



COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT AMONG GEN-Z INFLUENCERS: EXPLORING THE INSTAGRAM NGL FEATURE AND ILLUSION OF SOCIAL CLOSENESS

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the phenomenon of using the NGL Link or Not Gonna Lie feature on Instagram, which allows users to answer anonymous questions. It highlights the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory and its relevance to understanding how individuals manage their personal information. The research aims to explore the motivations of micro-influencers, specifically from Generation Z, in using the NGL Link feature and how they manage communication privacy on their Instagram main accounts. The methods used in this qualitative research include interviews and data documentation. The results and discussion section presents the findings from interviews with four micro-influencers, highlighting their different approaches to communication privacy management and motivations for using the NGL Link feature. One interesting finding is the existence of an illusion of closeness between micro-influencers and their followers on social media.

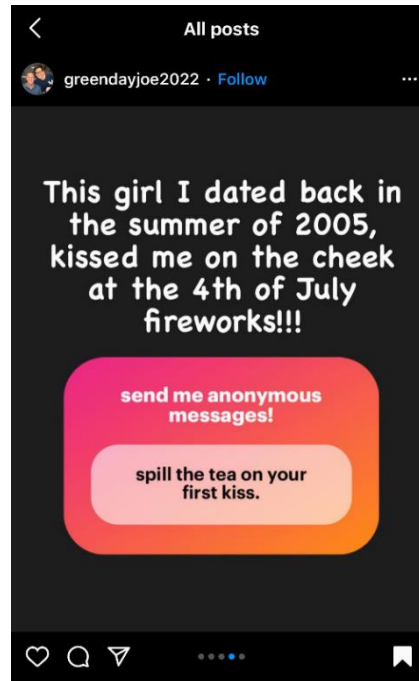
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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2022, there was a phenomenon of using the NGL Link or Not Gonna Lie feature used in Instagram Story. NGL Link is a feature that can allow Instagram users to answer various questions from anonymous messages. When looking at the statistical data on downloads of the NGL Link feature, Indonesia occupies the first position with 3.1 million downloads and in second place is occupied by the United States with 3 million downloads and India in third place with 1.5 million downloads (Riyanto, 2022b, 2022a). The NGL Link feature can be used by downloading the NGL Link application, entering the Instagram username, sharing the NGL link to the Instagram platform, writing a question that an anonymous friend wants to answer, and uploading the link to Instagram Story (Budianto, 2022). With the NGL Link feature used in Instagram Story, people who send anonymous messages can express honest feelings to an Instagram user (Mukti, 2022).

Recently, there is a trend that has become a concern of Instagram users, namely by utilising the NGL Link feature which will bridge the interaction process between each Instagram user with anonymous questions or messages. This allows users to convey various messages without showing their true identity. From one of the documentations from the New York Times, there are a number of informants who use the NGL Link feature on Instagram to get anonymous questions containing people's impressions of themselves and curiosity about their habits or matters concerning themselves. There is also a phenomenon where Instagram users use the NGL Link feature on the main account and answer various questions that tend to lead to personal questions such as fondest memories, interests and hobbies, to the ideal type of partner that leads to self-disclosure.

Image 1. Illustration of NGL Use on Instagram



Source: Researcher Documentation (2023)

The screenshot documentation shows an Instagram user making a self-disclosure by revealing quite personal information about himself ranging from his favourite band to his first kiss. In addition, the NGL Link user also decided to post the answers to the main post on her Instagram main account. Anonymity in general is the inability to attribute one or more characteristics that describe the owner of all these characteristics. Anonymity according to Zimmerman & Ybarra (2016) is divided into two categories, namely Social Anonymity and Technical Anonymity. Social anonymity refers to the perception of the inability to identify by people due to the lack of clues from the identity attributes of an individual such as body gestures, voice, and personality. Meanwhile, technical anonymity refers to the absence of all forms of identifying information about a person during interaction and communication such as full name, IP address, home address, date of birth, and so on.

On the other hand, according to Moore in Cirrucci (2015), privacy refers to the right to control personal information. Quoted from Suler in Schlesinger et al. (2017), anonymity can cause users to perform behaviours that they would not normally do such as revealing personal secrets or deviant behaviour that is not in accordance with the norms prevailing in society. Anonymity, especially in the internet world, can make someone feel a new identity, engage in a discussion without stigma, and can make someone commit dangerous acts (Weicher, 2007). Anonymity in the development of technology can also provide an opportunity for someone to collect unexpected information about others and create a sensation that everyone can be seen by others anonymously (Weicher, 2007). In this case, anonymity can provide protection of one's identity and activities and criminals in stealing personal information which is a form of privacy concern (Axelrod, 2015).

According to Petronio in Kennedy-Lightsey et al. (2012), the process of a person managing their personal information can be explained in the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory which shows that a person believes personal information is owned by them and only they have control over how personal information will be disclosed and to whom the information will be



disclosed. Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory can be a map in mapping how people navigate their privacy (Yuliarti et al., 2018). Petronio in Yuliarti et al. (2018) explains there are five main principles in CPM theory, namely: (1) People believe that they have control over their personal information; (2) Control of personal information is carried out by the use of privacy rules that are managed through self-management; (3) People who are notified or authorised of someone's personal information are co-owners of the information, (4) Co-owners of personal information need to mutually negotiate privacy rules when disclosing the information to others, (5) If there is no mutual negotiation agreement, it will lead to a failure of coordination between co-owners of personal information (boundary turbulence).

From the background explanation above, there are phenomena that are of concern to the authors, namely the motivation of social media users, especially generation Z, who are interested in using anonymous features and the communication privacy management process of Instagram users in using the NGL Link anonymous feature. When looking at the traces of previous anonymous applications such as Ask.fm, the anonymity of anonymous applications is like a double-edged knife. In this case, anonymous applications can provide exploration of the identity of users and on the other hand can lead to threats such as a lot of negative comment activity to insults (Farrugia et al., 2019). This research uses Sandra Petronio's Communication Privacy Management theory. The formulation of the problem in this study is to examine the motivation of micro influencers who are interested in using the anonymous feature of NGL Link and how the communication privacy management process is carried out on the Instagram main account. Therefore, this research question is: How is communication privacy management carried out by micro influencers among Generation Z as users of the NGL anonymous message feature on the Instagram main account?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Privacy Management

In Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, several terms are utilized. "Information owner" refers to the individual who has the right to control their personal information, while "selected co-owners" are individuals granted access to specific private information (Petronio & Child, Conceptualization and Operationalization: Utility of Communication Privacy Management, 2020). According to Smith and Brunner in Petronio and Child (2020), when someone intends to disclose personal information, they make decisions regarding who will receive that information. The information owner relies on privacy rules as guidelines for managing privacy when disclosing their personal information. This theory argues that individuals can make various mistakes that impact communication privacy management, leading to situations described as "privacy turbulency." Privacy turbulency refers to conditions involving violations or disruptions of privacy rules, information ownership, control, privacy boundaries, and private relationships.

Anonymity in Social Media

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook are generally non-anonymous since users have identities and share personal information when posting on these platforms. However, there is a desire among users to engage in anonymity, leading to the emergence of platforms that provide anonymity features, such as Slashdot, Whisper, and Secret (Correa, Silva, Mondal, Benevenuto, & Gummadi, 2015). According to Kang cited in Sharon and John (2018), individuals use social media platforms that offer anonymity to gain social validation from an anonymous community. Users of these platforms believe that anonymity allows them to be more open, honest, and express differing opinions. Secret, for example, is an anonymous application that connects users anonymously, allowing them to share posts within the reach of friends or a broader audience (Internetsafeeducation.com, 2014). Secret encourages users to share various things while maintaining their anonymity (Internetsafeeducation.com, 2014). In a study by Sharon and John (2018) on the popularity of the Secret app, it was found that users could open up to others by posting secrets and including links that directed users to different content. Additionally, Secret

offers anonymity features that enable users to be more open and daring in expressing differing opinions compared to other social media platforms (Sharon & John, 2018).

Micro-Influencers

Social media influencers are a group of digital content creators defined by their follower count, unique brand persona, and relationships with sponsored advertisements (Duffy, 2020). Typically, social media influencers create content or promotional communication based on their personal narratives, visuals, and texts, which appear more unique and authentic compared to paid advertising materials. Influencers are also perceived as trustworthy sources and have become a popular choice of occupation among the younger generation. Social media influencers can be categorized based on their number of followers as follows: (a) Mega-influencers, with over 1,000,000 followers on social media; (b) Macro-influencers, with followers ranging from 40,000 to 1,000,000 on social media; (c) Micro-influencers, with 1,000 to 40,000 followers on social media; and (d) Nano-influencers, with fewer than 1,000 followers on social media (Borges-Tiago, Santiago, & Tiago, 2023). In this context, micro-influencers tend to have more loyal followers and higher engagement compared to mega-influencers and macro-influencers (Conde & Casais, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative research uses the post-positivist paradigm. The post-positivist paradigm is a representation of thinking that is based on a derivative of the postivism view by challenging traditional ideas regarding the absolute truth of knowledge (Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell (2018), research using the post-positivist paradigm will examine a problem by reflecting on the need to identify a cause that affects the final results found in a particular experiment. In this case, the scientific method carried out by researchers using the post-positivist paradigm starts from a theory, collects data that supports or refutes the theory, and makes the necessary revisions before any additional tests are carried out. In this research, the authors uses a case study method based on an interest in examining the case of the phenomenon of Instagram users' communication privacy management with the NGL Link feature deeper by finding other possibilities related to the phenomenon raised in this research (Yin, 2018). Robert K. Yin's view of case studies is an empirical method used in investigating current phenomena in depth and within the scope of the real world context.

In case studies, it is necessary to screen candidates who are the main part of research with this method (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the researcher can select candidates by collecting some information about each participant and adjusting the qualification criteria that have been formed before. This study will focus on participants with a background as micro influencers. Micro influencers have loyal audiences, good engagement rates, and have delivery such as word-of-mouth techniques (Conde & Casais, 2023). Research on Communication Privacy Management on Anonymous Message Feature in Revealing Personal Information on Instagram (Case Study among Micro Influencers) will invite four informants with the following characteristics:

1. Gender: Male and Female
2. Generation Z
3. Age range 16-24 years old
4. A micro influencer who has 1,000 - 100,000 followers on Instagram (Conde & Casais, 2023).
5. Actively using Instagram social media for at least 30 minutes a day. This is based on reference data of active Instagram users in Indonesia who on average use social media for 15 hours per month (DataReportal, 2023).
6. Have answered and posted answers to personalised anonymous questions through the NGL Link feature on Instagram's Main Account.



In this research, the data collection techniques used are interviews and data documentation. According to Robert K. Yin (2018), data collection techniques through interviews can focus directly on case study topics and provide explanations and personal views (perceptions, attitudes, and meanings).

The following is the data of informants who have been interviewed by the authors.

1. Leoni Angela, a 23-year-old woman who lives in Gading Serpong, Tangerang. Leoni who is a micro-influencer has 19,600 followers and 4,114 following. The interview was conducted on Friday, 14 April 2023 at 08.00 WIB via Google Meet (online).
2. Muhammad Difa Ryansyah, a 21-year-old male who lives in the Jakarta area. Difa was previously known as a child singer who won 2nd place when auditioning for Idola Cilik 2013. Currently, Difa has 90,500 followers and 1,092 following. The interview was conducted on Friday, 28 April 2023 at 15.35 WIB via Zoom (online).
3. Maria Evelyn Winata, a 20-year-old woman who lives in BSD, Tangerang. Evelyn lives her daily life as a student and social media intern at Adira Finance. She has 1,270 followers and 700 following on Instagram. The interview was conducted on Thursday, 4 May 2023 at 16.15 WIB at the Millennium Centennial Center building (offline).
4. Swadigya Handaru Irsyad, a 26-year-old male domiciled in Jakarta. Swadigya has 2,235 followers and 1,089 following on Instagram and lives his daily life as an employee at Ninja Xpress. The interview was conducted on Tuesday, 9 May 2023 at 13.30 WIB on Zoom (online).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In general, individuals have their own criteria when deciding to share personal information. Leoni, for example, is open with her followers, as evidenced by the lack of categorization for followers who can view the anonymous question answers posted through the NGL Link feature on her Instagram Story. Similarly, Difa also does not have follower categorization, so all her posts, especially those containing answers to anonymous NGL Link questions, are fully disclosed publicly on Instagram, given her nearly 100,000 followers. Evelyn, the third informant in this study, also exhibits openness towards her followers, admitting that there are no restrictions on her followers, particularly regarding posts containing personal information shared through the NGL Link feature on Instagram Story. However, Swadigya is not as open with her followers, especially when posting personal information via the NGL Link feature. She uses the close friends feature to sort followers who can see her private posts. Additionally, Swadigya selectively filters her followers, particularly when uploading posts containing hate speech on her Instagram Story. Almost all informants are open with their followers and do not restrict the posting of anonymous question answers using the NGL Link. However, this does not apply to Swadigya, who uses the additional close friends feature to limit the followers who can access her NGL Link posts. This is due to her significant concerns about receiving negative comments or hate speech if she does not filter the followers who can view the NGL Link posts.

The Motivation of using NGL

Even though Leoni decides to be open with her followers, she still has motivations to maintain privacy while communicating on social media, especially when posting answers to anonymous questions through the NGL Link feature. Her motivations include fulfilling her need to express her opinions and satisfying the curiosity of her followers about herself. She also mentions that engagement and reactions from followers are higher when she uses anonymous features like NGL Link.

"Yeah, because with the anonymity of NGL Link, more people are brave enough to ask questions on our Instagram. So, with the NGL Link feature, I think people become more open and willing to ask questions compared to using the regular question box on Instagram, where their identity is revealed when they ask. According to me, it's good to have occasional

anonymity because it encourages people to ask questions, and I still upload those answers on Instagram if they are suitable to be answered." (Leoni, April 14, 2023).

Difa also explains the excitement and surprise she experiences from unexpected anonymous questions. This aligns with Leoni's experience. However, Difa recalls a sense of familiarity from her memories of the Ask.fm app, which also featured anonymous questions like NGL Link. This familiarity becomes a motivating factor for Difa to disclose her information on Instagram.

"Back then, it was like on Ask.fm, right? So, I started to realize that there were people who wanted to ask me questions but were too afraid. So, I added the NGL Link and posted it on my main account. From there, I received many questions, and I was surprised because I had never been asked such questions before. I was curious to know who asked them, and sometimes I recognized the person, while other times I didn't. It was just a feeling, and when I finally released that NGL Link feature on my story, I felt a unique excitement, like wow, there are many things I didn't know that people wanted to ask. I never expected people to ask me such things." (Difa, April 28, 2023)

In addition, Difa also has her own motivation to positively influence her followers through the anonymous NGL Link question answers posted on Instagram.

"For me, the reason I post those questions is because I think it can inspire others to create and express themselves without fear of making mistakes, and they can keep fighting." (Difa, April 28, 2023)

Evelyn's motivation for sharing her personal information through the NGL Link feature lies in the interesting anonymous questions she receives and the ongoing interactions that arise from posting anonymous questions on her Instagram story. She also feels that she should answer the anonymous questions to avoid criticism or negative impressions from her followers, which encourages her to continue posting personal information through the NGL Link.

"The first reason is just for fun. When someone answers the questions, they are usually excited. It's like, 'Oh, so you're like this' or 'Wow, Ve, you're crazy. I'm so happy to get to know you.' It's not fun if I don't post them; it would seem like I'm being arrogant. And besides, it's about interaction. It's not fun if I keep it to myself. So, I share it to make it fun and to have some activity. It fills my spare time." (Evelyn, May 4, 2023)

Swadigya's decision to use NGL Link and answer anonymous questions, including those that involve disclosing personal information, stems from her nostalgia for anonymous apps like Ask.fm.

"To be honest, it's more of a throwback for me. Back then, we had Ask.fm. I used to play it a lot, but then I got tired of it because Ask.fm had its own app, and there were so many social media platforms, so I didn't feel like using Ask.fm anymore. But suddenly, there's NGL Link that can directly link to Instagram posts, so I was curious to see how active the curiosity of my followers is... (Swadigya, May 9, 2023)

Most of the participants have nostalgic memories of the anonymous app Ask.fm, which also motivates them to disclose personal information through the NGL Link feature. Additionally, there is a motivation to express their opinions and use it as a means of self-expression for micro-influencers.



The Illusion of False Social Closeness

In the interviews conducted with four informants, there was an interesting discovery that the four informants felt close or closer to their followers when using the NGL Link feature in answering anonymous questions on Instagram Story. The closeness with followers or what is assumed to be an anonymous questioner starts from an anonymous question which is then answered by the informants by containing personal information such as the type of ideal partner, future career plans, special experiences with the closest people to tourist destinations that they personally want to visit. The closeness with followers felt by informants who are micro-influencers feels real even though they do not know whether the anonymous questioner is a person they know or maybe an AI (Artificial Intelligence). Hamdani and Herlianti (2019) stated that this incident is a phenomenon of para-social interactions and relationships which describes a phenomenon of one-way relationships and creates an illusion of closeness from a distance.

The concept of parasocial was originally created by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl who described that para-social relationships are created when individuals are exposed to media personas so that these individuals develop a sense of closeness, friendly relationships, and identify with the celebrity (Chung & Cho, 2017). When it comes to the perceived closeness on the part of digital celebrities or social media influencers, they can also feel a sense of closeness with their followers by not only sharing public activities, but also sharing their private lives (Cipta & Alvin, 2023; Robin et al., 2022; Verenia & Alvin, 2022; Winata & Alvin, 2022). The informants' interaction by answering anonymous questions through the NGL Link feature is a form of para-social relationship with followers where informants continue to interact with the anonymous messages conveyed without knowing which followers are actually interacting with them. With the results of interactions that bring informants to feel closer to followers and even consider followers as their close friends, this is in accordance with the findings of Puce's research (Puce, 2021), namely social media influencers have a personal attachment to their followers after interacting through the use of the question and answer feature on Instagram so that they call their followers real friends and make this a motivation to continue managing their social media accounts, especially on Instagram.

Research from Millham and Atkin (2018) found that there are characteristics of social media that form and unite a network of friends in which there are people who are trusted by social media users. If the results of this study are associated with the author's findings, the illusion of closeness felt by micro-influencers with their followers is a form of Instagram's social media characteristics that can gather people trusted by informants (from following to followers) so that this creates an assumption or perception in the minds of informants that they are interacting with their friends or closest people. This is further reinforced by questions from anonymous enquirers that lead to deeper curiosity about the micro-influencer such as asking personal opinions related to someone, reviewing memories with the micro-influencer, asking about career paths, and asking questions related to the micro-influencer's hobbies.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, it was found that individuals have different criteria when deciding to share personal information on social media. While Leoni, Difa, and Evelyn are generally open with their followers and do not restrict the posting of anonymous question answers using the NGL Link feature, Swadigya is more cautious and limits the followers who can access her NGL Link posts. The informants' motivations for using the NGL Link feature varied. Leoni and Difa found fulfillment in expressing their opinions and satisfying their followers' curiosity. They also believed that the anonymity of NGL Link encouraged more people to ask questions and allowed for open communication. Evelyn enjoyed the interaction and excitement generated by interesting anonymous questions. Swadigya's motivation was driven by nostalgia for previous anonymous apps like Ask.fm. Furthermore, the study revealed that the informants experienced a sense of closeness with their followers when using the NGL Link feature. They considered their followers

as close friends, even though they did not know the true identity of the anonymous questioners. This phenomenon can be attributed to para-social interactions and relationships, where individuals develop a sense of closeness with media personas or social media influencers.

The illusion of closeness experienced by micro-influencers with their followers through the NGL Link feature aligns with previous research on para-social relationships. It demonstrates the influence of social media characteristics in creating perceived closeness and fostering trust among users. Overall, this study highlights the complexities of sharing personal information on social media and the motivations behind it. It also underscores the illusion of closeness that can arise from digital interactions, emphasizing the importance of understanding the dynamics of para-social relationships in the context of social media influencers.

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