Differences in Self-disclosure Levels between Real World and Cyberspace in Students with Introverted Personalities

 Rizky Alfarizy[1], Sri Nurhayati Selian[2]

Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, Indonesia[1,2]
rzkyalfarzy18@gmail.com[1]
seliansrinurhayati@gmail.com[2]

Abstract

This research aims to understand the experiences of students with introverted personalities in carrying out self-disclosure (Self-disclosure) in two interaction contexts, namely the real world (face to face) and the virtual world (online). This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods that focus on subjective meaning of participants' experiences. The research subjects consisted of three Muhammadiyah University of Aceh students who had introverted personality tendencies and actively used social media. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews and non-participant observations, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Results show that introverted students find it easier to open up in cyberspace due to a sense of security, privacy, anonymity and control over self-expression, whereas in the real world self-openness is limited and selective. Cyberspace provides a safe space for expressing thoughts and feelings, while the real world becomes a means of building more authentic social relationships. The balance of self-openness in both contexts plays an important role in supporting healthy communication and the psychological well-being of introverted students.

INTRODUCTION

The development of information technology in the digital era has brought major changes in social life, especially in the way humans communicate. This digital transformation means that communication is no longer limited by space and time. Social media, such as Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and X (Twitter), are now the main spaces for students to express themselves, establish social relationships, and develop personal identity (Selian, 2025). In the context of communication psychology, social media functions as a new medium for individuals to open up (Self-disclosure). According to (Rahma & Ahyani, 2025), self-openness is an important aspect in forming healthy social relationships because it allows a person to gain emotional support, self-understanding and interpersonal trust. Through self-openness, individuals can build closer and more meaningful relationships. However, changes in communication patterns due to technological advances have given rise to new dynamics in

communication behavior, especially among students with introverted personalities.

Introverted students are known as individuals who tend to be quiet, reflective, and selective in sharing their thoughts or feelings with others. They are more comfortable in calm social situations and do not demand much spontaneous interaction. (Xaviera et al., 2021) state that introverted individuals tend to have lower levels of Self-disclosure in face-to-face communication due to awkwardness, concerns about social judgment, and interpersonal anxiety. Psychological factors such as shame, perfectionism, and social discomfort reinforce their tendency to shut down. Instead, cyberspace provides a safer space for introverted students to express themselves. (Chairunnisa & Dharma, 2024) explains that social media offers control over identity and timing, where individuals can choose when and how they want to share personal information. Anonymity features and the ability to edit messages before publication allow introverts to more freely show sides of themselves that are difficult for them to express in face-to-face interactions. Cyberspace thus functions as a "psychological safe space" that minimizes social stress and allows for greater self-openness.

However, openness in cyberspace does not always reflect true authenticity or depth. Research by Gruzd and Hernández-García (2018) shows that concerns about digital privacy can limit the level of self-disclosure of social media users. These findings are in line with research (Maghfiroh & Muhammad, 2024) which explains that control over privacy and risk perception are important factors in determining the extent to which someone is willing to reveal themselves online. Introverted students tend to select personal information that is shared out of concern about data misuse, negative responses, or privacy violations. Thus, while social media leaves room for self-disclosure, trust factors and security perceptions remain key determinants of the process.

Introverted students' communication behavior is also influenced by the Indonesian cultural context which tends to be collectivistic. In this culture, self-disclosure is often governed by social norms of decency, honor, and harmony. Liang et al. (2017) suggest that in collectivistic culture, group norms and social image encourage individuals to be more careful in sharing personal information online. These social norms reinforce introverts' tendency to limit self-openness in the real world, while explaining why social media is a more flexible alternative space for self-expression. In addition, (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2023) highlights that social media has transformed the way students communicate from direct interaction to fast and efficient digital communication. However, digital communication also carries risks such as miscommunication, excessive self-imaging, and social pressure from public expectations. Introverted students often feel a dilemma between the desire to connect and the need to maintain privacy. (Massaro & Simanjuntak, 2024) emphasize that introverted students often experience internal conflict: they want to participate in digital social spaces, but are afraid to show a personal side that is too open. As a result, Self-disclosure that occurs in cyberspace is often limited, symbolic, or conveyed through indirect narratives such as quotes, status, or aesthetic uploads.

In the context of psychological development, the student period is an important period of identity exploration. (Santrock, 2019) explains that early adulthood is a stage of development in which individuals seek to build social intimacy and develop emotional independence. Self-openness is the key to achieving healthy and deep relationships. (Rahardjo & Pramesti, 2022) added that low self-openness can cause students to have difficulty adapting socially, feel isolated, and experience decreased psychological well-being (psychological well-being). Meanwhile, cyberspace allows different forms of openness to be more selective and filtered but still have social and emotional value. (Darwis et al., 2024), suggests that social media can serve as a means of self-acceptance for introverted individuals, helping them recognize emotions and expand social networks without face-to-face stress. However, digital interaction cannot completely replace the warmth of direct communication which is the basis of social intimacy.

Based on this study, it can be seen that there is a gap between self-disclosure behavior in the real world and cyberspace in introverted students. Previous research in Indonesia has largely focused solely on openness on social media without comparatively examining the two communication contexts. Therefore, this research aims to understand in depth the differences between students' levels of self-disclosure and introverted personalities in the real world and cyberspace. The approach used is qualitative phenomenological, as it allows the researcher to explore the subjective meaning and personal experiences of the participants. In this way, a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological dynamics of introverted students in self-openness can be obtained. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of communication psychology and personality, especially in understanding students' social interaction patterns in the digital era. Practically speaking, the results of this research can be a reference for lecturers, counselors and educational institutions in helping introverted students balance openness between online and face-to-face interactions. In this way, introverted students can build healthy, adaptive and authentic social relationships, both in the real world and cyberspace.

RESERACH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological types of research. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore in depth the subjective experience of introverted students in self-disclosure in two interaction contexts, namely the real world (face to face) and the virtual world (online). According to (Khalefa & Selian, 2021), phenomenological approaches are effective for understanding how individuals interpret their personal experiences in a particular social context. Meanwhile, (Creswell & Poth, 2018) explains that phenomenological research focuses on efforts to explore the meaning of a person's life experience (lived experience) of a phenomenon, so that they are able to provide a deep, contextual and meaningful understanding of the reality experienced by participants.

The subject of this research is students with introverted personalities who actively use social media and have experience interacting both in the real world and in cyberspace. Participant selection was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, namely the technique of deliberately taking samples based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2021). The criteria for participants in this research include active undergraduate students at the Muhammadiyah University of Aceh, having an introverted personality tendency based on simple test results or self-recognition, being active using at least one social media such as Instagram, TikTok, or Twitter, and having open up both through direct communication and via digital media.

The number of participants in this study was 3 students, two of whom came from the Faculty of Psychology and one from the Faculty of Law. This number is considered adequate because in phenomenological research, data depth takes precedence over the number of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With a relatively small number of participants, researchers can explore individual experiences in more detail and depth, so that the data obtained is richer and more meaningful.

The data collection techniques used are in-depth interviews (in-depth interviews) and non-participant observations. In-depth interviews were conducted to directly understand participants' views, feelings and experiences in self-disclosure, both in the real world and cyberspace. Meanwhile, non-participant observations were made to strengthen the results of the interviews by looking at the participants' real behavior in the context of their social interactions. These two techniques complement each other so that researchers gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon of introverted students' self-disclosure.

Data analysis in this study was carried out using a phenomenological approach that refers to the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (Sugiyono, 2021). This model includes

three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. comThe analysis process is carried out repeatedly and simultaneously from the time the data begins to be collected until an in-depth meaning is obtained of the experiences experienced by participants. This approach helps researchers comprehensively understand the Self-disclosure dynamics of introverted students in two different interaction contexts, as well as discover the subjective meanings that underlie this behavior.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

This research aims to find out how students with introverted personalities carry out self-disclosure in two different social contexts, namely the real world and cyberspace. Based on the results of in-depth interviews with a number of informants who have introverted personality characteristics, significant differences were found in the way they express thoughts, feelings and personal experiences in these two spaces.

In general, research results show that introverted students tend to be more open in cyberspace than in the real world. Cyberspace is considered a communication space that provides psychological distance or a safe psychological distance for them to express themselves without feeling awkward or afraid of being judged by other people.

An informant, MA (22 years old), described his feelings when interacting on social media:

> *"On social media, I can tell you anything, especially in writing. I feel freer because I don't have to look at people directly. Sometimes I'm more honest there than when I talk directly."*

The statement suggests that cyberspace is becoming a means of escape for introverted individuals to channel self-expression that is difficult to express in face-to-face interactions. This is in line with the characteristics of introverts who tend to be more comfortable in personal reflection and internal communication.

However, this level of openness does not mean they are truly presenting themselves as they are. Most informants stated that self-disclosure in cyberspace is still carried out with certain limitations and filtering. FH (23 years old), for example, says:

> *"I do seem to often post on social media, but actually what I share is that I have filtered it first. I keep things that are too personal for myself."*

The statement showed that despite higher levels of self-disclosure in cyberspace, informants maintained control over the extent to which they wanted to present themselves. In other words, cyberspace provides a sense of control that allows them to choose the aspects of themselves they want to express.

In contrast, in real-world contexts, introverted students show a tendency to exercise restraint and limit personal communication. Face-to-face interactions are often considered stressful and emotionally exhausting because they have to deal with direct expressions and reactions from the person they are talking to.

This is reflected in RN's statement (21 years):

"If I meet in person, I am more silent. Sometimes I want to talk, but I'm already afraid that people will misunderstand me. Finally I just kept it to myself."

This quote illustrates the tendency to self-inhibition or self-restraint in interpersonal communication in the real world. Anxiety about social judgment and sensitivity to the environment make introverted individuals prefer to remain silent or speak as necessary.

Apart from comfort factors, it was also found that social context and interpersonal relationships influence these self-disclosure differences. Informants admitted that it was easier to open up to people they had known for a long time or had emotional closeness, both in the real and virtual worlds. In that context, security is the main factor driving openness.

As stated by DL (22 years):

"I can tell you a lot if I'm with a friend I really trust. But if I'm new to meeting or just a classmate, I'm usually not very open. I'm afraid that my story will become the subject of gossip."

From the results of this interview, it appears that trust (trust) is an important prerequisite in building communication that is open to introverted individuals. These beliefs are more easily formed in intense relationships, not in broad or open social interactions. However, some informants also realize that too much self-disclosure in cyberspace can carry risks. There are concerns that personal information could be misused or lead to misunderstandings. NL (20 years old) revealed:

"I once felt sorry for being too honest on social media. Other people even got me wrong and thought I was looking for attention. Since then, I have been more careful."

This shows that even though cyberspace gives freedom, introverted students still face a dilemma between the need to express themselves and the desire to maintain privacy. They tend to engage in open selective disclosure only on things they consider socially safe.

Apart from that, emotional context also plays an important role. Many informants admit that they find it easier to express negative emotions online, such as feelings of sadness, loneliness, or academic pressure. Cyberspace is considered a space of expression without having to face direct reactions from other people.

As AR (21 years old) said:

"When I'm sad, I prefer to confide in social media. Sometimes just through stories or captions. Not everyone knows what he means, but I felt relieved after writing."

This statement shows that for introverted individuals, cyberspace functions as a cathartic space — a place to channel emotions indirectly, with less social risk than talking face to face.

Meanwhile, in the real world, emotional expression is more controlled and often restrained due to social norms and shame. IF (22 years old) said:

"I don't easily show feelings in front of other people. When I'm depressed, I prefer to be alone rather than telling stories."

This quote reinforces the finding that introverted college students tend to avoid direct emotional disclosure, as they feel more comfortable with written or indirect forms of communication. From the entire interview, it can be concluded that cyberspace provides a safe space (safe space) for individuals with introverted personalities to communicate more openly, but still with strong personal control. Meanwhile, in the real world, their self-disclosure tends to be limited by social anxiety, shame, and sensitivity to the social environment. This phenomenon reflects that self-disclosure for introverted individuals is not just a matter of communication, but also part of the mechanism of psychological adaptation to social demands that they feel are pressing. Cyberspace is a means of maintaining a balance between the need to be recognized and the desire to maintain personal privacy.

Thus, the results of this research show that the difference in the level of self-disclosure between the real world and cyberspace in introverted students is influenced by three main factors, namely: (1) a sense of psychological security, (2) a level of trust in the audience, and (3) control over self and personal information. The real world demands high social courage, while the virtual world provides a reflective space that better suits the introspective character of introverted individuals.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that the context of communication influences the level and form of self-disclosure of students with introverted personalities. These results are in line with the view of Carl Gustav Jung (1921) who stated that introverts are individuals who are oriented towards themselves (inward-oriented), tend to be reflective, and need time to process thoughts before expressing them. The limitations of real-world self-disclosure relate to the basic characteristics of introverts who are more sensitive to social stimuli and external judgments. They tend to minimize direct social engagement to maintain emotional stability. These findings support the theory of Altman and Taylor (1973) in Social Penetration Theory which states that self-disclosure develops gradually as feelings of security and emotional closeness increase. In the context of cyberspace, the findings of this research show that digital media can reduce psychological barriers to communication. Anonymity, privacy controls, and time flexibility allow introverted individuals to express their thoughts and feelings more openly. This is in line with research by Chairunnisa and Dharma (2024) which found that introverted students tend to be more active in expressing themselves on social media because they have control over the audience and the intensity of interaction. The different forms of self-disclosure in these two contexts can also be understood through Jourard's Self-Disclosure Theory (1971) which asserts that self-openness depends on a sense of security and social acceptance. Cyberspace acts as a "safe space" which provides opportunities for introverted individuals to express their personal side without fear of direct criticism. This process has therapeutic value because it allows them to channel their emotions and understand themselves better.

Furthermore, this research also found that self-disclosure in cyberspace functions as a form of emotional regulation and formation of social identity. Through writing or digital uploads, introverted students are able to reflect feelings and get feedback from the social environment without face-to-face pressure. This process supports Rahma and Ahyani's (2025) theory which

states that digital self-expression contributes to emotional well-being because it functions as a means of releasing tension (emotional catharsis). However, openness in the real world still has deeper emotional value. Introverted students think that opening up directly is a sign of high emotional trust and closeness. They prefer meaningful relationships over broad interactions, according to introverted characteristics that emphasize the quality of interpersonal relationships. Thus, it can be concluded that the virtual world and the real world have complementary functions. Cyberspace provides a safe space for expression and training openness gradually, while the real world becomes an arena for authentic and meaningful actualization of relationships. The implications for psychological well-being are significant. Introverted students who were able to balance openness in both contexts showed higher levels of emotional comfort. They can channel thoughts without social pressure, while maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships. One participant described this very clearly: "Through social media I learn to be open, but when I get close to someone, I start to be able to tell stories directly. It feels more relieved and not as stiff as before." (Interview, Subject 4). These results show that self-disclosure for introverted students is not just a communication behavior, but a complex process of social adaptation. The digital world becomes an important bridge to more open interpersonal communication, while the real world becomes a space of emotional validation that fosters self-confidence and psychological well-being. Therefore, these findings provide a theoretical contribution that self-disclosure in introverted individuals in the digital era depends not only on personality traits, but also on a safe, flexible and supportive communication environment for emotional regulation. This expands the classical understanding of introverted personalities to become more contextual and dynamic in the modern communication space.

CONCLUSSION

This research shows that the self-disclosure rate of students with introverted personalities differs significantly between real-world and virtual contexts. Introverted students tend to be more open in cyberspace because they feel they have control over the time, form of messages, and privacy boundaries they want to maintain. The digital world is a safe space (safe space) for them to express thoughts and feelings without the social pressure that arises in face-to-face interactions. In the real world, on the other hand, self-disclosure is selective and relies heavily on the level of interpersonal trust. They only open themselves to individuals who are considered safe, such as friends or close family.

Apart from that, self-openness in introverted students has a reflective and therapeutic meaning. The process of sharing through writing or personal messages becomes a means to understand oneself and manage emotions. Meanwhile, face-to-face interactions, although more difficult, still have deeper emotional value and strengthen the quality of social relationships. Factors such as security, social support, emotional regulation, and self-confidence are the main determinants of the level of self-openness in both contexts.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the self-disclosure of introverted students is adaptive and contextual. Cyberspace and the real world play a complementary role in shaping psychological and social balance. Cyberspace provides a space for free and controlled expression, while the real world becomes a place for authentic and meaningful actualization of relationships. Thus, the balance between the two communication contexts contributes to improving psychological well-being, self-confidence, and the ability of introverted students to establish healthy social relationships in the digital era.

REFERRENCE

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

Chairunnisa, L., & Dharma, G. (2024). *Digital self-disclosure among introverted university students in social media interaction. Journal of Communication Studies*, 9(2), 55–68.

Chairunnisa, L., & Dharma, M. (2024). *Self-Disclosure pada Individu Introvert di Media Sosial dalam Perspektif Dramaturgi Erving Goffman. Jurnal Komunikasi dan Sosial Humaniora*, 16(1). https://doi.org/10.21070/ijccd.v16i1.1169

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Darwis, A., Latief, R., & Muhammad, A. (2024). *Media sosial dan penerimaan diri mahasiswa introvert. Jurnal Komunikasi Sosial Humaniora*, 5(1). https://journal.unkhair.ac.id/jksh

Gruzd, A., & Hernández-García, Á. (2018). Privacy concerns and self-disclosure in private and public uses of social media. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 21(7), 418–428. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2017.0709

Jourard, S. M. (1971). *Self-disclosure: An experimental analysis of the transparent self.* Wiley-Interscience.

Jung, C. G. (1921). *Psychological types.* Princeton University Press.

Khalefa, E. Y., & Selian, N. (2021). Non-random sample strategy in qualitative art-related studies. *International Journal of Creative and Arts Studies*, 8(1), 35–49. https://doi.org/10.24821/ijcas.v8i1.5184

Kurniawan, D., & Lestari, F. (2023). *Media sosial dan transformasi komunikasi mahasiswa di era 5.0. Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Nusantara.* https://jurnal.unpad.ac.id/jikn

Liang, H., Shen, F., & Fu, K. (2017). Privacy protection and self-disclosure across societies: A study of global Twitter users. *New Media & Society*, 19(9), 1476–1497. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816642210

Maghfiroh, L. N., & Muhammad, A. (2024). The relationship between self-disclosure and anonymity in online social media users. *Journal of Social and Industrial Psychology*, 12(1). https://journal.unnes.ac.id/sju/index.php/sip/article/download/10164/1053/26343

Massaro, T., & Simanjuntak, E. (2024). Social anxiety dan online self-disclosure pada mahasiswa pengguna Twitter/X. *Experientia: Jurnal Psikologi Indonesia*, 12(1), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.33508/exp.v12i1.5546

Rahardjo, W., & Pramesti, A. (2022). *Keterbukaan diri dan adaptasi sosial mahasiswa di era digital. Jurnal Psikologi Terapan Indonesia.* https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/jpti

Rahma, I., & Ahyani, N. (2025). *Digital expression and emotional well-being among introverted students. Indonesian Journal of Psychology and Education*, 12(1), 33–47.

Rahma, N., & Ahyani, S. (2025). *Perubahan pola komunikasi interpersonal di era digital. Jurnal Psikologi Komunikasi.* https://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/jpk

Santrock, J. W. (2019). *Life-span development.* McGraw-Hill Education.

Selian, S. N. E. S. L. R. (2025). *Antara dunia nyata dan virtual: Studi kasus remaja dengan gangguan kesehatan mental akibat kecanduan gadget. Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat dan Riset Pendidikan.* https://doi.org/10.31004/jerkin.v4i1.2184

Sugiyono. (2021). *Metode penelitian kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan R&D.* Alfabeta.

Xaviera, D., Prasetyo, A., & Mulya, R. (2021). Self-disclosure dan kecemasan sosial pada mahasiswa introvert. *Jurnal Psikologi*, 19(2). https://doi.org/10.24198/jpsp.v3i8.57766