

The Influence of Affiliation Needs on Online Self-Disclosure: Understanding Social Motivations Among Emerging Adult Instagram Users

Margaretha Intan Permata Handini^{1*}, Enjang Wahyuningrum²

¹² Universitas Satya Wacana, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: margarethaintanph@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed human interaction, with social media platforms like Instagram becoming central to social affiliation and self-expression. Given Instagram's dominance among young adults, this study examines the relationship between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure. The study employs a quantitative correlational research design with a sample of emerging adults actively using Instagram. Data were collected using validated scales for both variables and analyzed using Spearman's Rho correlation. Results indicate a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.421$, $p < 0.05$), showing that individuals with a higher need for affiliation are more likely to engage in online self-disclosure. The study further finds that the need for affiliation accounts for 19% of the variance in online self-disclosure, highlighting its growing significance in digital behavior. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of social motivation in online interactions and provide practical insights into balancing self-disclosure and privacy in social media usage. Future research is encouraged to explore additional psychological factors influencing online self-disclosure, such as personality traits, loneliness, and peer influence.

Keywords: need for affiliation, online self-disclosure, social media, Instagram, emerging adulthood



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INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally reshaped human interaction and communication. As inherently social beings, humans rely on interactions to share information and fulfill their social needs (Lee et al., 2014). This transformation is largely driven by technological advancements such as smartphones and the internet, enabling real-time global connectivity. Social media, in particular, has emerged as a critical platform for interpersonal and social interactions, enhancing communication accessibility and reshaping social dynamics (Mahendra, 2017).

As of January 2024, global social media users reached 5.04 billion, comprising 62.3% of the world's population (Rizaty & Widodo, 2024). In Indonesia, 49.9% of the population, or approximately 139 million individuals, actively use social media (Annur, 2024). Among these platforms, Instagram stands out as a popular choice, ranking Indonesia fourth globally in user numbers, with approximately 104.8 million users in 2023 (Mahardika, 2019). Notably, Instagram's primary demographic comprises young adults, with 30.8% of users aged 18–24 years and 30.3% aged 25–34 years. This dominance underscores Instagram's role in shaping the online social behavior of early adults.

Early adulthood is a developmental phase marked by significant milestones such as building interpersonal relationships, achieving emotional independence, establishing careers, and forming families (Hurlock, 1990; Nadlyfah & Kustanti, 2018). This stage often involves navigating complex social environments, where platforms like Instagram offer avenues for self-expression and interaction. One prominent form of expression on social media is self-disclosure, defined as the act of voluntarily sharing personal information, emotions, and

experiences with others (Chen et al., 2017; Desjarlais, 2019). This behavior serves not only as a communication tool but also as a mechanism to fulfill social and emotional needs (Leung, 2002).

Self-disclosure on social media, particularly Instagram, involves various dimensions, including depth, honesty, and intention (Leung, 2002; Blau, 2011). It allows individuals to connect with others, share personal experiences, and foster a sense of belonging. However, self-disclosure is not without risks. Overexposure may lead to privacy invasion, social rejection, and vulnerability to cybercrimes (DeVito, 2011; Ramadhan, 2021). On the positive side, effective self-disclosure can enhance interpersonal relationships, social affiliation, and emotional well-being (Abramova et al., 2017; Ratnasari et al., 2021).

The need for affiliation, as described by McClelland (1987), is a fundamental human motivation to form and maintain close interpersonal relationships. This need influences individuals' behavior, including their willingness to engage in self-disclosure (Baron & Byrne, 2016). Research has consistently found positive correlations between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure (Zahra & Kustanti, 2023; Hutauruk, 2022; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Individuals with a high need for affiliation are more likely to engage in frequent and deeper self-disclosure to establish meaningful connections. However, some studies report conflicting results, highlighting the complexity of this relationship (Novera & Fikri, 2020).

Given the growing prevalence of Instagram among young adults and its role in shaping online behavior, this study focuses on exploring the relationship between the need for affiliation and self-disclosure among Instagram users in early adulthood. By addressing gaps in existing research and emphasizing Instagram's unique characteristics, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological and social dynamics influencing self-disclosure behaviors. This investigation is particularly relevant in understanding how young adults navigate social media to fulfill their affiliation needs while managing the risks and benefits of online engagement.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research method to analyze social phenomena in detail based on available data. Specifically, a correlational research design was utilized, which aims to examine the relationship between two or more variables and determine the degree of association between them. According to Sudijono (1997), correlational research is designed to measure the extent of the relationship between variables, providing valuable insights for understanding and developing such relationships. The quantitative correlational approach was selected to explore whether variations in the independent variable (need for affiliation) are associated with changes in the dependent variable (online self-disclosure) (Azwar, 2010).

Research Variables

The research consists of two primary variables: the independent variable (X), which is the need for affiliation, and the dependent variable (Y), which is online self-disclosure. Online self-disclosure refers to the voluntary act of sharing personal information, thoughts, and emotions through digital platforms such as social media. It includes aspects such as the frequency, depth, and intent behind the shared content. To measure this variable, the study

employs the Revised Self-Disclosure Scale (RSDS) developed by Leung (2002), which assesses three key dimensions: depth/intimacy, honesty, and intent. On the other hand, the need for affiliation is defined as an individual's desire to establish and maintain close, meaningful relationships with others. According to McClelland (1961), this need drives individuals to seek acceptance and engage in social interactions. The measurement of this variable is based on a scale adapted from McClelland's framework, which evaluates six key aspects: preference for social interaction, frequency of interactions, desire to be liked and respected, inclination to please others, demonstration of loyalty, and seeking approval.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The population of this study consists of active Instagram users. The sample is specifically drawn from young adults aged 18 to 40 who meet certain criteria, including a minimum education level of senior high school and active Instagram usage for at least the past year. The study employs a voluntary sampling technique, in which participants self-select to take part based on their willingness to participate. This approach ensures that individuals who are genuinely engaged with the platform and willing to share their experiences are included in the research.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Both scales employed a Likert-scale format, allowing participants to indicate their level of agreement with various statements. The Online Self-Disclosure Scale was measured using the Revised Self-Disclosure Scale (RSDS), which consists of nine items covering three dimensions. The first dimension, Depth/Intimacy, refers to the level of intimacy in the shared information, as described by Blau (2011). The second dimension, Honesty, assesses the accuracy, sincerity, and openness of self-disclosure, based on Leung's (2002) framework. The third dimension, Intent, measures an individual's awareness and control during self-disclosure. The RSDS items were designed to capture these dimensions effectively.

Tabel 1. Blueprint for Online Self-Disclosure Scale

Dimension	Indicator	Items	Total Items
Depth/Intimacy	Sharing intimate personal details	1, 3	2
Honesty	Accuracy and sincerity in self-expression	4, 5, 6	3
Intent	Awareness and intentionality of sharing	7, 8, 9	3
Total			9

Tabel 2. Blueprint for Need for Affiliation Scale

Aspect	Indicator	Items	Total Items
Preference for social interaction	Enjoying collaboration and socializing	1–6	6

Aspect	Indicator	Items	Total Items
Frequency of interactions	Regular engagement in social exchanges	7–10	4
Desire to be liked/respected	Seeking attention and recognition	11–16	6
Inclination to please others	Making efforts to please others	19–25	7
Demonstration of loyalty	Showing commitment in relationships	26–29	4
Total			29

The Need for Affiliation Scale was adapted from McClelland's (1961) framework and comprises 29 items that assess six key aspects of affiliation needs. These aspects include Preference for Social Interaction, which reflects enjoyment in collaboration and socializing, and Frequency of Interactions, which measures the regular engagement in social exchanges. Additionally, the scale examines the Desire to Be Liked and Respected, capturing an individual's need for attention and recognition, and Inclination to Please Others, which assesses the tendency to make efforts to satisfy others. The final two aspects are Demonstration of Loyalty, which reflects an individual's commitment in relationships, and Seeking Approval, which evaluates the need for validation from others. This structured approach ensures a comprehensive assessment of both online self-disclosure and the need for affiliation, allowing for in-depth analysis of their relationship.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method in this study involves two main stages: assumption testing and hypothesis testing. Assumption testing includes a normality test, conducted using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in IBM SPSS Statistics 25 to ensure that the data distribution follows a normal pattern. Additionally, a linearity test was performed to verify the linear relationship between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure, with a significance level of 0.05. A p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that the variables are linearly related. For hypothesis testing, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 to assess the significance and strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This methodological approach provides a robust framework for analyzing how the need for affiliation influences online self-disclosure among young adult Instagram users.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistical analysis reveals significant findings regarding the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure among participants. As presented in Table 3, the majority of participants (85.4%) exhibited a high need for affiliation, demonstrating a strong inclination toward forming interpersonal connections. This finding aligns with McClelland's theory, which suggests that early adults tend to prioritize social affiliation as a fundamental psychological need. Furthermore, as shown in Table 4, a substantial proportion of participants (90.7%)

displayed high levels of online self-disclosure. This suggests that Instagram is perceived as a conducive platform for self-expression, allowing individuals to share personal experiences and thoughts openly within a digital social space. These results highlight the role of social media in fulfilling psychological needs related to affiliation and self-expression.

Table 3. Categorization of Need for Affiliation

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$77.33 \leq x$	High	175	85.4%
$38.67 \leq x \leq 77.33$	Medium	30	14.6%
$x \leq 38.67$	Low	0	0%

Table 4. Categorization of Online Self-Disclosure

Interval	Category	Frequency	Percentage
$24 \leq x$	High	186	90.7%
$12 \leq x \leq 24$	Medium	18	8.8%
$x \leq 12$	Low	1	0.5%

Assumption Testing

The normality test results, as presented in Table 5, indicate that the need for affiliation data followed a normal distribution, with a significance value of 0.200 ($p > 0.05$). In contrast, the online self-disclosure data did not meet the normality assumption, as evidenced by a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). Given this non-normal distribution, a non-parametric correlation analysis was deemed necessary for further examination of the relationship between the two variables. Additionally, the linearity test results, shown in Table 6, confirm the presence of a significant linear relationship between need for affiliation and online self-disclosure. The ANOVA test for linearity yielded an F-value of 50.214 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a strong linear association. Furthermore, the deviation from linearity was not significant ($p = 0.110 > 0.05$), suggesting that the relationship between the two variables can be adequately modeled as linear.

Table 5. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	K-S Z	Sig.
Need for Affiliation	86.90	10.136	0.044	0.200
Online Self-Disclosure	31.10	5.935	0.096	0.000

Table 6. ANOVA Table for Linearity

Source	F	Sig.
Linearity	50.214	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	1.319	0.110

Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis testing results, as presented in Table 7, reveal a moderate positive correlation between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure. The Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient (r) was found to be 0.421, with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$).

This indicates that individuals with a higher need for affiliation tend to engage in greater online self-disclosure. The statistical significance of this relationship suggests that the need to establish social connections may be a key factor influencing individuals' willingness to share personal information on online platforms.

Table 7. Correlation Results (Spearman's Rho)

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Need for Affiliation	0.421	0.000
Online Self-Disclosure		

The findings of this study indicate that the proposed hypothesis is supported, demonstrating a significant positive relationship between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure among emerging adult Instagram users. The correlation analysis revealed a relationship between these two variables with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.421$ and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that individuals with a higher need for affiliation tend to exhibit greater levels of online self-disclosure. This result aligns with previous research by Hutaaruk (2022), which confirmed a significant positive association between the need for affiliation and self-disclosure. The correlation coefficient of 0.421 indicates a moderate relationship between these variables, suggesting that the need for affiliation has a substantial contribution in explaining variations in online self-disclosure.

This relationship can be explained by the interactive nature of Instagram, which provides users with various features to fulfill their need for affiliation. These features include sharing photos, videos, stories, and commenting on others' posts, enabling users to engage socially, seek social recognition, and establish emotional connections (Zahra & Kustanti, 2023). Individuals with a high need for affiliation are more likely to utilize these features actively as a means of maintaining social bonds. Furthermore, the very low significance level ($p < 0.05$) strengthens the statistical confidence that the observed relationship is not due to chance but rather represents a consistent pattern among Instagram users in the emerging adulthood stage.

In this study, the need for affiliation was found to contribute 19% to the increase in online self-disclosure. This finding reinforces the study by Zahra and Kustanti (2023), which found that the need for affiliation contributed 11.1% to self-disclosure behavior on social media. The increase in the effective contribution percentage in the present study suggests that the role of the need for affiliation in influencing online self-disclosure is becoming more pronounced. The effective contribution of 19% indicates that the need for affiliation is a fairly important predictor of online self-disclosure, although 81% of the variance remains unexplained by other factors not investigated in this study. These factors may include personality traits, levels of loneliness, existential needs, and situational influences such as social support and peer pressure (Chen et al., 2017).

The increase in effective contribution from 11.1% to 19% over a relatively short period suggests a shift in digital behavior, where Instagram is increasingly regarded as a valid and effective platform for fulfilling the need for affiliation through self-disclosure. This shift may also be associated with the development of increasingly diverse and interactive Instagram features, such as Instagram Stories, Reels, and other engagement tools, which encourage users

to be more open in sharing aspects of their lives. This phenomenon is particularly relevant for emerging adults, who generally have high digital literacy and use social media as an extension of their real-world social interactions (McClelland, 1987).

The results indicate that the level of affiliation need among participants is high, with a percentage of 85.4% and a mean score of 58. According to McClelland's (1987) theory, the need for affiliation is a drive to interact, establish, seek, and maintain interpersonal relationships. The high level of affiliation need reflects the characteristics of the digital generation, which has a strong desire to connect and socialize through digital platforms. Previous studies support these findings by revealing that emerging adults have a higher need for affiliation compared to other age groups, particularly in the context of digital interactions (Hutauruk, 2022). The high percentage (85.4%) suggests that the majority of participants have a strong motivation to build and maintain social relationships, which is then expressed through their online activities on Instagram.

A mean score of 58, which is significantly above the midpoint of the measurement scale, further reinforces the finding that the need for affiliation is a dominant characteristic in this group. Referring to McClelland's concept, individuals with a high need for affiliation tend to exhibit behaviors such as actively seeking social approval, striving to maintain harmonious relationships, avoiding conflict, and being highly sensitive to social acceptance or rejection (Zahra & Kustanti, 2023). In the context of Instagram usage, these characteristics are evident through high posting frequency, actively giving likes and comments, and a tendency to share content that facilitates social interaction. This phenomenon aligns with the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, which is characterized by identity exploration and the formation of meaningful interpersonal relationships (Chen et al., 2017).

Similarly, the level of online self-disclosure among participants was found to be high, with a percentage of 90.7% and a mean score of 18. According to Chen et al. (2017), online self-disclosure refers to the act of instant communication, the dissemination of text or images on websites to convey information and meet social needs in the virtual world. The high level of online self-disclosure suggests that Instagram has become a platform perceived as safe and comfortable for emerging adults to express themselves and build social connections. Several prior studies corroborate this finding by showing that social media, particularly Instagram, has created an environment that encourages self-disclosure as a form of social validation and digital identity formation (Zahra & Kustanti, 2023).

The percentage of 90.7% suggests that nearly all participants exhibit a high tendency to share aspects of their lives on Instagram, ranging from daily activities to more personal thoughts and emotions. A mean score of 18, which is above the scale midpoint, confirms the consistently high level of self-disclosure among participants. This phenomenon can be explained through several theoretical perspectives: First, from a developmental psychology perspective, emerging adulthood is a critical period for identity formation and social validation, where Instagram serves as an ideal platform for expressing and exploring various aspects of the self (McClelland, 1987). Second, from an interpersonal communication perspective, online self-disclosure has advantages over face-to-face communication, such as greater control over shared information, impression management, and a wider audience reach (Chen et al., 2017).

Third, the increasingly diverse Instagram features, such as temporary stories, aesthetic-enhancing filters, and various interactive tools, provide users with a sense of security and encourage greater openness in self-disclosure.

The positive correlation between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure has important implications for understanding social media behavior. Individuals with a high need for affiliation are more vulnerable to oversharing or excessive disclosure of personal information, which may pose privacy risks. Previous studies have identified a relationship between high affiliation needs and oversharing behavior on social media, as well as its impact on users' psychological well-being (Hutauruk, 2022; Zahra & Kustanti, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial for Instagram users, particularly emerging adults, to understand their motivations for using this platform and to maintain a balance between fulfilling their need for affiliation and protecting personal privacy.

Implications for Guidance and Counseling

The findings of this study highlight several implications for guidance and counseling, particularly in assisting young adults in managing their social interactions on digital platforms like Instagram. One of the primary concerns is raising awareness about online self-disclosure and its psychological underpinnings. Counseling professionals should educate individuals on how their need for affiliation influences self-disclosure, enabling them to balance social connectivity and privacy protection (Joinson, 2001). Given the risks of excessive self-disclosure, such as cyberbullying, privacy breaches, and emotional distress, integrating digital literacy and privacy management training into counseling interventions is crucial (Livingstone et al., 2017). These programs should equip individuals with strategies for managing their online presence while fulfilling their social needs in a healthy manner.

Additionally, the positive correlation between the need for affiliation and self-disclosure suggests that individuals with high affiliation needs may be vulnerable to validation dependency and emotional distress when their expectations of online engagement are not met (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). Counselors should assist such individuals in developing offline relationships and engaging in meaningful face-to-face social interactions to mitigate over-reliance on digital validation. Personalized counseling approaches should also be employed, recognizing that different individuals have varying levels of affiliation needs and self-disclosure tendencies. For instance, those with high affiliation needs may require structured interventions that help them cultivate real-world relationships while managing their online behaviors effectively (Chen et al., 2017).

Promoting healthy social media use is another essential implication. Counseling programs should incorporate strategies that encourage self-reflection on online behaviors and help individuals establish personal boundaries regarding their social media interactions (Keles et al., 2020). This can prevent compulsive social media usage, which has been linked to increased anxiety and depression among young adults. Additionally, peer support and social skills training programs can be beneficial, particularly for individuals who rely heavily on digital platforms for socialization. Encouraging face-to-face communication skills can help reduce excessive dependence on social media for social fulfillment and improve interpersonal relationships (Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010).

Finally, future research should explore additional psychological variables that influence self-disclosure, such as personality traits, emotional intelligence, and coping mechanisms. Understanding these factors will allow counselors to refine their interventions for individuals struggling with online overexposure, social anxiety, or loneliness. By integrating these counseling strategies, professionals can support young adults in using social media more effectively, ensuring that their online engagement enhances their psychological well-being rather than compromising their mental health.

CONCLUSION

There is a positive and significant correlation between the need for affiliation and online self-disclosure among emerging adults who use Instagram. Both variables were found to be at a high level, indicating that individuals with a greater need for affiliation tend to engage in higher levels of online self-disclosure, and vice versa. These findings suggest that social media, particularly Instagram, serves as an effective platform for fulfilling social affiliation needs and self-expression among emerging adults. Theoretically, this study contributes to social psychology by providing insights into the relationship between social needs and information-sharing behavior in digital spaces. Furthermore, it enriches the existing academic literature on social media usage from a developmental psychology perspective and offers methodological references for future research in social and digital psychology. The practical implications of this study highlight the importance of individuals maintaining a balance between their need for affiliation and setting boundaries in online self-disclosure to protect their privacy and psychological well-being. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore additional factors influencing online self-disclosure, such as personality traits, levels of loneliness, social validation, and contextual factors that may moderate the relationship between the need for affiliation and self-disclosure in digital environments.

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