

## Self-Disclosure: A Psychological Pro

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### ABSTRACT

Self-disclosure, whether in case of clinical, educational, commercial, social networking or in mental health domain had been a crucial factor for alliance formation, cleansing one's emotional, conscious, and unconscious states. Such disclosure becomes necessary to promote reboot of internal states and refresh one's homeostasis. During COVID, social networking sites (SNSs) had been a prominent platform for self-disclosure incorporating both male and female variations. Contemporarily, chatbots had tried simulating interactions with people for the acquisition of self-disclosure which had been proven to be an effective strategy. Even commercial sectors had imbibed self-disclosure methods for consumer marketing and brand image where smartphones had been found to be an economical asset. Unfortunately, self-disclosure rates declined steadily with age due to maturity levels & males tend to self-disclose less relatively to females. The following review endeavours to elucidate the modality of self-disclosure via the above-mentioned summarization.

**Keywords:** *Self-Disclosure, Social Networking Sites, Reciprocation, Gender, Mental Health, Teacher-Student Relationship, Chatbots, Products*

Self-disclosure is the process via which one communicates and shares his internal states and reveals personal information to someone with whom the relationship stands out on trust. The personal information that one shares could comprise of thoughts, dreams, intuitions, opinions, preferences, experiences, goals, fears, aspiration etc. Self-disclosure plays a key role in relationship formation, and it makes people feel intimate, understanding, and cooperative. It withstands on the foundation of trust. It is the building block of intimacy and reciprocation stabilises the same. Reciprocation can be of two types:

- **Turn-taking reciprocation:** Where there's immediate self-disclosure to one another. People with this type of reciprocation, have more intimate liking towards their partner where they feel close and like each other enjoying each other's companionship.
- **Extended reciprocation:** Here, one partner may be revealing but the other just listens. Immediate close association may delay forming in this type of reciprocation. Such people may be affected by 'social exchange theory' & 'norm of reciprocity' leading to lower degree of liking and imbalance. Therefore, it's usually observed that people say, "I am disclosing more than my partner".

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There are 3 theories which describe reciprocation:

- **Social exchange theory** - which states that people try to maintain equality in self-disclosure because imbalance may make them uncomfortable.
- **Social attraction-trust hypothesis** - which states that people may disclose to one another because they may feel that the other person likes or trusts them.
- **Norm of reciprocity** - argues that reciprocation in self-disclosure is a kind of social norm that one needs to follow and violating them makes them uneasy.

According to Social penetration theory, there are two dimensions of self-disclosure, i.e.,

- 1) **Breadth** - which refers to the range of topics (variations) which are discussed by two individuals.
- 2) **Depth** - which refers to the degree to which the shared information is personal or private.

Comparatively to depth, breadth is more easily accessible because it comprises of outer personality layers and daily life, but depth involves painful memories which might sound difficult for anyone to reveal freely. Other factors which could affect self-disclosure rates are mood, gender, individual difference, nature of relationship, group size, environment etc.

### *Self-Disclosure on Social Media*

In 2017, Zhang Conducted a study on 560 university students to probe the effect of self-disclosure on social networking sites on young adult's mental health. Results showed that self-disclosure on Facebook can moderate the relation between stress and mental health and moreover such disclosure had been positively correlated with social support on Facebook which led to enhanced life satisfaction and reduction in depression. It could be deciphered that contemporary, social networking sites had been a mainstream platform for exhibition of self and self-related issues to display to audience and gain mass attention. People can be benefited by self-disclosing their negative emotion and 'imagery' could be a good method in doing so. Hence, social networking sites like Instagram promote image-based sharing, therefore Andalibi & more in 2017 did a study to find sensitive self-disclosure on Instagram and responses that they gather. The study elicited that Instagram usage led to social exchange and story about difficult times where considerable evidence for sense of community, social support, aggression, or support for pro-disease behaviour was found. It was also understood that factor like food and beverage, illnesses, personal narrative, self-appearances are more likely to attract social support. Hence, disclosure on social networking sites depends upon the self-presentation & appealing variables that determine the level of support one obtains. Again, Utz in 2015 did a study on 151 university participants trying to probe the functions of self-disclosure on social medias. He found that not only intimate but positive & entertaining self-disclosures raised feelings of connections. It was quite intriguing that partner's responsiveness didn't play a significant role portraying that dyadic face to face interactions do not hold for public communication on social networking sites. So possibly, face to face interaction may not facilitate deeper self-disclosure relatively to masked interactions.

Celebrities' self-disclosure on social media like Twitter, too, led to formation of parasocial relationship with their fans which mediated their social presence. Kim & Song in 2016 conducted an online survey on 429 celebrity followers where they found that celebrities professional self-disclosure like about their work dynamics, personal self-disclosure like friends and families and their fan's retweeting, augmented their fan's social presence, positively affecting their parasocial interactions. Social presence mediated self-disclosure and

retweeting. Hence, professional self-disclosure, personal self-disclosure and social presence are like prerequisite for self-disclosure, connectionism & relatability.

Kim & Sung in 2021, did a study on CEO's self-disclosure on Instagram with a sample of 125 University students & consumer brand relationship as the moderating effect of relationship norms. The study incorporated a 2 x 2 Factorial design where it had self-disclosure (High vs Low) & relationship norms (Exchange vs Communal). Results showed that with subjects primed with communal norm, high CEO self-disclosure produced more positive attitude towards brand, CEO as well as higher consumer intentions for self-disclosure relatively to low CEO self-disclosure. But results were reversed in case of exchange norm conditions. In 2015, Balani & De Choudhary produced a study to characterise and detect mental health related self-disclosure on social media. Self-disclosure was a significant factor facilitating psychological wellbeing of individuals with mental illness. It was found that greater self-disclosure led to improve mental health. Even during COVID, it was found that self-disclosure along with parental support alleviated the negative stressful events and students perceived stress. Both i.e., self-disclosure and parental support, during the pandemic, moderated the stress level that students experienced due to life disruptions because of COVID (Zhen et al., 2021).

In a study done by Ma & more in 2016, which comprised of a mixed factorial design, it was found that self-disclosure has rewarding properties for individuals but involves some risks as well. The study was conducted to probe the relationship between 'content intimacy' and 'willingness to self-disclose' on social networking sites and to find how identification i.e., real or anonymous and audience type i.e., social or close once, moderated the relationship. Content intimacy regulated self-disclosure in face-to-face interaction i.e., as content intimacy increased self-disclosure decreased. Although anonymity and an audience of social ties, both increased self-disclosure but it was unclear whether 1) it increased self-disclosure for content of all intimacy level or 2) it weakened intimacy regulation effect leading to more self-disclosure by people. Findings revealed that intimacy mostly regulates self-disclosure irrespective of the settings. Also, anonymity increases the same.

One of the intriguing studies done by Knop et al., 2016 on 357 participants, tried to compare within group differences in online & offline interaction. It was tested across 4 dimensions i.e., depth, amount, valence & breadth. Results highlighted that there's increased depth, breadth and amount in offline disclosure but was less positively valenced than online disclosure because participants could fabricate their information in offline disclosure to surpass evaluation and judgement. Interestingly, there was increased frequency of communication in online disclosure but despite the permanent availability, participants didn't disclose their personal information to each other online and offline time seemed more of a quality time than online. It could be because participants could be concerned about the privacy of their data and security of the information being shared.

### ***Self-Disclosure Minimising Clinical Symptoms***

Role of self-disclosure is not only evident on social networking sites but also in clinical setting. With a sample of 52 (32 women & 20 men) Levitt & more in 2016, performed a study to decipher how therapist's self-disclosure pertains to therapeutic alliance and outcomes. Results portrayed that no. of self-disclosures weren't significantly linked with outcome and alliance. Self-disclosure that humanised the therapist associated with fewer clinical symptoms (post session) than self-disclosures exhibiting encouragement & appreciation. Similarly, self-disclosures which conveyed similarity between client and

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therapist linked to fewer clinical symptoms and interpersonal problems (post session) than self-disclosure that neither portrayed similarity nor dissimilarity. Ultimately 'neutral therapist's self-disclosure' optimally associated with client's functioning than self-disclosure which relayed positive or negative nature of the therapist. Similarly, a qualitative meta-analysis of 21 studies on therapist's self-disclosure and immediacy, done by Hill & more in 2018, revealed that the crucial and subsequent processes like therapeutic relationship, mental health functioning, gain of insight and overall assistance were aided by therapist's self-disclosure. It led to clients being more open and immediate about their concern, but client's contribution and diversity acted as moderator. Hence, therapist's self-disclosure can foster overall therapy.

Even in psychodynamic psychotherapy, therapist self-disclosure had been a crucial factor. Pinto-Coelho & more in 2016, investigated 185 therapist's self-disclosure in 16 cases. Qualitatively, disclosures of feelings & insight were evaluated to be more intimate & higher than factual disclosures. Results reveal that disclosures were positively linked to the working alliance and feelings, but factual disclosure was negatively correlated to the same. Hence, intimate disclosure had proven to be more beneficial during psychotherapy than factual disclosures.

### ***A Commercial Boon***

Lee & Choi in 2017, investigated 'user experience' with conventional agent for movie recommendation looking for the effects of self-disclosure and reciprocity on a sample of 225 participants (18-58 years). The two-way ANOVA was run to analyse the effects of self-disclosure and reciprocity where the interaction effects were found insignificant but main effects were significant. Here, reciprocity was found to be more emphasising and stronger variable than self-disclosure for predicting the relationship between the agent and user. Thus, reciprocation could be a crucial tool along with self-disclosure to determine the adequate level of relationship formation. In one of the fascinating studies conducted by Melumad & Meyer in 2020, revealed that how smartphones are a better tool for consumer self-disclosure. Three large scale field studies & two experiments were performed to exhibit that how consumers tend to be more self-disclosing on smartphones than on computers. It included domains like restaurant reviews, compliance to requests, social media posts, personal information etc. Results highlighted that self-disclosure on smartphones increased because of two psychological effects or properties of the device i.e., 1) comfort feeling with the device and 2) narrowing focus attention on disclosure task at hand due to difficulty on smaller devices. Hence, smartphone illustrates increased self-disclosure relatively to computers as due to its physical proximity with people, excessive usage, and increased connectionism & personal linkage.

Leite & Baptista, under commercial research did a study in 2022 on 433 participants investigating the effects of social media influences on intimate self-disclosure of consumers intention to purchase products. Outcomes indicated that high level of self-disclosure enhanced consumer's intention to buy the products. Therefore, self-disclosure makes it appealing and trusting to opt to purchase the products as a strategy in consumer marketing.

### ***An Aid to Educational Benefit***

Self-disclosure not only facilitates clinical, social media disclosure and commercial areas but also the educational field i.e., specifically the teacher-student relationship. Song et al., 2016 with a sample of 534 undergraduate students, tested this during online classes. Results suggested that the teacher's self-disclosure and students' emotional response to the same

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enhanced their relationship satisfaction, which in turn improved knowledge and class satisfaction. Ultimately, it was found that teachers self-disclosure effect was stronger in online than face to face interaction. Another study conducted on 262 Undergraduate students by Kim et al., 2019, produced similar results where student's perception about their teacher's self-closure increased their feeling of social presence about their teachers which in turn led to strengthening of the teacher-student relationship satisfaction ultimately leading to knowledge gain. The teacher's self-disclosure and teacher-student relationship was mediated by social presence. Hence, such disclosure augments, refines, and upgrades the overall relationship and learning.

### *Chatbot Simulation*

Lee et al., 2020 produced a study titled "I hear you; I feel you: Encouraging deep self-disclosure through a chat bot" with a sample of 47 participants divided into three groups using different chatting styles of chatbot for 3 weeks. In prior research, chat bots had served as a potential, low cost and effective tool to endorse self-disclosure. This study found that chat bot self-disclosure produced reciprocal effect for deeper self-disclosure which lasted throughout the study period but unfortunately the chat styles without self-disclosure features failed to produce such effect. Participants intimacy and enjoyment were improved by the aid of chat bot self-disclosure. Therefore, chat bot self-disclosure acted as a tool with which one can openly share and link without the concern of being evaluated or judged. Subsequently, a group of researchers in 2020, designed a chat bot, a mediator to promote deeper self-disclosure to a real mental health professional with a sample of 47 subjects randomly assigned to three groups where participants in each group obtained chat bot self-disclosure at varying levels. After few weeks, they were asked to disclose their content to a mental health professional. They were rendered the choice to add, delete, or edit their content shared with the chat bot. Self-disclosure was compared (week before & week after) after sharing with mental health professional. Results illustrated those participant's self-disclosure depth to the chat bot remained, after sharing with the mental health professional. Also, they elicited deeper self-disclosure to the mental health professional via more self-disclosing chat bot. Hence, self-disclosure was facilitated using chat bots (Lee et al., 2020). But who elicits better self-disclosure? Is it a human or a chat bot? This was answered in 2018, where Ho & more performed a study on 128 participants to find the psychological, emotional, and relational effects of self-disclosure after conversing with a chat bot. It illustrated that chat bots and humans both are equivalent in producing such effects which could be undermined and enhanced. Whether disclosing to a chat bot or human, self-disclosure is an essential to cleanse inner states.

### *Sex Differences*

In one of the studies performed by Brown et al., 2018, 'predictors of self-disclosure among college students with mental illnesses' was investigated with a sample of 1393 students from 5 universities whereas an outcome, public stigma was found to be closely associated with mental health disclosure among the students because such disclosures were linked to perceived stress, specifically among men. Hence, males are found to be more sceptical to reveal their mental health issues publicly because of the public stigma, evaluation, and judgement. It had also been observed that older the participant, lower is the self-disclosure on social media, lesser need of relatedness, and tendency to spend online time which could be possibly due to emotional maturity of students making them wiser as age affects emotional maturity which aid individuals develop self-control. Gender affected self-disclosure due to differences in motivational level. Women used social media for interpersonal relationship while men used it to share non-emotional and technical things (Rahardjo & Mardianti, 2022).

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Byred et al., 2017 did a study to probe the effect of self-disclosure on male and female perception about individuals who stutter. 173 participants were randomly assigned to view 2-4 videos (Male self-disclosure, No male self-disclosure, Female disclosure & No female disclosure). Results revealed that listeners selected those speakers more who self-disclosed their stuttering as friendly, confident, and outgoing relatively to speakers who didn't self-disclosed. Observers didn't select unfriendly and shy speakers compared to speakers who used a self-disclosed statement. Observers were less likely to choose females as outgoing, friendlier, and confident but more likely to choose them as unfriendly, shy, unintelligent, and insecure relatively to male. Hence, the nature of disclosure and gender associated with that disclosure, determines selectivity by viewers. Sex differences had been significant in case of self-disclosure, and this was again illustrated by the study done by Sivagurunathan & more in 2019 on male survivors of child sexual abuse. It signified that males are less likely to disclose their abuse relatively to females. Study revealed 4 themes pertaining to self-disclosure in case of male survivor i.e., personal characteristic, interpersonal relationship, institutional elements, and social norm that acted as determinants.

### *Determinants of Self-Disclosure*

Self-disclosure leads to positive effects but what as antecedents determines positive self-disclosure on social networking sites was something tested by Chen in 2017 on 368 undergraduate students. The study incorporated the effects of life satisfaction, self-esteem, privacy concern, social anxiety, public self-consciousness, and perceived collectivism on positive self-disclosure on social networking sites. Outcomes highlighted that self-esteem and perceived collectivism increased positive self-disclosure but unfortunately privacy concerns and life satisfaction deteriorated positive self-disclosure. Social anxiety and public self-consciousness effects weren't significant.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the contemporary scenario, self-disclosure had been found to be an effective method for handling and improving different aspects of psychological wellbeing like overcoming depression, illness, raising intimacy, elevating connectionism etc. Most of the self-disclosure takes place on social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram (Zhang, 2017) and other available platforms. These had aided in reducing clinical symptoms, but consideration of self-presentation is must on such platforms (Andalibi et al., 2017). Social networking sites had increased feelings of connectionism by self-disclosure through masked interaction rather than face to face communication (Utz, 2015). Even celebrities' professional and personal self-disclosure on social media augmented their fan's social presence which positively affected their parasocial interaction (Kim & Song, 2016). Even CEO's positive self-disclosure on social media attracted consumers improving brand marketing (Kim & Sung, 2021). There's increased frequency of communication in online disclosure but the content could be less personal (depth) whereas the offline disclosure may be in depth, breath (variation of content) and more in amount but less positively valenced (Knop et al., 2016). During COVID, self-disclosure along with parental support assisted in moderating stress levels as well (Zhen et al., 2021).

In the clinical setting, number of self-disclosures weren't found to be significant but humanised self-disclosure via therapist promoted lesser clinical symptoms. Similarly self-disclosure which conveyed similarity between therapists and client led to lesser symptoms. Even 'neutral therapist self-disclosure' fostered optimal client functioning rather than therapist being positive or negative (Levitt et al., 2016). Therapist's self-disclosure had led to gain of insight and making clients more open and immediate about their concerns (Hill et al.,

2018). Comparative to factual disclosures, disclosures of feelings and insights were positively linked to working alliance (Pinto-Coelho et al., 2016).

Smart phones relatively to laptops and other gadgets are found to be better tool for consumer self-disclosure. Self-disclosure on smartphones were higher due to comfort feeling and narrowing focus attention (Melumad & Meyer, 2020). It could also be due to the proximity and excessive usage of such devices. Even higher level of self-disclosure on social medias have attracted consumers intention to buy products (Leite & Baptiste, 2022).

Teacher's self-disclosure and students' emotional response to the same had enhanced their relationship satisfaction improving knowledge and class satisfaction (Song et al., 2016) and even such disclosures augmented, refined, and upgraded overall learning experience (Kim et al., 2019).

In terms of sex differences, males are found to be more sceptical to reveal their mental health issues (Brown et al., 2018). Women disclose on social media for building and improving interpersonal relationships while men used social media to share non-emotional and technical stuffs (Rahardjo & Mardianti, 2022). Here age had been a pivotal factor i.e., with increase in age, self-disclosure rates on social media reduces which could be due to maturity levels. Positive self-disclosures are considered and related more by the audience than negative self-disclosure. Again, gender of the discloser and nature of disclosure determines attention drawing (Byrd et al., 2017). In case of reporting childhood sex abuse, males are less likely to disclose their feelings (Sivagurunathan et al., 2019).

Current studies had tried simulating human self-disclosure by the aid of chat bots which produced reciprocal effects of deeper self-disclosure (Lee et al., 2020) improving intimacy and enjoyment but both human and chat bot had found to be equivalent in producing self-disclosure effects (Ho et al., 2018). Ultimately, factors like self-esteem and perceived collectivism may increase positive self-disclosure but privacy concerns & life satisfaction could reduce the same.

### ***Recommendation***

To get in-depth knowledge about self-disclosure effects, further exploration is must to probe nuances in gender differences, variations of disclosures in online-offline mode, age related changes and other variables associated with self-disclosure. Self-disclosure had mostly led to positive effects but what could be the negative side of the same picture is still unclear. Hence, it requires further extensive research to elucidate the cons.

## **CONCLUSION**

Self-disclosure is a need in most of the sectors like clinical, educational, commercial etc. to endorse self and social benefits and to promote overall psychological wellbeing. Intimacy, reciprocation, gender, could be some of the crucial determinants of self-disclosure on social medias and other domains. Smartphones and chat bots had currently assisted for practical and online self-disclosure for purchasing products, forming relationships etc. Additively, teacher-student relationship, brand marketing & therapeutic alliance are all fostered by positive self-disclosure, but age & gender ought to be considered as a moderating variable.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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