the appropriateness of the information may affect the recipient's view of the individual, it relates to the dynamics formed between the peers. Thus, this study postulated that:

H3: Appropriateness of self-disclosure has a positive effect on peer dynamics.

The intent of self-disclosure refers to the individual's reason or motivation behind disclosing personal information (Ostendorf et al., 2020). According to Bai et al. (2025), positive motivations (intent) are what drive individuals to disclose personal information online. These motivations mainly include emotional support, gaining information, and strengthening interpersonal relationships (Luo & Hancock, 2019; Hossain et al., 2023). Negative intent, such as hostility, may lead to unsatisfying peer relations (Ding et al., 2021). However, when the intention behind self-disclosure is positive, such as seeking support and deepening connections, peer dynamics may be enhanced in terms of emotional support, social engagement, and social influence. Hence, this study formulated that:

H4: The Intent of self-disclosure positively affects the peer dynamics.

Figure 1 illustrated the proposed research model for this study.

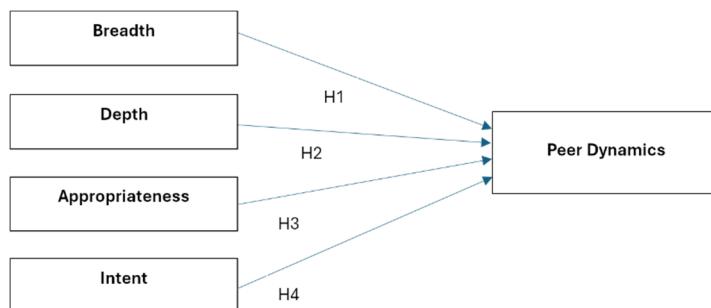


Figure 1. Proposed research model

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses quantitative methods where researchers collect numerical data and run analyses to answer research objectives, which will be used to summarize, make predictions, and test causal associations (Rana et al., 2021). Surveys enable efficient collection of standardized data from a large population of participants and allow researchers to have structured comparisons to conclude from their responses (Murphy, 2023). It also uses statistical tests to measure variables and their relationships (Ali et al., 2022).

3.2 Sampling Procedure

The sample of this study consists of university students in Malaysia, as they represent a highly active demographic on social media platforms. According to Zulkii and Zainal Abidin (2023), Malaysia had a social media penetration rate of 83%, indicating that a significant portion of the population—particularly university students—are active users of social media. This supports the relevance of Malaysian university students being the targeted group for studying self-disclosure behaviors and their effect on peer dynamics in social media. The age range proposed is also suitable for the study, as it is common in Malaysia that the average age of university students ranges from 18 to 24 years old (Talib et al., 2013). This study also depends on active users of social media, as they are more likely to engage in self-disclosure and develop online peer interactions, directly relating to the variables in the investigation. According to Abu et al. (2025), university students commonly use social media for entertainment, communication, and creating new networks, which makes their usage patterns highly relevant for this research.

As it is unattainable to study the whole population and the researchers do not have the exact sampling frame of all university students who studied in Malaysia, this study used a non-probability, purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling enables researchers to collect data that aligns closely with specific parameters, contexts, and research objectives (Memon et al., 2025), such as research involving online behavior. Besides, researchers used G-power analysis to determine the sample size (Memon et al., 2020). Based on the G-power analysis, with 4 predictors, effect size: 0.15, Power: 0.95, the minimum required sample is 129, but the valid sample has 175, which is sufficient.

3.3 Measurement

The structured questionnaires consisted of four (4) sections. Section A is the demographic information, including age, gender, race, and year of study. It will also include questions related to the respondents' social media habits, specifically their average daily usage they use. This question was included to ensure that participants meet the study's criteria and are contextually relevant to the research objective.

Sections B and C included items that pertained to the dimensions of self-disclosure behaviors (breadth, depth, appropriateness, and intent). For instance, items related to breadth and depth are adapted from Lai and Yang (2014). Items for appropriateness are drawn from the study by Yew et al. (2024). Meanwhile, intent is measured using items adapted from (Wang et al., 2017; Lai & Yang, 2014).

As for Section D, it contained items that are particularly related to the peer dynamics, which were also adapted from Lai and Yang (2014). The survey used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) as an anchor for accuracy and consistency in the obtained responses.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

A self-administered online survey via Google Forms was used to solicit the data. The questionnaires were distributed online through social media platforms such as Instagram stories, X postings, and WhatsApp to reach Malaysian university students. Participants were acknowledged at the start of the survey (cover page) to ensure they were given consent regarding their information and data collection from their survey responses. The data collected from the surveys was collected anonymously, ensuring that respondents' information is confidential and only be examined for research purposes.

3.5 Common Method Variance

Before testing the measurement model, Common method variance (CMV) needs to be addressed (Kock et al., 2021). The researchers applied a procedural measure by incorporating the social desirability items in the online survey to reduce the bias (Caputo, 2017). Furthermore, researchers applied full collinearity assessment with a marker variable technique, and the VIF was less than 3.3 as suggested by Kock (2017). Thus, it can be observed that there were no serious CMV issues (see Table 1).

Table 1. Full collinearity assessment using the marker variable

Variables	App	Bre	Dep	Int	PD
Marker (VIF)	1.093	1.176	1.161	1.097	1.083

Note: Bre = Breadth, Dep = Depth, App = Appropriateness, Int = Intent, PD = Peer Dynamics

4. Results

More than half of the respondents were females (61.1%), with the majority aged 21-23 years old (73.1%). For the race, Malay has the highest number, which contributed 72.0% and they have a Bachelor's degree, and are active social media users who use social media more than 4 hours.

Table 2. Profile of the respondents (N=175)

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	68	38.9
	Female	107	61.1
Age	18-20	41	23.4
	21-23	128	73.1
	24-26	3	1.7
	27-29	2	1.1
	>29	1	0.6
Race	Malay	126	72.0
	Chinese	10	5.7
	Indian	12	6.9
	Others	27	15.4
Education	Foundation/diploma	37	21.1
	Bachelor's degree	133	76.0
	Postgraduate's degree	5	2.9
Year of study	Year 1	55	31.4
	Year 2	95	54.3
	Year 3	18	10.3
	Year 4	7	4
How often do you use social media daily?	< 1 hour	3	1.7
	1-2 hours	14	8
	2-4 hours	57	32.6
	4-6 hours	60	34.3
	> 6 hours	41	23.4

4.1 Assessment of Measurement Model

As shown in Table 3, every item was accepted, except for App2 and Int1, as those items did not meet the loading threshold of 0.70 and were removed to improve the reliability and validity of the construct. All of the variables in Table 3 show acceptable reliability with the composite reliability (CR) value more than 0.70 as suggested by Hair et al. (2022), and they range from 0.801 to 0.857. Besides, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) demonstrated how well the constructs are represented by its items, and the value should be above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022). Hence, all the AVE values were above 0.50 (ranged from 0.524 to 0.573), and convergent validity was met.

Table 3. Measurement model assessment

Variables	Items	Item deleted	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Appropriateness	App1	App2	0.696	0.706	0.814	0.524
	App3		0.661			
	App4		0.817			
	App5		0.713			
Breadth	Bre1	Bre2	0.650	0.816	0.857	0.546
	Bre2		0.800			
	Bre3		0.757			
	Bre4		0.683			
	Bre5		0.793			
Depth	Dep1	Dep2	0.732	0.802	0.855	0.542
	Dep2		0.703			
	Dep3		0.683			
	Dep4		0.762			
	Dep5		0.795			
Intent	Int2	Int1	0.761	0.633	0.801	0.573
	Int3		0.750			
	Int4		0.759			
Peer Dynamics	PD1	PD2	0.676	0.790	0.853	0.537
	PD2		0.765			
	PD3		0.771			
	PD4		0.717			
	PD5		0.731			

The discriminant validity is evaluated through the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) method as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). According to Hair et al. (2022), the HTMT ratio cannot exceed 0.90, and none of the HTMT values in Table 4 are more than the 0.90 threshold, thus establishing the discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant validity using HTMT

	App	Bre	Dep	Int	PD
App					
Bre	0.185				
Dep	0.298	0.712			
Int	0.230	0.479	0.503		
PD	0.231	0.240	0.296	0.483	

Note: Bre = Breadth, Dep = Depth, App = Appropriateness, Int = Intent, PD = Peer Dynamics

4.2 Structural Model

The findings of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 5. The structural model was assessed using a 10,000 bootstrapping process as suggested by Hair et al. (2024). The three significant paths would be Depth ($\beta = 0.166$, $t = 1.951$, $p = 0.026$), Appropriateness ($\beta = 0.165$, $t = 2.151$, $p = 0.016$), and Intent ($\beta = 0.260$, $t = 3.155$, $p = 0.001$), which have a positive and significant effect on peer dynamics. Therefore, H2, H3, and H4 were accepted. However, Breadth ($\beta = 0.083$, $t = 1.083$, $p = 0.139$) does not have a significant effect on peer dynamics, and H1 was rejected. The R^2 of 0.192 indicated that all four exogenous variables can explain peer dynamics by 19.2% (see Figure 2).

Table 5. Direct effects

Paths	Std. Beta	Std. error	T	P	LLCI (5%)	ULCI (95%)	D	r^2	f^2	VIF
H1: Bre \rightarrow PD	0.083	0.077	1.083*	0.139	-0.058	0.186	NS	0.192	0.006	1.507
H2: Dep \rightarrow PD	0.166	0.085	1.951*	0.026	0.012	0.288	S		0.022	1.590
H3: App \rightarrow PD	0.165	0.077	2.151*	0.016	-0.050	0.257	S		0.031	1.088
H4: Int \rightarrow PD	0.260	0.082	3.155**	0.001	0.117	0.389	S		0.065	1.275

Note: Bre = Breadth, Dep = Depth, App = Appropriateness, Int = Intent, PD = Peer Dynamics, LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval, ULCI = Upper Limit confidence interval, S = Supported, NS = Not supported

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$; 1-tailed test

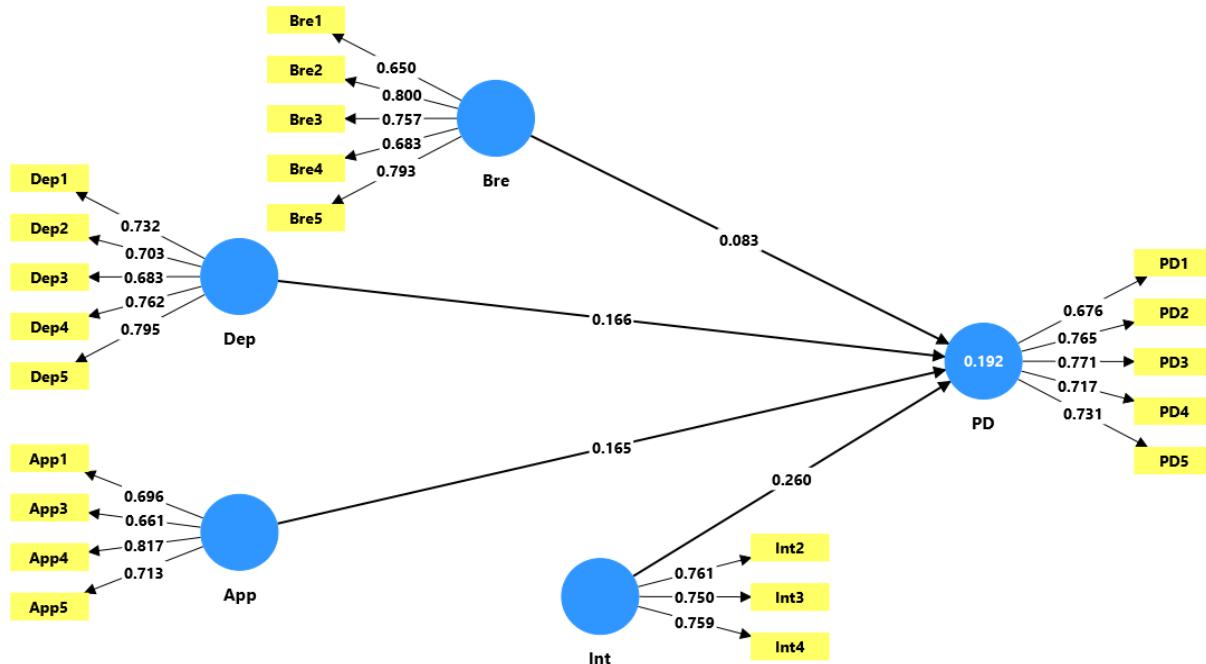


Figure 2. Structural model assessment

In addition, PLSpredict was incorporated to assess how much predictive power the model had (Shmueli et al., 2019). The PLS-SEM_RMSE is the original data generated from the respondents, whereas the LM_RMSE is artificial data generated by the SmartPLS software. As mentioned by Shmueli et al. (2019), the predictive power for a construct is high if all its PLS-SEM_RMSE is lower than LM_RMSE. As observed from Table 6, most of the PLS-SEM_RMSE for peer dynamics are lower than the LM_RMSE, indicating a medium predictive power.

Table 6. PLSpredict assessment

Items	Q ² predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	PLS-SEM - LM	Interpretation
PD1	0.115	0.858	0.893	-0.035	
PD2	0.053	1.000	1.027	-0.027	
PD3	0.092	1.035	1.029	0.006	Moderate
PD4	0.002	1.094	1.137	-0.043	
PD5	0.033	1.023	1.074	-0.051	

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) proposed that disclosing a wider range of topics (breadth) would increase peer-dynamics, but the effect is not statistically significant, and H1 is rejected. This aligned with Shabahang et al. (2022) that broad and surface-level sharing may be seen as oversharing and may weaken trust overall. Besides, the possible explanation is that the demographics, where most of the respondents (73.1%) were social media users aged 21–23. For this group, posting on many topics is likely habitual, and it is no longer has a strong effect on peer-dynamics outcomes. This is in line with the notion of Haq et al. (2025) that breadth on social media happens quickly and is often a routine form of self-expression. This interpretation aligns with SPT, which suggests that relationships deepen not just through the variety of topics (breadth) but also through the depth and intimacy of the disclosure itself.

The second hypothesis (H2) proposed that there is a positive effect between the depth of self-disclosure and peer dynamics, and it is supported. This finding is supported by Nowell et al. (2022), who claimed that self-disclosures can vary in depth from superficial information to more intimate communication (thoughts, feelings, and emotions) that will lead to supporting and strengthening the relationships. Theoretically, when bond and trust are formed through these relationships, communication becomes more open and meaningful, which should have a positive influence on peer dynamics.

Appropriateness has a statistically significant influence on peer dynamics, and H3 is supported. For instance, Leite et al. (2024) state that appropriateness in disclosing personal information, such as positive self-disclosure, leads to being seen as more credible and trustworthy, which then strengthens connections. Besides, it also aligned with the study of Petronio and Hernandez (2019), which states that the appropriateness of disclosure, such as disclosing private information, may make the friendship stronger if the content fits.

Lastly, the finding supports H4 and indicates that an individual's intent has a significant effect on shaping peer dynamics online. This result aligns with He et al. (2024), who found that individuals who have higher intentions of self-disclosure when in stressful environments use it as a coping strategy to help build new social connections with others. When users choose to intentionally disclose personal information online, it can be perceived as more genuine or meaningful, which results in a stronger relationship.

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the results show that depth, appropriateness, and intent positively affect the peer dynamics, whereas breadth does not. This study contributed to the SPT to examine the effects of self-disclosure behaviors on peer dynamics in social media among university students.

6.1 Academic Implications

This study introduces two underexplored dimensions of self-disclosure (appropriateness and intent) into a model that usually focuses only on breadth and depth. This is seen in prior studies done by Baruh and Cemalcilar (2018), which focused on the breadth and depth of social networks, whereas Pan et al. (2020) focused on depth alone when seeking support online. Therefore, our study adds a contribution to the SPT by exploring two additional dimensions of self-disclosure, appropriateness, and intent, and the results were significantly related. Besides, this study also strengthens and extends SPT by applying it to peer dynamics within social media, rather than romantic relationships (Blackhart et al., 2021) or face-to-face settings (Chen et al., 2021), which adds new insight to the interpersonal communication scholarship.

6.2 Practical Implications

From a practical point of view, the findings from the study are relevant and may be useful for university educators, social media users, policymakers, and NGOs. Starting with university educators, counselors, and staff, they can use the findings to understand how students' online self-disclosure affects their emotional support systems and friendships. A study by Debeck (2020) emphasizes how self-disclosure occurs in academic environments and is important as it affects peer social support. It is further noted that emotional support is an aspect of peer dynamics and can have implications for their academic performance. With our findings, academic-related activities may be enhanced to better fit the students' needs. Educators will be able to alter their teaching approaches, physical and online class activities, along with group assignments, to reflect the students' self-disclosure behaviors.

Besides that, the findings are useful for social media users as they can reflect on how their self-disclosure habits might affect peer relationships, trust, and comfort levels. According to Chu et al. (2022), social media users often overlook the quantity of self-disclosure (breadth and depth) and its relation to psychological well-being. In contrast, our study emphasized each self-disclosure dimension and how they relate to peer dynamics. Therefore, social media users can look closely and reevaluate the type and depth of information they share online, its appropriateness, and the intent behind their disclosure, as all these attributes may affect their friendships and connections.

Lastly, the findings may inform policymakers, NGOs, or digital literacy advocates on safe digital engagement among Malaysian youth. Our findings can be applied when developing programs or carrying out social campaigns regarding safe digital engagement. When understanding the relation between self-disclosure behaviors and peer dynamics, including support, engagement, and influence, the respective parties can ensure that the content disclosed online is safe for users' online interactions and emotional health.

6.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The first limitation is that the sample was drawn strictly from Malaysian university students. This limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should try using a more diverse backgrounds, such as students of higher education in other countries, working adults, and secondary-school students. Researchers could utilize stratified random sampling, which helps to diversify the sample of respondents across different age groups, occupations, and social media habits to enhance the generalizability.

Besides, this study relied on a quantitative survey. Likert-scale items give useful numbers, yet they do not account for respondents' motives, feelings, or the context behind each answer. Integrating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, and conducting Delphi method (Tan et al., 2024) could offer a more in-depth insight into understanding self-disclosure behaviors in the future.

Lastly, this study solely focused on four self-disclosure dimensions, which are breadth, depth, appropriateness, and intent, and all these variables account for roughly 19.2% of the variance in explaining the endogenous variable, leaving about 80.8% unexplained. Other factors, such as personality traits (Alwahaishi et al., 2024), social media platform features, privacy concerns (Wang et al., 2025), and religious norms (Danzer, 2018), can be incorporated in the model to test the mediating and moderating effects on these relationships and contribute to the interpersonal communication and media psychology scholarship.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank INTI International University for providing financial support to publish this article. The authors also thank Ms. Nik Nur Damia Nik Mohd Romie for the help in research data collection.

Authors contributions

TJC - Methodology, Supervision, Writing -original draft, Writing -Review & editing. ARHZ- Conceptualization, writing original draft. ANZ - Data curation, Project administration, Writing -original draft. MLN - Writing -Review & editing. YBS & MHC -Validation, Writing -Review & editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Redfame Publishing.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

Abu, R., Setiawati, L., Agustina, S., Ramadhan, S. Y., & Khoerunnisa, L. (2025). Exploring the impact of social media usage towards mental health among university students in Malaysia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(3), 6354-6362. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRRISS.2024.803479S>

Ali, I., Azman, A., Mallick, S., Sultana, T., & Hatta, Z. A. (2022). Social survey method. In M. R. Islam et al. (Eds.), *Principles of social research methodology* (pp. 167-179). Springer Nature Singapore.

AlRabiah, S., Marder, B., Marshall, D., & Angell, R. (2022). Too much information: An examination of the effects of social self-disclosure embedded within influencer eWOM campaigns. *Journal of Business Research*, 152, 93-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.07.029>

Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Alwahaishi, S., Al-Ahmadi, M. S., Ali, Z., & Al-Jabri, I. (2024). Self-disclosure on social media: Do personality traits matter? *SAGE Open*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241255754>

Bai, Q., Dan, Q., Choi, Y., & Luo, S. (2025). Why we disclose on social media? Towards a dual-pathway model. *Behavioral Sciences*, 15(4), 547. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15040547>

Baruh, L., & Cemalcilar, Z. (2018). When more is more? The impact of breadth and depth of information disclosure on attributional confidence about and interpersonal attraction to a social network site profile owner. *Cyberpsychology Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 12(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.5817/cp2018-1-1>

Bengtsson, S., & Johansson, S. (2022). The meanings of social media use in everyday life: Filling empty slots, everyday transformations, and mood management. *Social Media + Society*, 8(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221130292>

Blackhart, G. C., Hernandez, D. K., Wilson, E., & Hance, M. A. (2021). The impact of rejection sensitivity on self-disclosure within the context of online dating. *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Networking*, 24(10), 690-694. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0257>

Brammer, S. E., Punyanunt-Carter, N. M., & Duffee, R. S. (2022). Oversharing on social networking sites: A contemporary communication phenomenon. *Computers in Human Behavior Reports*, 8, 100236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2022.100236>

Brody, N., Blackburn, K., & LeFebvre, L. (2024). The great reconnection: Examining motives for relational reconnection and investigating social penetration as a predictor of well-being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 41(7), 1679-1702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075231222945>

Caputo, A. (2017). Social desirability bias in self-reported well-being measures: Evidence from an online survey. *Universitas Psychologica*, 16(2), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy16-2.sdsww>

Carpenter, A., & Greene, K. (2016). Social Penetration Theory. In *The International Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Communication* (First). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118540190.wbeic0160>

Casale, R. (2021). *Trust me! Examining how group membership and self-disclosure affect trust perceptions between strangers*. Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Chen, L., Cheng, R., & Hu, B. (2021). The effect of self-disclosure on loneliness in adolescents during COVID-19: The mediating role of peer relationships. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.710515>

Chu, T. H., Sun, M., & Jiang, L. C. (2022). Self-disclosure in social media and psychological well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 40(2), 576-599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075221119429>

Crocetti, E., Albarello, F., Meeus, W., & Rubini, M. (2022). Identities: A developmental social-psychological perspective. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 34(1), 161-201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2022.2104987>

Danzer, G. (2018). Therapeutic self-disclosure of religious affiliation: A critical analysis of theory, research, reality, and practice. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 10(4), 398-403. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000197>

Debeck, D. P. (2020). *Peer Social Support in the Classroom*. Unpublished Graduate Research Theses & Dissertations, Northern Illinois University. <https://huskiecommons.lib.niu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7967&context=allgraduate-thesesdissertations>

Demetre, D. C. (2024, April 29). *Social Penetration Theory and Self-Disclosure*. ScienceBeta. <https://sciencebeta.com/social-penetration-theory/>

Desjarlais, M. (2022). The socially poor get richer, the rich get poorer: The effect of online self-disclosure on social connectedness and well-being is conditional on social anxiety and audience size. *Cyberpsychology Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 16(4), 4. <https://doi.org/10.5817/cp2022-4-4>

Ding, X., Liu, B., Zeng, K., Kishimoto, T., & Zhang, M. (2021). Peer relations and different functions of cyber-aggression: A longitudinal study in Chinese adolescents. *Aggressive Behavior*, 48(2), 152-162. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.22012>

Finkenauer, C., Kerkhof, P., & Pronk, T. (2018). Self-disclosure in relationships. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (pp. 271-281). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316417867.022>

Fitzgerald, K., Vandenbosch, L., & Tabruyn, T. (2024). Adolescent emotional expression on social media: A data donation study across three European countries. *Affective Science*, 5(4), 436-448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-024-00259-9>

Gul, S., Altaf, S., & Asghar, H. (2024). Exploring peer dynamics: A cross-sectional quantitative analysis. *Journal of Health and Rehabilitation Research*, 4(1), 297-301. <https://doi.org/10.61919/jhrr.v4i1.366>

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*, 3rd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., Sharma, P. N., & Liengard, B. D. (2024). Going beyond the untold facts in PLS-SEM and moving forward. *European Journal of Marketing*, 58(13), 81-106. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-08-2023-0645>

Haq, E. U., Jangra, S., De, S., Sastry, N., & Tyson, G. (2025). Unpacking the Layers: Exploring Self-Disclosure Norms, Engagement Dynamics, and Privacy Implications In *Companion Proceedings of the ACM Web Conference 2025 (WWW Companion '25)*. ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3701716.3717740>

He, W., Wang, M., Chen, M., & Cai, Q. (2024). Residential mobility increases the intention of self-disclosure on personal contact information and emotional distress. *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 14(2), 39. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jedp.v14n2p39>

Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115-135.

Hossain, M. M., Islam, K. M. Z., Masud, A. A., Hossain, M. A., & Jahan, N. (2023). Antecedents and consequences of self-disclosure in subjective well-being: A Facebook case with a social support mediator. *SAGE Open*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231179925>

Karmakar, A. (2020). Self-disclosure: A psychological pro. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.25215/1104.275>

Kasmani, M. F., Aziz, A. R. A., & Sawai, R. P. (2022). Self-disclosure on social media and its influence on the well-being of youth. *Jurnal Komunikasi Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 38(3), 272-290. <https://doi.org/10.17576/jkmjc-2022-3803-17>

Kemp, S. (2025, March 23). *Digital 2025: the state of social media in 2025 — DataReportal - Global Digital Insights*. DataReportal - Global Digital Insights. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-sub-section-state-of-social>

Kock, F., Berbekova, A., & Assaf, A. G. (2021). Understanding and managing the threat of common method bias: Detection, prevention and control. *Tourism Management*, 86, 104330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104330>

Kock, N. (2017). Common method bias: A full collinearity assessment method for PLS-SEM. In: Latan, H., Noonan, R. (eds) *Partial Least Squares Path Modeling*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64069-3_11

Koponen, J. P., & Julkunen, S. M. (2022). Development of long-term B2B customer relationships: The role of self-disclosure and relational cost/benefit evaluation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 56(13), 194-235. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ejm-07-2020-0492>

Lai, C., & Yang, H. (2014). Determinants of individuals' self-disclosure and instant information sharing behavior in micro-blogging. *New Media & Society*, 17(9), 1454-1472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814528294>

Leite, F. P., Pontes, N., & Septianto, F. (2024). To share or not to share: When is influencer self-disclosure perceived as appropriate? *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 23(5), 2585-2598. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2361>

Liu, L., Zhang, T., & Han, L. (2023). Positive self-disclosure on social network sites and adolescents' friendship quality: The mediating role of positive feedback and the moderating role of social anxiety. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 3444. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043444>

Low, S. M. P., Bolong, J., Waheed, M., & Wirza, J. (2022). 10-year systematic literature review of social Penetration in online communication. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(14), 29-47. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i14/15813>

Luo, M., & Hancock, J. T. (2019). Self-disclosure and social media: Motivations, mechanisms and psychological well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 31, 110-115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.08.019>

Lv, Y., Fang, G., Zhang, X., Wang, Y., & Wang, Y. (2022). Influence of personality traits on online self-disclosure: Considering perceived value and degree of authenticity separately as mediator and moderator. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.958991>

Ma, J., Gao, S., Wang, P., & Liu, Y. (2023). High level of self-disclosure on SNSs facilitates cooperation: A serial mediation model of psychological distance and trust. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 150, 107976. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107976>

Marzo, R. R., Chen, H. W. J., Ahmad, A., Thew, H. Z., Choy, J. S., Ng, C. H., ... & Elsayed, M. E. G. (2024). The evolving role of social media in enhancing quality of life: A global perspective across 10 countries. *Archives of Public Health*, 82(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-023-01222-z>

Masur, P. K., Bazarova, N. N., & DiFranzo, D. (2023). The impact of what others do, approve of, and expect you to do: An in-depth analysis of social norms and self-disclosure on social media. *Social Media + Society*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231156401>

Memon, M. A., Ramayah, T., Ting, H., & Cheah, J. H. (2025). Purposive sampling: A review and guidelines for quantitative research. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 9(1), 1-23. [https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.9\(1\)01](https://doi.org/10.47263/JASEM.9(1)01)

Memon, M. A., Ting, H., Cheah, J. H., Ramayah, T., Chuah, F., & Cham, T. H. (2020). Sample size for survey research: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 4(2), i-xx.

Murphy, L. (2023). The questionnaire surveying research method: Pros, cons and best practices. *ScienceOpen Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.14293/S2199-1006.1.SOR-PP3WYS8.v1>

Nesi, J., Choukas-Bradley, S., & Prinstein, M. J. (2018). Transformation of adolescent peer relations in the social media context: Part 2—Application to peer group processes and future directions for research. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 21(3), 295-319. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0262-9>

Nowell, C., Pfeifer, J. H., Enticott, P., Silk, T., & Vijayakumar, N. (2022). Value of self-disclosure to parents and peers during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 33(1), 289-301. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12803>

Ostendorf, S., Müller, S. M., & Brand, M. (2020). Neglecting long-term risks: Self-disclosure on social media and its relation to individual decision-making tendencies and problematic social-networks-USE. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.543388>

Pan, W., Feng, B., Wingate, V. S., & Li, S. (2020). What to say when seeking support online: A comparison among different levels of self-disclosure. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11 <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00978>

Papneja, H., & Yadav, N. (2025). Self-disclosure to conversational AI: A literature review, emergent framework, and directions for future research. *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 29, 119-151. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00779-024-01823-7>

Pennington, N. (2021). Extending social penetration theory to Facebook. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 10(2), 325-343.

Petronio, S., & Hernandez, R. (2019). Communication privacy management theory. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.373>

Petrosyan, A. (2025, April 1). *Worldwide digital population 2025*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>

Punyanunt-Carter, N. (2022). *Social penetration theory*. EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | www.ebsco.com. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/communication-and-mass-media/social-penetration-theory>

Qin, Y., Cho, H., Li, P., & Zhang, L. (2021). First impression formation based on valenced self-disclosure in social media profiles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.656365>

Rana, J., Gutierrez, P. L., & Oldroyd, J. C. (2021). Quantitative methods. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 1-6). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_460-1

Sari, P. W. (2023). Self-disclosure interaksi dalam jaringan online pada teori penetrasi sosial. *Jurnal Common*, 7(1), 13-21. <https://doi.org/10.34010/common.v7i1.8144>

Satyaningrum, N. S., & Jamalullail, J. (2025). Social penetration in digital spaces: Developing interpersonal relationships through the Bumble Dating app. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, IX(III), 2220-2229. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2025.90300175>

Shabahang, R., Shim, H., Aruguete, M. S., & Zsila, Á. (2022). Oversharing on social media: anxiety, attention-seeking, and social media addiction predict the breadth and depth of sharing. *Psychological Reports*, 127(2), 513-530. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221122861>

Shi, J., & Khoo, Z. (2023). Online health community for change: Analysis of self-disclosure and social networks of users with depression. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1092884>

Shmueli, G., Sarstedt, M., Hair, J. F., Cheah, J. H., Ting, H., Vaithilingam, S., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). Predictive model assessment in PLS-SEM: Guidelines for using PLSpredict. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(11), 2322-2347. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ejm-02-2019-0189>

Sidek, S., Tasir, Z., & Jumaat, N. F. (2018). Interacting through disclosing: Peer interaction patterns based on self-disclosure levels via Facebook. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Information Technology*, 96(11), 3127-3141. <http://eprints.utm.my/id/eprint/84173/>

Susilo, M. E., Prayudi, P., & Florestiyanto, M. Y. (2025). Oversharing behavior in Gen Z on social media. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 212, 04022. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202521204022>

Swirsky, J. M., Rosie, M., & Xie, H. (2021). Adjustment correlates of social media engagement among early adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 50(12), 2265-2278. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-021-01421-3>

Talib, R. A., Kahairudin, Z. F., Rajikan, R., & Abdul Wahab, N. A. (2013). Health factors and academic performance among residential college students. *Jurnal Personalia Pelajar*, 16, 37-46.

Tan, J. M., Wider, W., Rasli, A., Jiang, L., Tanucan, J. C. M., & Udang, L. N. (2024). Exploring positive impact of social media on employee mental health: A Delphi method. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 14(3), e202436. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ojcmmt/14646>

Tran, T. T. H., Robinson, K., & Paparoidamis, N. G. (2022). Sharing with perfect strangers: The effects of self-disclosure on consumers' trust, risk perception, and behavioral intention in the sharing economy. *Journal of Business Research*, 144, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.081>

Wang, G., & Hu, W. (2021). Peer relationships and college students' cooperative tendencies: Roles of interpersonal trust and social value orientation. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.656412>

Wang, J., Cao, Q., & Zhu, X. (2025). Privacy disclosure on social media: the role of platform features, group effects, trust and privacy concern. *Library Hi Tech*, 43(2-3), 1035-1059. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-06-2023-0253>

Wang, L., Yan, J., Lin, J., & Cui, W. (2017). Let the users tell the truth: Self-disclosure intention and self-disclosure honesty in mobile social networking. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(1), 1428-1440. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2016.10.006>

Xu, X., Liu, J., & Liu, J. H. (2023). The effect of social media environments on online emotional disclosure: Tie strength, network size and self-reference. *Online Information Review*, 48(2), 390-408. <https://doi.org/10.1108/oir-04-2022-0245>

Yan, R., Gong, X., Xu, H., & Yang, Q. (2024). Seeing the forest and the trees: A meta-analysis of the antecedents to online self-disclosure. *Internet Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-05-2022-0358>

Ye, X., & Gao, H. (2025). Distress disclosure on social media and depressive symptoms among college students: The roles of social comparison and gender. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1520066>

Yew, S. W., Rahman, A. H. A., & Yusoff, S. (2024). Self-disclosure and digital privacy awareness and knowledge among university students in Malaysia. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(X), 3024-3032. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2024.8100255>

Zhang, X., Qi, C., Wei, X., & He, W. (2023). Identifying Intimacy of self-disclosure: A design based on Social Penetration Theory and Deep Learning. *AMCIS 2023 Proceedings*, 7. https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2023/sig_dsa/sig_dsa/7

Zulkii, N. F. N., & Zainal Abidin, M. Z. (2023). Exploring social media addiction among Malaysian university students. *Forum Komunikasi*, 18(1), 120-146.