PRIVACY MANAGEMENT AND THE CULTURE OF OVERSHARING ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
  	Social media has blurred the boundaries between private and public life, creating new challenges for privacy management among communication students. This study explores how graduate students in communication understand privacy, perceive the impacts of oversharing, and negotiate boundaries in their social media use. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with six graduate students, analyzed through source triangulation and guided by theories of privacy meaning, Communication Privacy Management (CPM), boundary regulation, uses and gratifications, and digital well-being. The findings show that students perceive privacy management not only as data protection but also as a psychological and emotional safeguard. They employ strategies such as maintaining multiple accounts, audience segmentation, deliberate identity construction, and regulating posting frequency. Oversharing fulfills self-expression needs but also generates digital anxiety, social pressure, and concerns over digital footprints. While communication theory enhances reflective awareness, it does not fully counteract the influence of an open digital culture. Overall, privacy management emerges as an ongoing reflective process essential to digital well-being and ethical communication. ***Keywords:*** *understanding privacy management; oversharing; sosial media, master's students, phenomenology; digital communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, advances in communication technology have profoundly transformed the ways people build relationships, interact, and define their personal boundaries. Social media now functions as a public arena where individuals can present themselves, construct identities, and share life experiences openly.

According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2024, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221.5 million, representing nearly an 80% penetration rate. The majority of users are adolescents and young adults, including those enrolled as graduate students.

The high frequency of social media use has inevitably generated various behaviors, both positive and negative, giving rise to the phenomenon known as "oversharing." This term refers to the excessive disclosure of information, whether intentional or unintentional. One of the primary motivations for sharing content on social media is the desire to gain attention, praise, and feedback from others, which in turn enhances personal visibility and popularity (Febriana et al., 2023).

Numerous studies indicate that students often overshare personal information due to motivations such as self-expression, the pursuit of social recognition, pressure to remain visible online, and emotional needs for psychological stimulation. Interestingly, this pattern persists even though students are generally well-educated individuals with knowledge of communication theory, media literacy, and information-sharing ethics. While many are aware of the risks of data misuse and the social consequences of oversharing, they do not always adhere to appropriate data protection boundaries.

Excessive information sharing produces significant consequences. On one hand, it provides space for expression and social networking; on the other, it increases the risks of data misuse, cyberbullying, social comparison, and pressure to maintain curated identities, all of which may negatively affect mental health and digital well-being. For graduate students, these risks can be even more pronounced, as social media functions not only as a personal space but also as a platform for demonstrating professionalism. This condition reflects a gap between theoretical awareness and everyday digital practices.

Although many users understand the risks of data abuse and the psychosocial impacts of oversharing, such awareness does not always translate into self-control in social media interactions. Personal information including emotions, relationships, opinions, and academic or professional activities is frequently disclosed in public digital spaces, increasing vulnerability to social conflict, negative judgment, and psychological pressure. Betty Yel and Mahyuddin K. M. Nasution (2022) emphasize that as access to data and information expands, data protection becomes increasingly

critical. Rapid technological advances and declining costs in information and communication technologies have significantly increased internet accessibility, yet data misuse has also emerged as a major concern, often due to inadequate implementation or insufficient security measures.

The discrepancy between theoretical understanding and everyday digital practice is particularly compelling and can be explored through a phenomenological approach, which allows for an in-depth examination of students' subjective experiences. Unlike more structured methods, phenomenology provides space to explore the meanings individuals assign to their lived experiences (Sriwahyuni & Seprina, 2024). This approach offers a valuable framework for understanding how students conceptualize privacy, manage personal boundaries, and respond to cultural pressures that encourage excessive self-disclosure. This study aims to contribute to digital communication scholarship by elucidating the dynamics of privacy in an era of information openness.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study adopts a social constructivist paradigm. Social constructivism posits that individuals understand the world around them by constructing subjective meanings based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2018, as cited in Sriwahyuni & Seprina, 2024).

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to explore the lived experiences of students in depth. Phenomenological research is a design rooted in philosophy and psychology in which researchers examine individuals' experiences related to the phenomena they encounter. This descriptive process enables researchers to identify the core essence of experiences shared by individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon. The approach is grounded in a strong and specific philosophical foundation and typically involves in-depth interviews (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2018, in Sriwahyuni & Seprina, 2024). Six participants were selected based on the following criteria: master's students in communication studies, active users of social media, and individuals willing to share their personal experiences related to digital data protection.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted in a flexible yet structured manner, guided by established research protocols. Data analysis was carried out in several stages. First, interviews were transcribed and reread; next, the data were condensed, key themes were identified, and source triangulation was applied. Referring to Alfansyur and Andarusni (2020) as cited in Susanto et al. (2023), source triangulation is defined as a process of verifying information obtained from multiple informants. This process involves comparing data gathered during the study with information from different sources or participants, thereby enhancing data credibility.

Triangulation was conducted by comparing perspectives across different generations, examining the consistency of experiences among participants, and linking these experiences to four main theoretical frameworks: communication-based data privacy management, the boundary between private and public domains, uses and gratifications theory, and digital well-being. Phenomenological interpretation was then applied to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings underlying students' strategies for information exchange and digital data protection.

3.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Privacy Management on Social Media

Privacy in the context of social media emerges as a fundamental concept shaping how individuals manage, select, and protect personal information within digital spaces. The findings indicate that participants do not perceive privacy merely as a technical effort to conceal data, but rather as a reflective capacity to control self-exposure in the digital public sphere. In this sense, privacy is understood as a selective, contextual, and strategic communication process.

Table 1. Meaning of Informant Privacy Management

Informan	Meaning of Privacy	Privacy Management
Informan 1	Privacy as information control and prevention of overexposure.	Weighing social consequences and avoiding sensitive content.

Informan 2	Privacy as self-protection from public curiosity and the risk of data misuse.	Using multiple accounts and limiting emotional information.
Informan 3	Privacy as strict safeguards over sensitive data and personal life.	Avoiding personal posts and deactivating accounts when unstable.
Informan 4	Privacy as identity protection from misuse.	Locking accounts and curating photo content.
Informan 5	Privacy as a dynamic concept based on risk assessment.	Sharing safe information and tailoring content to social responses.
Informan 6	Privacy as protection of sensitive data.	Filtering audiences and avoiding risky details.

As summarized in Table 1, participants conceptualize privacy as control over sensitive information, identity protection, and a preventive mechanism against unwanted social consequences. Informant 1, for instance, emphasized the importance of anticipating social impacts before posting content, stating that they rarely upload anything because they constantly consider potential consequences. This reflects a heightened awareness of audiences and public interpretation.

Digital risk constitutes a central dimension in participants' understanding of privacy. Informant 2 explicitly associated privacy with concerns over technological misuse, particularly AI-based image manipulation. This concern reinforces the notion that privacy is no longer solely a personal issue, but also a form of protection against structural risks embedded in the digital ecosystem.

Privacy was also found to be dynamic and situational, closely influenced by emotional conditions. Informant 3 reported temporarily deactivating social media accounts during periods of emotional instability to avoid impulsive sharing. This finding highlights that privacy management functions not only as information control but also as a mechanism of emotional regulation.

Conceptually, these findings align with existing literature that frames privacy as an active practice of public image construction and identity consistency. Privacy operates across multiple levels, including safeguarding sensitive data, managing emotions, and anticipating social responses. Accordingly, digital privacy should be

understood not as a purely technical matter, but as a sustained communication strategy within a high-risk digital environment.

Application of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory

The analysis reveals that participants consistently apply the core principles of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, namely ownership, control, and boundary rules. Personal information is perceived as an individual asset, and access to it is deliberately regulated.

Table 2. Application of CPM Principles by Informants

Informan	Ownership of Information	Access Control	Limit Rules
Informan 1	Personal data is a vital asset.	Strict content selection, risk assessment before posting, use of private and second account features.	Don't post sensitive content.
Informan 2	Emotional information carries high privacy value.	Account segmentation, using four accounts and the close friends feature.	Only share with close groups.
Informan 3	Personal information must be protected.	Avoiding personal content, strictly managing audiences.	Archive, postpone, and share posts only with people you know well.
Informan 4	Photos/identity are high risk.	Locking accounts, strictly selecting based on risk, and not exploring technical features too much.	Avoid content that could trigger comments.
Informan 5	Digital identity is formed from uploads.	Reducing frequency, using a three-account system.	Check for public appropriateness.
Informan 6	Personal identity must be secure.	Filtering audiences and content.	Only share safe content.

As shown in Table 2, participants employed diverse access-control strategies, including multiple accounts, close friends features, content archiving, and temporary disengagement from social media. Informant 2, for example, articulated ownership of emotional information by distributing content across different accounts according to audience proximity. This practice illustrates active negotiation over information ownership and dissemination.

Boundary rules emerged through internal negotiations between the desire for self-disclosure and the need for self-protection. Informant 4 emphasized that past negative experiences, such as potential conflict or public misinterpretation, motivated them to withhold highly personal content. This indicates that privacy rules are not static but evolve through lived experiences.

Boundary turbulence was also evident, particularly when unexpected virality occurred. One informant described how a post unexpectedly went viral, prompting stricter privacy rules afterward. This aligns with CPM theory, which posits that boundary violations often lead to the reinforcement of privacy regulations.

Overall, participants' application of CPM demonstrates that privacy on social media is adaptive and responsive, shaped by personal experiences, platform risks, and emotional needs. CPM operates as a dynamic framework enabling individuals to recalibrate privacy strategies as social and digital contexts change.

Negotiating the Private–Public Boundary

The boundary between private and public life on social media is not fixed but continuously renegotiated. Participants determined these boundaries based on information sensitivity, audience proximity, and psychological conditions, as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Private–Public Boundary

Informan	Private–Public Boundary	Management Strategy
Informan 1	Sort content based on information sensitivity.	Avoid personal details and reassess the meaning of posts.
Informan 2	Boundaries are determined by audience familiarity.	Use multiple accounts for segmentation, avoid real-time posting, and limit content about achievements.
Informan 3	Boundaries are influenced by emotional states.	Deactivate accounts and archive posts; don't share family conflicts, only light-hearted content.
Informan 4	Set boundaries to avoid negative comments.	Private accounts and follower selection: Real life and online life are not much different, but limit the intensity of posting.
Informan 5	Boundaries are based on identity risk assessment.	Keep posting frequency to a minimum; don't post about conflicts.

Informan 6	Assess the appropriateness of content for the public.	Filter your audience and minimize personal details; share private information in restricted spaces or closed groups.

Audience segmentation emerged as a key strategy in maintaining private–public boundaries. Informant 2 explicitly preferred posting on secondary accounts due to perceived safety and familiarity of the audience. Meanwhile, Informant 3 adjusted boundaries according to emotional states, choosing to deactivate accounts during periods of overthinking.

These findings indicate that private–public boundaries are not merely technical constructs but function as mechanisms for self-management and digital identity regulation. Practices such as content archiving, audience restriction, and blocking represent responses to context collapse, where diverse social groups converge in a single digital space. Thus, boundary-setting serves as a psychological safe space that enables individuals to manage self-presentation according to situational and emotional demands. The private public divide becomes a crucial tool for balancing openness and self-protection.

Sharing Motivation from a Uses and Gratifications Perspective

Analysis of sharing motivations shows a shift toward predominantly intrinsic needs. As presented in Table 4, participants' motivations were less driven by social validation and increasingly oriented toward self-expression, documentation, creativity, and personal satisfaction. Informant 1's statement that they no longer prioritize likes illustrates a transition from external to internal gratification. Similarly, Informant 3 emphasized pride in the creative process rather than audience response.

Table 4. Motivation to Share Content

Informan	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation
Informan 1	Authentic self-expression, aesthetics, and documentation.	Social validation isn't a priority, but it does boost self-confidence.
Informan 2	Emotional release, documentation, and insight sharing.	Likes aren't particularly important, and social validation declines with age.

Informan 3	Pride in the creative process, sharing humorous and engaging content, and fandoms/hobbies.	With minimal external motivation, validation isn't particularly important.
Informan 4	Desire to entertain audiences and seek information.	Validation is situational.
Informan 5	Sharing relevant information, documentation, self-expression, and emotional support.	Validation is perceived as affirming.
Informan 6	Sharing educational knowledge, documentation, and seeking entertainment.	The number of likes has a positive effect.

These findings reinforce the Uses and Gratifications framework, which conceptualizes users as active and reflective agents in shaping their communication goals. However, platform structures and aesthetic norms continue to exert subtle influence on sharing decisions. Therefore, sharing behavior emerges from an interaction between individual needs and digital environmental expectations.

Impacts on Digital Well-Being

Participants' digital well-being was significantly affected by performative pressure, social comparison, and fear of public judgment. As summarized in Table 5, post-upload anxiety, overthinking, and concern over negative feedback were common experiences.

Table 5. The Impact of Digital Wellbeing

Informan	Psychological Impact	Recovery Strategy
Informan 1	Overthinking audience reactions can lead to mental stress and anxiety.	Uploading safe and controlled content, deactivating accounts or archiving content.
Informan 2	Anxiety about photo misuse, social pressure, and fear of comments.	Audience restrictions, frequently deleting/archiving posts.
Informan 3	Fear of public judgment makes it very easy to overthink.	Deactivating accounts and archiving content.
Informan 4	I used to be very influenced by likes, but now I'm more emotionally stable.	Reducing app usage.
Informan 5	Pressure to choose the right content, post-upload anxiety.	Reducing upload frequency, taking offline activities for balance.
Informan 6	Anxiety at the start of use, fear of negative comments.	Strictly curate content.

Statements from Informant 3 and reflections on social comparison highlight how social media exposure intensifies psychological pressure. To cope with these challenges, participants adopted digital self-care strategies, such as reducing posting frequency, limiting audience access, and temporarily disengaging from platforms. These practices demonstrate awareness that emotional well-being is integral to privacy and identity management. Consequently, digital well-being emerges as the outcome of an interaction between individuals' reflective capacities and platform design.

The Influence of Communication Theory Knowledge

Theoretical knowledge of communication was found to significantly enhance participants' reflective abilities in managing digital risks and adopting more ethical privacy practices. As shown in Table 6, understanding communication ethics, digital identity construction, and data risks contributed to more selective and responsible online behavior.

Table 6. The Influence of Communication Theory Knowledge

Informan	New Understanding	Impact on Behavior
Informan 1	Aware of digital risks.	Be more critical in your posts, avoid oversharing, and understand the importance of self-control.
Informan 2	Understand the structure of risk.	Be more empathetic, selective, and understand digital ethics.
Informan 3	Aware of the dangers of oversharing.	Evaluate content before sharing, become more aware of the dangers of digital crime, and understand the purpose of communication.
Informan 4	Understand public-private ethics.	Strictly select reposts and be wiser because you understand the permanence of your digital footprint.
Informan 5	Understand the construction of digital identity.	Have strong digital literacy and understand privacy ethics.
Informan 6	Understand the risks of sensitive data.	Focus on educational content, be more careful when sharing information, and avoid spreading misinformation.

Participants reported that learning communication theory helped them discern what is appropriate to share, indicating that theoretical literacy functions as a cognitive filter in digital practice. Communication theory not only shapes content

production but also strengthens ethical judgment in information consumption and dissemination. Thus, communication theory serves as a critical resource for fostering digital resilience, enabling individuals to develop reflective, ethical, and sustainable privacy practices on social media.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that digital privacy management among graduate students in Communication Studies is a reflective, dynamic, and context-dependent process. Based on a phenomenological analysis of six participants, privacy is understood not merely as technical data protection but as a psychological and emotional space that supports individual security, well-being, and identity stability in digital environments. Data protection is practiced as a form of control over self-presentation in the public digital sphere and is continuously negotiated in relation to users' emotional experiences, social relationships, and personal circumstances.

The findings also demonstrate that excessive personal information sharing produces ambivalent effects. Social media serves as a space for self-expression, life documentation, and fulfillment of social and emotional needs; however, excessive openness generates digital anxiety, overthinking, social evaluation pressure, and concerns regarding data misuse and digital footprints. These outcomes indicate that students' digital well-being largely depends on their ability to regulate private–public boundaries and manage self-presentation reflectively.

Furthermore, knowledge of communication theory plays a significant role in shaping students' awareness and practices of digital privacy. Understanding Communication Privacy Management, private–public boundary negotiation, digital communication ethics, and identity construction enhances students' capacity to evaluate communicative risks and develop more selective and critical data protection strategies. Nevertheless, theoretical understanding does not entirely eliminate the impulse to overshare; rather, it functions as a reflective tool to control and mitigate its effects. Overall, the findings confirm that digital privacy is an ongoing process resulting from the interaction between individual experiences, sharing motivations, boundary management, and digital well-being within the complex social media ecosystem.

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