

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AMONG STUDENTS AT SMKN 9 MEDAN

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Abstract

This study analyzes the depth of self-disclosure in the interpersonal communication of 11-3 grade Visual Communication Design (DKV) students at SMKN 9 Medan using Irwin Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected from 10 informants divided into five friendship dyads using in-depth interviews, observation, and document studies. The results showed that students' interpersonal communication processes gradually developed, penetrating the six layers of Social Penetration Theory, from the biographical layer, preferences, aspirations, values and beliefs, private issues, to the core self-concept. The achievement of this penetration depth was divided into two categories, groups that managed to fully penetrate all layers thanks to long lasting friendships, high reciprocity, and psychological safety, and groups that experienced partial penetration due to the application of privacy boundary management and past friendship trauma. This dynamic shapes a circular communication pattern driven by risk perception, relational roles, cultural values, and emotions. The study concludes that full penetration contributes to the development of absolute trust and nonverbal sensitivity, while partial penetration serves as a self-protection mechanism to maintain harmony in social interactions at school.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a fundamental process in the formation of social relationships, particularly during adolescence, when individuals undergo identity development, experience a heightened need for social acceptance, and engage more intensively with peers. In educational settings, interpersonal communication functions not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a medium for building trust, providing emotional support, and fostering mutual understanding. DeVito (2016) explains that effective interpersonal communication is characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality. One important aspect of this process is self-disclosure, namely an individual's willingness to reveal personal information to others based on the level of trust and relational closeness. Self-disclosure enables individuals to build more meaningful relationships while also developing a deeper understanding of themselves and others (Saputra & Fadhilah, 2023).

Within adolescent friendships, self-disclosure occurs through communication processes shaped by interpersonal experience, emotional closeness, and perceptions of relational safety. Openness is not determined solely by the frequency of communication, but also by the depth of the personal information exchanged. Putra et al. (2024) show that self-disclosure plays an important role in

developing interpersonal closeness and reducing communication barriers among adolescents. Meanwhile, Anggriyani et al. (2023) found a relationship between self-esteem, self-disclosure, and students' interpersonal communication. These findings indicate that openness constitutes an important component of adolescent social relationship development. Nevertheless, individuals continue to make judgments regarding which information is appropriate to disclose and which should be retained as part of their personal privacy.

The dynamics of self-disclosure can theoretically be explained through Social Penetration Theory developed by Altman and Taylor (1973). This theory conceptualizes the development of interpersonal relationships as a gradual process involving an increase in the breadth and depth of information exchanged. Through the onion-layer analogy, individuals tend to disclose relatively general information before moving toward deeper aspects of personality. In this study, the depth of self-disclosure is operationalized through six analytical categories: biographical information, preferences, aspirations, values and beliefs, private problems, and core self-concept. These six categories are used to map variations in students' openness rather than as fixed stages explicitly established by Altman and Taylor. Relationship development is also not necessarily linear, as individuals may continue to maintain privacy boundaries even within close friendships (Nuridin, 2020).

A number of previous studies have examined self-disclosure in various contexts of adolescent communication. Fitriani and Andriani (2021) investigated interpersonal communication based on self-disclosure among adolescent Instagram users, while Rifani et al. (2024) examined the relationship between self-disclosure and students' social interaction. Furthermore, Tampubolon and Munir (2025) explored the relationship between self-openness and interpersonal communication among senior high school students. These studies contribute to understanding the relationship between self-disclosure and the quality of social interaction. However, based on their respective focuses, further research is still needed to specifically explain variations in the depth of self-disclosure within friendship dyads among vocational high school students, including how relational closeness, reciprocal openness, and privacy boundaries influence the information being exchanged.

This need is particularly relevant in the context of students in Class XI-3 of the Visual Communication Design program at SMKN 9 Medan. Vocational learning activities involving design work, project discussions, and peer interaction create opportunities for intensive interpersonal communication. Based on preliminary observations, students actively interact through conversations, jokes, and exchanges of experiences during learning activities. However, such intensity of communication cannot automatically be assumed to reflect the depth of self-disclosure. Students who appear close may only share information related to academic activities and personal interests, while family problems, emotional experiences, and personal concerns remain private. This condition highlights the importance of distinguishing between interaction intensity and the depth of interpersonal openness.

Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in its comparative analysis of the depth of self-disclosure across five student friendship dyads in the Visual Communication Design program using six analytical categories grounded in Social Penetration Theory. The study not only identifies the types of information disclosed but also examines reciprocal communication processes and the considerations that encourage students either to reveal or withhold personal information. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the depth of self-disclosure, identify patterns of interpersonal communication, and understand the factors influencing differences in openness across friendship dyads among students at SMKN 9 Medan. Theoretically, the study is expected to enrich the application of Social Penetration Theory within the context of vocational education. Practically, the findings are expected to provide useful input for students, homeroom teachers, and school counseling services in creating a supportive and safe communication environment that respects individual privacy boundaries.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method to provide an in-depth analysis of the dynamics of self-disclosure in interpersonal communication among students from the perspective of Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to understand subjective experiences, the process of developing interpersonal closeness, and the considerations underlying individuals' decisions to disclose or withhold personal information. The study was conducted from April 27 to May 29, 2026, at SMKN 9 Medan,

specifically in Class XI-3 of the Visual Communication Design program. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the extent to which their characteristics corresponded with the objectives of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants consisted of 10 students organized into five friendship dyads. The selection criteria included active involvement in everyday communication, an established friendship relationship, frequent interaction within the school environment, and the willingness of both members of each dyad to share information regarding their interpersonal communication experiences. Variations in background and duration of friendship were also considered in order to capture differences in the depth of self-disclosure. The inclusion of 10 informants was determined on the basis of targeted information adequacy and the relevance of each dyad's experience to the research focus, rather than for statistical representativeness. Data adequacy was assessed using the principle of information power, which proposes that the required sample size is influenced by sample specificity, the aim of the study, the use of established theory, the quality of dialogue, and the analytical strategy employed (Malterud et al., 2016).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, passive participant observation, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' self-disclosure experiences. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol that enabled the researcher to explore communication experiences, the development of friendship closeness, reciprocal openness, and the privacy boundaries maintained by each informant. The interview guide was developed around six analytical categories of self-disclosure: biographical information, preferences, aspirations, values and beliefs, private problems, and core self-concept. These categories constituted an operational framework developed with reference to the principles of breadth and depth of self-disclosure in Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory. Observations focused on verbal and nonverbal interaction, emotional responses, and communication patterns during classroom activities as well as informal interactions within the school environment. Documentation included school profiles, photographs of activities, and other relevant supporting documents. The use of multiple data collection techniques was intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding while also allowing the researcher to assess the consistency between informants' reported experiences and their observed communication behavior (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, interview data were transcribed, coded, and grouped according to the six self-disclosure categories, forms of reciprocal openness, communication patterns, and factors influencing the withholding of personal information. The data were then presented through thematic narratives and comparative matrices across the five friendship dyads in order to identify similarities, differences, and variations in the depth of self-disclosure. The analytical process not only identified the categories of information disclosed but also interpreted why some dyads achieved deeper levels of openness while others maintained privacy boundaries despite having close friendship relationships. Conclusions were drawn iteratively through the examination of relationships among categories and the comparison of experiences across dyads. Data trustworthiness was assessed through source triangulation by comparing accounts provided by both members of each friendship dyad and through methodological triangulation by cross-checking interview findings with observations and documentation (Sugiyono, 2019). These procedures were employed to enhance the credibility of the interpretation and to ensure that the conclusions were grounded in traceable empirical evidence.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Analysis of the Layers of Social Penetration Theory in Student Communication

The dynamics of self-disclosure in interpersonal communication among Grade XI Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan developed gradually through six communication layers derived from Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory. At the first layer, namely general or biographical information, all informant groups exchanged factual information that was public in nature and involved minimal social risk. The students' initial acquaintances emerged from diverse circumstances, including adjacent seating arrangements since Grade X in the W and A dyad, shared interest in extracurricular dance activities in the N and N dyad, friendships maintained since junior high school in the S and Z dyad, routine classroom interaction in the I and B dyad, and first contact through WhatsApp during the school orientation program in the R and S dyad. As Informant A explained regarding the beginning of the friendship with W:

"It was because we had been in the same class since Grade 10, and our seats were close to each other. That was how I first became close to W. We got to know each other because we sat in front of and behind one another." (Interview with Informant A).

The initial topics exchanged included names, home addresses, modes of transportation, junior high school backgrounds, and perceptions regarding the difficulty of daily school assignments. Informant A further explained:

"At first, it was things like names and home addresses. We would usually ask about that when going home. Then we would talk about lessons, such as whether the class that day was difficult or not." (Interview with Informant A).

The students consistently agreed that personal boundaries were necessary during the early stages of acquaintance in order to avoid discomfort. As emphasized by Informant W:

"I do not think it would be appropriate. There should be boundaries. At the beginning, I do not think it is appropriate because that is personal information. It is only for people who are already genuinely close." (Interview with Informant W).

The exchange of descriptive information functioned as an initial communication strategy involving relatively low social risk. This finding is consistent with Putra, Syalsabila, and Purwandari (2024), who argue that the disclosure of descriptive information can function as an initial coping mechanism for assessing potential friendships and reducing social anxiety within the school environment.

At the second layer, namely preferences, hobbies, and interests, an increased sense of comfort emerged through the exchange of information about personal interests. The relatively long duration of practical Visual Communication Design activities encouraged students to share stories about drawing, the game Roblox, novels, films, and swimming. Informant W from Dyad 1 described this openness as follows:

"We often talk about hobbies. Back in Grade 10, because we were in Visual Communication Design, we did a lot of drawing, so we often talked about drawings. We also often shared stories about the games we played, such as Roblox." (Interview with Informant W).

Habits such as buying snacks together in the school cafeteria, watching films together, ordering food through GoFood, and collaborating in preparation for school competitions strengthened comfort and familiarity among the students. Openness at the level of preferences was supported by shared vocational interests that created a sense of interpersonal compatibility, as expressed by Informant B:

"It feels very comfortable because we are really on the same wavelength." (Interview with Informant B).

This finding reinforces Fitriani and Andriani's (2021) argument that similarities in interests and engagement in shared activities can accelerate self-disclosure and facilitate adolescents' social adjustment within the school environment.

At the third layer, namely aspirations, goals, and expectations, communication began to involve more evaluative information concerning students' future plans after graduation. The W and A dyad and the R and S dyad discussed in depth their goals of entering public universities outside the city, while the N and N dyad discussed realistic considerations regarding whether to pursue higher education or enter the workforce immediately, particularly in relation to their families' financial circumstances. One Informant N from Dyad 2 explained candidly:

"We talked about whether we would continue to university or work after this. Then my friend said that if going to university was not possible, they would probably work immediately because there might not be enough money for college." (Interview with Informant N).

Meanwhile, the S and Z dyad and the I and B dyad openly expressed concerns regarding the selection of university majors. This level of openness was encouraged by the perception that close friends served as good listeners and as companions for mutual growth rather than as competitors. Informant A emphasized:

"There is nothing that makes me hesitate because we are here to grow together, not to treat each other as opponents or competitors." (Interview with Informant A).

Discussions regarding future goals reflect the presence of supportiveness and empathy in interpersonal communication (DeVito, 2016). This finding confirms the study by Tampubolon and Munir (2025), which found that open discussions about future plans, when met with positive responses, were associated with increased communication effectiveness and interpersonal trust among students.

The fourth layer, namely values and beliefs, reflects students' openness in providing critical evaluations of creative work and in managing differences of opinion. As Visual Communication Design students, this layer was expressed distinctively through their willingness to provide honest criticism and constructive feedback on their peers' design work in order to improve assignments. Informant W from Dyad 1 explained:

"Yes, I am willing to give criticism because when it comes to assignments, we need to criticize each other so that we know where the mistakes are and can improve the work." (Interview with Informant W).

Such feedback was generally received openly, responded to with expressions of gratitude, or handled casually through humor. In terms of conflict management, the S and Z dyad and the I and B dyad had experienced differences of opinion that led to periods of silent treatment. Informant S from Dyad 3 acknowledged:

"Yes, we have had disagreements. There was also a time when we barely spoke to each other for about a week, but after that we made up again." (Interview with Informant S).

The willingness to provide criticism of design work reflects an integration between vocational academic norms and the emotional maturity developed within friendship relationships. This finding is consistent with Anggriyani, Murad, and Hasanuddin (2023), who argue that the combination of positive self-esteem and honest self-disclosure contributes significantly to the development of a healthy communication climate.

At the fifth layer, namely private problems, communication enters a more sensitive domain involving a relatively high degree of emotional risk. Information categorized as personal and confidential included internal family problems, past friendship conflicts, and romantic relationship issues. The N and N dyad and the I and B dyad were willing to discuss family problems openly because their relationships were characterized by mutual trust and reciprocal self-disclosure. Informant I explained:

"Yes, I have talked about family problems. I am not afraid of being judged because my friend also shares similar things with me." (Interview with Informant I).

In contrast, the W and A dyad and the R and S dyad deliberately withheld such information and regarded family matters as a highly private domain that should remain protected by a clear privacy boundary. Informant W emphasized:

"In general, family problems are definitely something I would not share because they are really very personal. They are only meant to remain private." (Interview with Informant W).

At the sixth layer, namely core self-concept, communication concerns deeper understanding of one another's authentic personality, sensitivity to nonverbal emotional cues, and the development of a high level of interpersonal trust. The S and Z dyad and the I and B dyad reported that they had developed an in-depth understanding of their friends' genuine personalities and behavioral tendencies as a result of prolonged interaction. When responding to a friend who was in a bad mood, students demonstrated sensitivity in recognizing emotional changes through nonverbal cues, as described by Informant A:

“Usually, when there is a problem, my friend just becomes quiet. Normally, they talk a lot, but when something is wrong, they suddenly become silent.” (Interview with Informant A).

Nevertheless, not all dyads reached a state of complete trust. Informant N from Dyad 2 described an emotional barrier rooted in negative past experiences:

“From my own perspective, I do not think I can become so close that I completely trust someone. Maybe it is also because of past trauma.” (Interview with Informant N).

Deeper social penetration was facilitated by the length of the friendship and the presence of balanced reciprocity. This finding supports Simbolon, Pakpahan, and Gultom (2022), who argue that a sense of security cultivated through deeper self-disclosure can foster strong and mutually supportive friendships. Conversely, dyads that continued to withhold information at particular private layers demonstrate that social penetration is dynamic rather than strictly linear, as students rationally assess interpersonal risks before disclosing highly personal information.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the interview data from Layer 1 (Biographical Information) to Layer 6 (Core Self-Concept), the process of social penetration among Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan did not develop uniformly across all dyads. Only Dyad 3 (S and Z) and Dyad 4 (I and B) demonstrated disclosure across all six analytical layers. Dyad 3 reached the deepest level of disclosure largely because the friendship had been established since junior high school, lasting approximately five years, and was reinforced by intensive daily interaction as seatmates. Their openness extended beyond academic matters and future aspirations to include the management of interpersonal conflict, including a period of approximately one week of silent treatment, mutual understanding of each other's authentic personality traits, sensitivity to nonverbal cues during negative emotional states, and a shared perception of very high interpersonal trust. Dyad 4 likewise demonstrated extensive social penetration, primarily because of strong reciprocal self-disclosure. Their willingness to share sensitive experiences, including family problems and concerns about the future, did not generate substantial fear of judgment because both individuals disclosed comparable forms of vulnerability. This reciprocal pattern contributed to a shared perception that their friendship had reached a very high level of trust and openness.

In contrast, the remaining three dyads—Dyad 1 (W and A), Dyad 2 (N and N), and Dyad 5 (R and S)—displayed forms of information withholding or privacy boundary management at particular layers and therefore did not demonstrate the same degree of depth across all six categories. Dyad 1 generally showed a harmonious relationship and a high level of mutual trust at the level of core self-concept, yet both members consciously maintained boundaries at Layer 5 by defining family problems as a highly private domain that should not be disclosed. Their interaction therefore remained more focused on matters such as Visual Communication Design assignments and gaming. In Dyad 2, social penetration developed asymmetrically: one student perceived the relationship as approaching complete trust and viewed the friend as a reflection of the self, whereas the other remained more reserved because of negative experiences in previous friendships. These past experiences functioned as an emotional barrier to deeper disclosure. Dyad 5, meanwhile, adopted a partial and pragmatic pattern of openness, in which family issues were deliberately withheld and deeper disclosure at Layer 6 was constrained by the personal principle that not every aspect of one's life should be shared, even with a close friend. Overall, the extent of self-disclosure across the six analytical layers was strongly influenced by the duration of the friendship, the balance of reciprocal openness, and individual experiences that shaped personal privacy boundaries.

Circular Communication Patterns in Students' Self-Disclosure

The findings from 10 informants organized into five friendship dyads among Grade XI-3 Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan indicate that self-disclosure develops through a circular communication pattern characterized by reciprocal message exchange and feedback. Based on interview and observational data, two general communication tendencies were identified: circular communication with deeper openness and circular communication with selective openness. The first pattern was observed in Dyad 3 (S and Z) and Dyad 4 (I and B), whose members were able to disclose personal experiences, concerns about the future, family problems, and emotional conditions relatively openly. In contrast, Dyad 1 (W and A), Dyad 2 (N and N), and Dyad 5 (R and S) maintained active reciprocal communication but restricted the exchange of information in certain domains. Dyad 1 demonstrated strong emotional closeness while continuing to treat family problems as private

information. Dyad 2 showed an imbalance in openness due to a negative friendship experience encountered by one member, whereas Dyad 5 consciously limited the disclosure of personal problems. These findings demonstrate that the intensity of interaction and relational closeness do not necessarily produce the same depth of self-disclosure.

The findings also show that circular communication develops through reciprocal response mechanisms involving both verbal and nonverbal messages. In Dyad 3 and Dyad 4, the disclosure of personal experiences was met with responses in the form of empathy, attention, acceptance, and a willingness to share similar experiences. Such responses encouraged the continuation of communication and enabled the friendship to develop at a deeper level. In Dyad 3, the duration of the friendship since junior high school, combined with previous experiences of resolving interpersonal conflict, strengthened interpersonal trust. In Dyad 4, reciprocal disclosure concerning family problems generated a sense of comfort because both individuals felt that they would not be judged when sharing personal experiences. In contrast, communication within Dyads 1, 2, and 5 remained two-way through conversations about vocational assignments, interests, and everyday activities, but the disclosure of sensitive information was more limited. Thus, the difference among the dyads did not lie in the presence or absence of feedback, but rather in the depth of information disclosed, the degree of reciprocity, and individuals' willingness either to maintain or to open their privacy boundaries.

Theoretically, these findings can be explained through the perspectives of transactional communication and Social Penetration Theory. Kurniadini and Putranto (2025) explain that circular communication occurs through the dynamic exchange of communicator and receiver roles, whereby each individual's response influences meaning construction and the continuation of interaction. In the context of this study, students' openness developed when personal disclosures received supportive responses, whereas responses perceived as risky could encourage individuals to restrict further disclosure. This finding is consistent with Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory, which explains the development of interpersonal relationships through increasing breadth and depth of self-disclosure. Relational depth is determined not only by the amount of information exchanged but also by the intimacy of the information disclosed and the reciprocal nature of the exchange. In Dyads 3 and 4, reciprocity and trust facilitated deeper levels of disclosure. By contrast, in Dyads 1, 2, and 5, relational closeness did not necessarily result in openness across all categories of personal information. This condition indicates that social penetration may develop dynamically rather than through a completely linear progression. Accordingly, circular communication can be understood as the mechanism through which messages are exchanged, while social penetration explains changes in relational depth that emerge through that communicative process.

Differences in the depth of self-disclosure can also be analyzed through Communication Privacy Management Theory developed by Petronio (2002). This theory explains that individuals retain the right to control their private information by establishing privacy boundaries based on considerations of risk, trust, and relationship characteristics. In this study, Dyad 1's decision not to disclose family problems, the cautiousness displayed by one member of Dyad 2 due to previous friendship experiences, and the restrictions maintained by Dyad 5 demonstrate that selective openness represents a deliberate form of privacy management rather than merely an indication of ineffective interpersonal communication. This interpretation complements the findings of Tampubolon and Munir (2025), who emphasize the importance of openness in students' interpersonal communication, while also showing that relationship quality can be maintained through respect for personal information boundaries. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that circular communication can produce different levels of social penetration depending on reciprocity, relational experience, and privacy management. Practically, these findings underscore the importance of homeroom teachers and school counseling services in creating a supportive communication environment that respects confidentiality and provides students with opportunities to disclose personal experiences without pressure or fear of negative judgment.

Communication Factors in Students' Self-Disclosure

The findings from 10 informants organized into five friendship dyads among Grade XI-3 Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan indicate that the depth of self-disclosure is influenced by four major communication factors: perception, roles and relationships, values and culture, and emotions. These factors were identified through students' communication experiences and the considerations underlying their decisions either to disclose or withhold personal information. The perceptual factor is reflected in how students assess the social risks that may arise after sharing sensitive experiences, including concerns about negative judgment, breaches of trust, and the dissemination of

private information. In Dyad 2 (N and N), one informant expressed hesitation about placing complete trust in another person because of an unpleasant friendship experience in the past. Meanwhile, the factor of roles and relationships is reflected in differences in the level of openness according to emotional closeness and the duration of the friendship. Dyad 3 (S and Z), whose friendship had been established since junior high school, demonstrated deeper openness than several other dyads. These findings indicate that students' willingness to disclose personal information is determined not merely by the intensity of interaction, but also by perceived information security and the quality of the interpersonal relationship that has developed.

The findings further show that values and culture, as well as emotional conditions, shape students' decisions in managing private information. Values and cultural factors are reflected in friendship norms that determine which topics are considered appropriate to discuss, particularly matters related to family problems, interpersonal conflicts, and personal experiences perceived as sensitive. Dyad 1 (W and A) and Dyad 5 (R and S) tended to maintain family problems as private information despite having close and communicative friendships. By contrast, Dyad 4 (I and B) demonstrated greater openness regarding family issues because of the presence of trust and reciprocal self-disclosure. Emotional factors were evident in feelings of comfort, empathy, and confidence that personal information would be received without judgment. In dyads characterized by emotional safety, self-disclosure occurred at a deeper level and was met with supportive responses. Conversely, negative experiences, anxiety, and concerns about the consequences of disclosure encouraged some individuals to restrict the information they shared. These differences demonstrate that privacy norms and emotional safety are important considerations in the development of students' interpersonal communication.

Theoretically, these findings can be analyzed through the interpersonal communication factors proposed by Corrie (as cited in Chandra et al., 2023), which include knowledge, growth, perception, roles and relationships, values and culture, and emotions. Of these factors, the present study identified four as particularly prominent in the self-disclosure experiences of the informants. The findings can also be explained through Altman and Taylor's (1973) Social Penetration Theory, which conceptualizes interpersonal relationship development as a process involving increasing breadth and depth of personal information based on interactional experience and relational evaluation. In the context of students at SMKN 9 Medan, perceived risk and relationship quality influenced individuals' willingness to engage in more personal conversations. The openness demonstrated by Dyads 3 and 4 highlights the importance of supportive relationships and reciprocal self-disclosure in developing interpersonal trust. Conversely, information restrictions in Dyads 1, 2, and 5 show that relational closeness does not necessarily eliminate individuals' need to retain certain information as private. This interpretation is consistent with DeVito (2016), who identifies openness, empathy, supportiveness, and equality as important dimensions of effective interpersonal communication. Accordingly, self-disclosure should be understood as a relational process shaped by the interaction between individual evaluations, relationship experiences, and the communication responses received.

Variations in self-disclosure can also be understood through Communication Privacy Management Theory developed by Petronio (2002). This theory explains that individuals manage private information through privacy boundaries established on the basis of perceived risks, benefits, relational considerations, and rules concerning information ownership. In this study, some students' decisions not to disclose family-related problems can be interpreted as privacy-protection strategies rather than indicators of poor interpersonal relationship quality. Values and cultural norms contribute to determining which information is considered appropriate to share, while risk perceptions and emotional experiences influence decisions to open or maintain privacy boundaries. These findings extend the understanding offered by Tampubolon and Munir (2025) regarding the relationship between self-disclosure and students' interpersonal communication by demonstrating that openness is associated not only with relational closeness but also with individuals' capacity to manage vulnerability and personal information boundaries. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in integrating the perspectives of social penetration and privacy management to explain why friendship dyads with relatively high levels of communication intensity may exhibit different depths of self-disclosure. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of developing a school communication environment that prioritizes empathy, trust, respect for privacy, and emotional support, enabling students to build healthy interpersonal relationships without feeling pressured to disclose all aspects of their personal experiences.

Impacts of Openness and Self-Restriction among Students

Based on the overall findings from the in-depth interviews covering the First through Sixth Layers among Grade XI-3 Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan, the dynamics of self-disclosure—from the exchange of general information, hobbies, future aspirations, and design criticism to private problems—had tangible effects on students' emotional conditions and friendship patterns within the school environment. One positive impact of extensive openness was the development of psychological safety, or a safe space, and strong emotional support. When informants, particularly those in Dyads 1, 3, and 4, engaged in a high degree of openness, they developed supportive friendship environments amid the demanding workload of vocational Visual Communication Design activities. Interview data show that sharing stories about hobbies, such as playing Roblox or watching films, discussing future plans, and openly giving constructive criticism on design work contributed to a stronger sense of mutual support. This finding is consistent with Tampubolon and Munir (2025), who found that open dialogue and positive reciprocal interaction are associated with stronger interpersonal trust among students. Such openness also fostered greater sensitivity to nonverbal cues, enabling students to recognize changes in facial expression, body language, or periods of silence when a friend was in a negative emotional state. This sensitivity allowed them to provide emotional reassurance and support more effectively.

Conversely, selective self-restriction also produced protective effects. When informants, particularly some members of Dyads 2 and 5, chose to limit disclosure, withhold certain information, or keep family matters and other sensitive issues private, the primary effect was the preservation of social boundaries and self-protection. Interview data indicate that disclosing highly sensitive problems was sometimes considered inappropriate or potentially uncomfortable. Privacy-boundary management therefore served a dual function for some students: it reduced the risk of negative judgment associated with previous friendship experiences while also functioning as an adaptive strategy for maintaining interpersonal harmony within the classroom. This phenomenon is consistent with Fitriani and Andriani (2021), who suggest that adaptive self-regulation and measured information disclosure can help adolescents maintain psychological comfort and reduce the potential for social friction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that self-disclosure in the interpersonal communication of Grade XI-3 Visual Communication Design students at SMKN 9 Medan occurs dynamically and varies in depth across friendship dyads. Analysis of 10 informants organized into five dyads indicates that Dyad 3 (S and Z) and Dyad 4 (I and B) demonstrated deeper levels of openness, characterized by interpersonal trust, reciprocal disclosure of personal information, and the ability to understand one another's emotional states. By contrast, Dyad 1 (W and A), Dyad 2 (N and N), and Dyad 5 (R and S) demonstrated selective openness by maintaining privacy boundaries around certain types of information, particularly family problems and sensitive personal experiences. These self-disclosure processes formed circular communication patterns through reciprocal exchanges of messages and feedback, influenced by four major factors: perception, roles and relationships, values and culture, and emotions. The findings confirm that communication intensity and the duration of a friendship do not necessarily correspond directly with the depth of self-disclosure, as individuals continue to evaluate interpersonal risk, emotional safety, and privacy boundaries when developing relationships. Theoretically, this study extends the application of Social Penetration Theory by showing that interpersonal closeness does not always develop linearly and may involve selective information boundaries. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of fostering empathetic, supportive, and privacy-respecting interpersonal communication within school environments. Given that this study involved only five friendship dyads within a single classroom, the findings are not intended to be generalized to all vocational high school students. Future studies are therefore encouraged to involve participants with more diverse characteristics and educational contexts in order to broaden understanding of adolescent self-disclosure dynamics.

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