

THE IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH CONTENT EXPOSURE ON INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS' SELF-DISCLOSURE

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Abstract. Mental health remains a taboo subject in many countries, including Indonesia, where stigma prevents individuals from seeking help. This negative perception often leads individuals with mental health issues to conceal their struggles, making self-disclosure a challenging decision. However, social media provides a platform for individuals to share personal experiences, emotions, and daily activities. This phenomenon is evident on Instagram, particularly on the @ibunda.id account, where users actively engage by commenting or seeking online consultations regarding their mental health. This study examines the influence of mental health content exposure on followers' self-disclosure, utilizing the S-O-R theory. A quantitative approach was adopted, employing simple random sampling with 272 respondents. Data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 65 questions across three sections based on the study variables. Findings indicate that the followers are predominantly young adults and that mental health content exposure positively influences their willingness to self-disclose. These results highlight the potential of social media as an effective tool in encouraging individuals to discuss their mental health openly.

Keywords: *self-disclosure, social media engagement, mental health content exposure, instagram, S-O-R theory*

Introduction

Mental health remains a sensitive and often taboo subject in many societies, including Indonesia. The way mental health issues are perceived and constructed by society significantly influences public attitudes and behaviors toward individuals experiencing such challenges. Research has shown that mental health stigma is pervasive, resulting in adverse consequences for those affected (Hartini et al., 2018). Negative societal perceptions often associate mental health problems with supernatural causes, weak faith, or moral failings (Subu et al., 2021). Consequently, individuals with mental health disorders are frequently labeled as "crazy," feared, and subjected to discrimination, which prevents them from seeking the necessary support and treatment (Ran et al., 2018). The stigma surrounding mental illness contributes to social isolation, rejection, and exclusion from social and professional circles (Han et al., 2017). Media portrayals often reinforce these misconceptions, depicting individuals with mental health conditions as violent or incompetent (Oexle et al., 2017). As a result, those affected experience barriers to employment, financial instability, and diminished life satisfaction (Axén et al., 2020). The reluctance to disclose mental health struggles further exacerbates these challenges, as individuals fear discrimination and negative societal reactions (Ahad et al., 2023). However, research suggests that hiding mental health issues can lead to additional psychological distress and limited access to social support (Subu et al., 2021).

Despite the challenges posed by mental health stigma, the rise of digital communication platforms presents new opportunities for self-expression and support. Social media enables individuals to share personal experiences and seek advice, fostering a sense of community and understanding. Platforms like Instagram have become instrumental in facilitating discussions on mental health, with dedicated pages offering resources, counselling, and peer support. In Indonesia, accounts such as @ibunda.id actively engage audiences through educational content, testimonials, and online consultations, contributing to increased mental health awareness. This study examines the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in shaping self-disclosure behavior among individuals with mental health concerns. Guided by the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, the research explores how exposure to mental health-related content influences individuals' willingness to disclose their struggles online. Understanding these dynamics is crucial in addressing stigma-related barriers and enhancing digital mental health interventions. By investigating the relationship between social media engagement and self-disclosure, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on mental health communication in digital spaces. The findings will provide insights into how social media can be leveraged to promote mental well-being, reduce stigma, and encourage help-seeking behaviors. Through this exploration, the research seeks to inform both scholars and practitioners on effective strategies for fostering a more inclusive and supportive online environment for mental health discussions.

Literature review

Self-disclosure on social networking sites

Researchers have explored whether social networking sites (SNSs) serve as alternative platforms for self-disclosure and fostering intimacy (Luo and Hancock, 2020). Some studies suggest that self-disclosure is more prominent online than offline (Peter and Valkenburg, 2006; McKenna and Bargh, 2000). However, Nguyen and Nguyen (2012) found that self-disclosure varies depending on contextual factors, including the nature of relationships, communication medium, and situational context. Several theories, including the social presence theory (Short et al., 1976), the lack of social context cues hypothesis (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986), and the hyper-personal model of social identity (Walther, 1996), help explain why self-disclosure is enhanced online. Due to the growing popularity of SNSs, technology-based interventions have been introduced to support individuals with social anxiety (Weidman et al., 2012). SNSs provide a communication platform for socially anxious individuals who might otherwise struggle with face-to-face interactions (Yin et al., 2022). Studies indicate that online self-disclosure is influenced by perceived benefits and risks, individual differences, and social influence (Schouten et al., 2007). Joinson and Paine (2012) observed that self-disclosure is higher in computer-mediated communication due to visual anonymity and increased self-awareness. Instagram, a widely used photo-sharing application, facilitates self-disclosure through features like Stories, Live Videos, and the ability to comment and engage with content (Arifin, 2015). Research has shown that Instagram is not only a medium for networking but also for business promotion (Kusyanti and Safitri, 2016). Users engage in self-expression and social interaction, reinforcing the role of social networking sites as tools for maintaining relationships (Alkandari et al., 2016).

However, self-disclosure can blur the lines between private and public spaces (Robinson, 2017), leading to concerns about personal boundaries.

Self-disclosure has been linked to mental health benefits, including improved emotional well-being and social support (Gainau, 2009). Online platforms provide spaces for individuals to discuss sensitive topics, such as mental health, with reduced fear of stigma. However, some online communities may also reinforce harmful behaviors (Haas et al., 2011). Social media allows for both positive and negative influences in self-disclosure, with some users leveraging anonymity to share personal struggles while others encounter judgment or misinformation (Pavalanathan and De Choudhury, 2015). Visual-based self-disclosure on Instagram differs from text-based platforms, offering new dimensions for mental health expression (Hu et al., 2014). Previous studies suggest that self-disclosure enhances trust and relationships, yet its implications vary across different social settings (McKenna and Bargh, 2000; Rotenberg and Kmill, 1992). Future research should further examine the psychological and social consequences of self-disclosure on SNSs, particularly in image-driven platforms like Instagram.

Media and mental health

The relationship between media and mental health has been widely explored, with studies emphasizing the role of communication in shaping mental well-being. A study highlights the importance of social support in reducing stress and anxiety, emphasizing that media can serve as a channel for fostering social connections. Health communication, as defined by Notoatmodjo (2018) involves systematically influencing mental health behavior through interpersonal and mass communication, encompassing disease prevention, medical treatment procedures, and health promotion. The evolution of mental health as a field traces back to the 19th century, gaining momentum in the mid-20th century alongside scientific advancements (Ramayulis, 2002). Mental health encompasses harmony in life, problem-solving abilities, and emotional well-being (Daradjat, 2002), requiring interdisciplinary insights from psychology, medicine, sociology, and religion (Gautam et al., 2024). Mental hygiene principles involve self-respect, decision-making, and daily life management (Joseph, 2011). Contemporary media, especially digital platforms, play a crucial role in mental health communication. Telemedicine and internet-based strategies, utilizing mobile devices and social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, offer new possibilities for mental health support (Smit and Wandel, 2006). The organization endorses the internet as a powerful tool for disseminating health information and fostering interaction among individuals, communities, and professionals. The effectiveness of media interventions lies in fostering participatory engagement. Ruitter et al. (2001) underscores the importance of respectful, audience-centered content, advocating for storytelling as a foundation for impactful mental health communication. Murray (2008) highlights the media's potential to promote well-being and reduce mental health stigma through collaborative efforts between citizens, professionals, and media outlets.

Globally, diverse media strategies have addressed mental health challenges. Edutainment, blending entertainment with education, has proven effective in various contexts. Latin American telenovelas, integrating social messages since the 1960s, exemplify this approach (Singhal et al., 2004). South Africa's "Soul City" series focused on HIV prevention, showcasing the power of media-driven behavioral change (Usdin et al., 2004). Similarly, Sanders et al. (2000) demonstrated the effectiveness of mixed-

media interventions in enhancing parenting practices and reducing child abuse. Mass media interventions have improved mental health literacy, reduced stigma, and promoted empathy across cultures (Twardzicki, 2008; Finkelstein and Lapshin, 2007). These interventions have effectively addressed issues like aggression, depression, and suicide, as seen in North America, Africa, and Asia. Sanders' Triple P program, with over 40 controlled trials, showed positive outcomes in reducing parental stress and improving child behavior (De Graaf et al., 2008). In conclusion, media's integration with mental health initiatives holds immense promise. By promoting participatory engagement and leveraging diverse platforms, media can enhance mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and foster global collaboration. The rapid growth of mobile and internet communication further expands access to mental health care, making media a vital tool for advancing well-being worldwide.

Relationship between content on mental health and self disclosure

The Instagram account @ibunda.id is a platform that provides information about mental health, considered useful for the people of Indonesia. In 2021, @ibunda.id was chosen as the 1st Winner of the Healthy Impact Accelerator 2021, held by Johnson & Johnson with Instellar ID. Additionally, it was selected as the 1st Winner of the Indonesian Local Round of She Loves Tech Global Stage Indonesia in 2021. With these awards, @ibunda.id has become an interactive and responsive medium for society's information needs, utilizing social media not just to reach a wide audience but also to engage actively with the community. During the Covid-19 pandemic, social media played a crucial role in improving mental health for individuals with mental health disabilities by providing support from others facing similar challenges. Furthermore, online consulting support services were widely used to maintain mental health. As a mental health service platform, Instagram @ibunda.id is expected to act swiftly in providing up-to-date information and responding to community participation. Consistently updating content and engaging with followers enhances public trust and strengthens relationships with the community. @Ibunda.id is a digital-based consulting platform designed to be a supportive space for individuals to share their problems and concerns. The platform provides solutions to everyday issues such as love, family, friendships, and personal struggles. Additionally, Ibunda.id actively publishes articles related to these daily challenges. It operates under a start-up company called Amplified, established in 2015. The platform continuously updates content through social media by posting articles, quotes, short videos, interactive animations, and photos on Instagram. The strategic use of Instagram is intended to attract audiences to its consulting services and assist them in overcoming personal difficulties. Self-disclosure refers to the ability to communicate and share intimate personal feelings and experiences (Cozby, 1973). It is increasingly conducted through online social networking in addition to offline behaviors (Vijayakumar and Pfeifer, 2020). Self-disclosure can take the form of verbal or written emotional expression, where personal experiences are articulated into words and communicated to others via written or spoken channels (Gonsalves et al., 2023). Studies have documented both the benefits and potential harms of disclosing personal experiences related to mental health.

The positive impacts for those who disclose include reduced self-stigma (Goodwin et al., 2021; Corrigan, 2012), improved quality of life, personal empowerment (Corrigan and Shapiro, 2010), and enhanced social support (Corrigan and Shapiro, 2010). From the recipients' perspective, knowing someone or having contact with an individual with

a mental health issue has been shown to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behaviors (Corrigan, 2012). Amid ongoing global debates on social media's impact on mental health (Naslund et al., 2020), especially among young people, it is becoming increasingly important to assess how social media influences mental health disclosure. Additionally, it is necessary to explore how social media can be leveraged to achieve positive outcomes while mitigating potential adverse effects. As some traditional mental health services, such as therapy sessions and counseling, became unavailable during the pandemic, younger individuals turned to Instagram for support. On this platform, influencers played a crucial role in offering guidance and emotional support, providing a lifeline to those facing isolation. Social media fosters various forms of peer support, transforming social networks into spaces where individuals can both provide and receive encouragement, advice, and reassurance.

Application of the S-O-R model

The theoretical foundation of this study is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory, which originates from psychology and has since been applied to communication studies. This adaptation is based on the shared focus of both disciplines on human behavior, attitudes, opinions, and effects (McQuail, 1989). The theory was initially introduced by psychologists such as Pavlov, Skinner, and Hull, who demonstrated that specific stimuli could elicit specific reactions from individuals. The S-O-R model conceptualizes communication as a process where a stimulus (S) influences an organism (O), resulting in a response (R). In the context of mass media, this model suggests that media messages have a direct, immediate, and strong effect on audiences. The relationship between these elements underscores the media's capacity to act as a powerful stimulus, prompting significant responses from communicants. This has led to the model being likened to a 'hypodermic needle', emphasizing the media's ability to inject information directly into audiences and generate predictable reactions. In this study, the S-O-R framework in *Figure 1* is applied to analyze the role of mental health content shared by @ibunda.id, a social media account. The elements of the model are defined as follows: (1) Stimulus (S): The mental health messages and content posted by @ibunda.id.; (2) Organism (O): The followers of @ibunda.id who engage with the content; (3) Response (R): The self-disclosure behavior exhibited by the followers after engaging with the content. By incorporating these aspects, this study examines how social media engagement, influenced by the S-O-R model, encourages users to disclose personal experiences and emotions in response to mental health messaging.

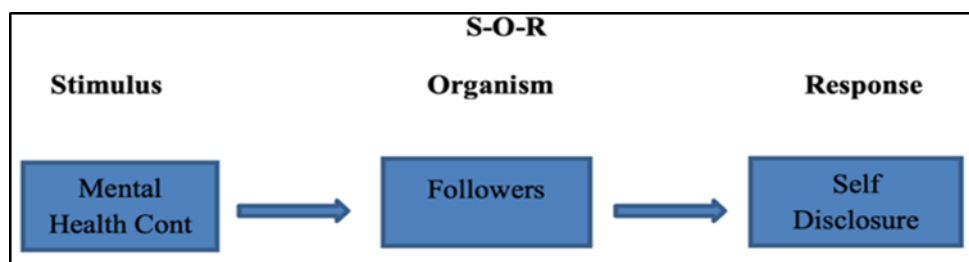


Figure 1. Model of the effect of mental health content exposure on Instagram towards its followers' self-disclosure.

Materials and Methods

A research design serves as a strategy for conducting a study, encompassing general hypotheses and specific methods for data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). It also functions as a systematic approach to gathering and analyzing information to address research questions (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This study employs a quantitative approach, which, according to Sugiyono (2017), is rooted in positivist philosophy and is used to examine a specific population or sample. Data collection is conducted using research instruments, and statistical or quantitative analysis is employed to test predefined hypotheses. This approach is particularly suited to assessing the impact of mental health content exposure on Instagram (@ibunda.id) on followers' self-disclosure. Furthermore, it facilitates the explanation and examination of relationships between variables, the testing of theories, and the development of predictive generalizations. To test the applicability of the S-O-R theory, this study employs a regression correlation method to explore the relationships between variables and measure the extent to which one variable influences another. Questionnaires are used as the primary data collection instrument, allowing the researcher to gather responses directly from participants.

Ibunda.id is a social media platform dedicated to increasing awareness of mental health and well-being in Indonesia through psychological and technological innovations. It aims to create a positive impact on society by providing accessible mental health resources. To date, Ibunda.id has assisted over 1,019,508 individuals through its services. The brand is known for its innovative, collaborative, and impactful personality, fostering a supportive and engaging community. Mental health self-disclosure plays a crucial role in emotional well-being. This study aims to examine whether exposure to mental health-related content on Instagram (independent variable, X) influences followers' self-disclosure behavior (dependent variable, Y). Ibunda.id actively shares mental health content through Instagram, including articles, quotes, short videos, interactive animations, and images. This content is designed to engage audiences and encourage them to seek psychological consultation services. The high level of engagement, including followers sharing their mental health concerns in comment sections and acknowledging content relevance, highlights the potential influence of social media exposure on self-disclosure. Moreover, followers receive practical advice on managing emotions and recognizing early signs of stress. Given the significant engagement and openness observed among followers of Ibunda.id, this research seeks to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between exposure to mental health content and followers' self-disclosure. Understanding this relationship is critical, as self-disclosure has been recognized in previous studies as a key factor in maintaining mental well-being.

Results and Discussion

A total of 272 respondents, all followers of @ibunda.id, participated in this study (Table 1). The demographic profile captured gender, age, education, and Instagram usage. The sample was predominantly female (69.1%), with males accounting for 30.9%. In terms of age, the largest segment was 21–25 years (51.8%), followed by 26–30 years (39.3%) and 31–35 years (8.8%). No respondents were recorded in the 36–40 or 40 and above categories, highlighting the platform's primary engagement with younger users. Educational background revealed that most respondents held a Master's

degree (56.6%), while 30.5% had a Bachelor's degree and 12.9% an SPM/O-Level qualification. This distribution suggests that @ibunda.id predominantly attracts a well-educated audience, a factor that may influence both content engagement and willingness to disclose personal experiences online. With respect to Instagram usage, the majority reported more than four years of experience (65.4%), reflecting sustained platform loyalty. Smaller proportions had used Instagram for less than one year (17.3%) or three to four years (13.2%), while only 4.0% fell into the one to two-year category. Taken together, these findings indicate that @ibunda.id primarily engages young, female, and highly educated long-term users, suggesting that its digital health initiatives resonate most strongly with this demographic group.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents (N=272).

Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Female	188	69.1
Male	84	30.9
21–25 years	141	51.8
26–30 years	107	39.3
31–35 years	24	8.8
36–40 years	0	0.0
40 years and above	0	0.0
Master's Degree	154	56.6
Bachelor's Degree	83	30.5
SPM / O-Level	35	12.9
< 1 year	47	17.3
1–2 years	11	4.0
3–4 years	36	13.2
> 4 years	178	65.4

The comparative analysis of Mental Health Content Exposure (X) and Self-Disclosure (Y) in *Table 2* demonstrates that although respondents acknowledge the credibility and appeal of @ibunda.id's content, their overall engagement remains cautious. The mean scores for both variables cluster around the "unsure" category, with Exposure (M=2.86) indicating greater hesitation compared to Self-Disclosure (M=3.14). This suggests that while respondents recognize the accuracy and visual quality of the content, such positive perceptions do not consistently translate into behavioral engagement, including frequent visits, sharing, or active participation. By contrast, the Self-Disclosure variable reveals stronger agreement in areas such as honesty, sharing beneficial experiences, and awareness of potential consequences. This pattern indicates that although respondents are willing to disclose in principle, their openness remains highly selective. The prevalence of "unsure" responses across 25 items reflects a deliberate boundary-setting process in which individuals weigh the potential benefits of openness against risks such as stigma, misinterpretation, or privacy concerns. These findings correspond with self-disclosure and uncertainty reduction theories, which posit that individuals evaluate risks before revealing personal information in mediated contexts. The mixed engagement patterns also support research on media credibility, where content accuracy and design enhance trust but may not guarantee deeper interaction. Taken together, the results suggest that mental health platforms like @ibunda.id foster trust and partial openness but remain constrained by persistent

stigma, underscoring the necessity of stronger trust-building mechanisms to encourage sustained digital engagement.

Table 2. *Mental health content exposure variables (X) and self-disclosure (Y).*

Variable	Mean	S.D.
Mental Health Content Exposure (X)	2.86	1.34
Self-Disclosure (Y)	3.14	0.85

The findings of this study in *Table 3* indicate a significant positive influence between Mental Health Content Exposure and Self-Disclosure on the Instagram account @ibunda.id, with a coefficient value of 0.766, exceeding the r-table value of 0.1185, and a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$. These results support the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), showing that 58.7% of Self-Disclosure on @ibunda.id is influenced by Mental Health Content Exposure, while 41.3% is attributed to other factors not explored in this study. This aligns with Social Information Processing Theory, which posits that relationship development in computer-mediated communication environments occurs through textual exchanges, gradually fostering impressions and interpersonal connections (Walther, 1996). The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of @ibunda.id followers belong to the early adulthood phase, with the highest concentration of respondents aged 21-25 years (51.8%), followed by those aged 26-30 years (39.3%). This finding is consistent with previous research by Deska and Yuliana (2018), which also found that Ibunda.id users are predominantly aged 21-30 years. Early adulthood is characterized as a transitional period marked by a shift from dependence to independence, encompassing personal growth, exploration, and emotional adjustment (Santrock, 2011). Individuals at this stage tend to seek emotional support and social connection, which may explain their engagement with mental health content and willingness to disclose personal experiences in supportive online environments. The instrument trials conducted prior to data collection confirmed the validity and reliability of the measurement tools. The Mental Health Content Exposure variable consisted of 3 indicators with 35 items, of which 30 were validated. Similarly, the Self-Disclosure variable comprised 5 indicators with 35 items, of which 30 were valid.

Table 3. *Hypothesis testing results.*

Variables	r-value	r-table (df = 270, $\alpha = 0.05$)	p-value	Conclusion
Mental Health Content Exposure → Self-Disclosure	0.766	0.1185	0.000	Significant positive influence ($r > r\text{-table}, p < 0.05$)

The reliability analysis presented in *Table 4* confirms the strong internal consistency of the instruments used in this study. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were exceptionally high for both constructs: 0.974 for Mental Health Content Exposure and 0.958 for Self-Disclosure, each surpassing the conventional threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability. These results indicate that the items within each construct consistently captured the intended dimensions, ensuring the robustness of subsequent statistical analysis. High reliability is particularly significant in studies of digital health behavior, where constructs such as exposure and self-disclosure are multidimensional and context-sensitive. The validated items in this study not only demonstrated consistency but also reflected the nuanced ways in which respondents interpret and respond to mental health content on social media. Such stability strengthens confidence in the conclusions drawn

regarding the relationship between exposure and disclosure. These findings also resonate with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which highlights the role of message credibility, medium appropriateness, and audience characteristics in shaping communicative responses (Fisher, 2002). In the context of @ibunda.id, the high reliability underscores the platform’s ability to deliver consistent stimuli through accurate, empathetic, and visually engaging content. By fostering a predictable environment, the platform encourages users to feel secure in sharing experiences, thereby reinforcing patterns of cautious but meaningful engagement observed in this study.

Table 4. Reliability test results.

Variable	Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha)	Interpretation
Mental Health Content Exposure	0.974	Excellent reliability
Self-Disclosure	0.958	Excellent reliability

The respondents’ answers to the questionnaire formed the basis of the analysis presented in this chapter. Their responses, combined with experiences as followers of the Instagram account @ibunda.id, provided valuable insights into patterns of exposure to mental health content and practices of self-disclosure. Variations in responses were influenced by several factors, including the frequency of online consultations, familiarity with diverse forms of digital content, and the degree of trust cultivated within the online community. These differences reveal the nuanced ways in which individuals engage with mental health resources in mediated environments. After systematically analyzing the evidence, the findings were organized into five overarching themes, as illustrated in *Figure 2*. These themes synthesize patterns of behavior and perception, offering a structured understanding of how users balance trust, credibility, and self-protection when engaging with online mental health platforms. The thematic categorization not only highlights users’ cautious yet constructive participation but also underscores the interplay between content design, audience characteristics, and broader social influences. By framing the results in this manner, the study extends current knowledge on digital health communication and offers a foundation for future research into the dynamics of trust-building and selective openness in online mental health communities.

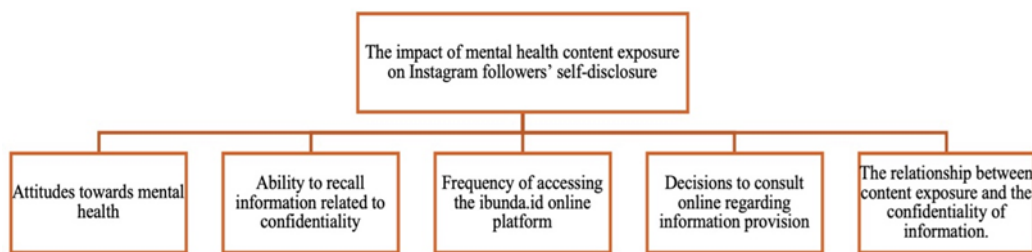


Figure 2. Five main themes of mental health content exposure.

In overall, this study underscores the role of Mental Health Content Exposure in enhancing Self-Disclosure among young adults on Instagram. The findings contribute to understanding the dynamics of mental health communication in digital spaces, emphasizing the importance of tailored content that resonates with users' emotional and

developmental needs. Future research could delve into other contributing factors to Self-Disclosure and explore longitudinal effects of such digital interventions.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Mental Health Content Exposure significantly enhances Self-Disclosure among young adults on Instagram, though engagement remains selective and cautious. While credible and well-designed content fosters trust, users' reluctance to fully disclose underscores the enduring impact of stigma and privacy concerns. These findings contribute to the literature on digital mental health communication by emphasizing the role of tailored, empathetic content in shaping cautious but meaningful openness. Practically, the study underscores the importance of designing digital interventions that integrate trust-building strategies with credible, interactive content. Future research should broaden the scope by examining cultural, gender, and occupational factors, as well as employing longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture evolving patterns of disclosure. Expanding analysis beyond Instagram to include video and audio-based platforms such as YouTube and Spotify would further illuminate how media formats shape mental health engagement. Such efforts will refine digital health communication strategies and support the development of safer, more inclusive online spaces.

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Conflict of interest

The researcher hereby confirms that there is no conflict of interest involving any party in this research study. This study has been conducted with full integrity and transparency to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

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