X (Twitter): A Protective Platform for Personal Revelations Among Indonesian LGBTQ Adolescents

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Abstract

Social media provides a protective space for LGBTQ adolescents to share their experiences and self-disclosures. Digital platforms such as X (Twitter) offer an environment that is distinct and more open compared to the conservative attitudes commonly found in traditional societies. However, not all social media platforms provide a safe space for LGBTQ adolescents to openly share their identities and personal experiences, highlighting an urgent need to create safer and more educational digital spaces. This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to understand the self-disclosure experiences of LGBTQ adolescents on the X platform. The findings reveal that the X platform plays a crucial role in supporting the self-disclosure of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia. The motivations for self-disclosure include the desire to acquire and disseminate knowledge, personal expression, self-acceptance, and involvement in LGBTQ movements and groups. The feedback received in self-disclosure encompasses positive responses such as acceptance and recognition, as well as negative responses such as rejection and exclusion. The consequences of self-disclosure are divided into internal benefits, such as self-actualization and increased self-esteem, and external benefits such as social connections and recognition from the community. This study provides insights for social media platform developers to create more inclusive and supportive environments, despite limitations related to sample size and other factors that may influence the results. Future research is recommended to expand the sample size and explore the long-term impacts of online community support on the well-being of LGBTQ adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescents, LGBTQ, Personal Revelation, Platform, Protective.

In social media, LGBTQ adolescents find a protective space where they can openly share their personal experiences and revelations. The digital platform offers a unique environment that contrasts with the more conservative attitudes found in traditional social settings (Chen, 2023; Cho et al., 2022; Heitmayer & Schimmelpfennig, 2023). Social media can be redefined as digital platforms and technologies that enable LGBTQ adolescents to produce, disseminate, and

exchange self-created content within their communities (Chong et al., 2015; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It facilitates a supportive online environment for personal expression and connection. Traditional stereotypes have often inaccurately portrayed the LGBTQ community, stemming from misrepresentation and demonization in specific media segments, along with the spread of false rumors.

Consequently, there is a widespread public misconception that links the LGBTQ community to various mental health issues, and some even erroneously believe that this group contributes to an increase in crime rates (Chi, 2023; Gauthier et al., 2021; Gnan et al., 2019). X plays a crucial role in communication for LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia, allowing them to openly express their identities and experiences without worrying about negative consequences from society. This phenomenon holds great importance, especially considering the cultural and social obstacles that individuals frequently encounter when attempting to express their sexuality and sexual orientation (Hammack et al., 2022). The significance of social media in offering a secure space for personal self-expression among Indonesian LGBTQ teens underscores the influential capacity of digital platforms in enabling underrepresented communities.

In light of potential threats and societal denial of their identities, Indonesian LGBTQ adolescents increasingly use social media as a platform to explore issues pertinent to them, seek community, and engage socially (Chen, 2023; Tarigan & Harahap, 2022). This research zeroes in on X as a secure environment where these adolescents can reveal their identities and sexual orientations, comforted by the knowledge that there are supportive online communities. Consequently, it's crucial to understand their motivations for personal revelation on X and acknowledge the reciprocal support and outcomes that arise from this process.

The exploration of the experiences of Indonesian LGBTQ adolescents on X provides valuable insights into their efforts to present a positive self-image. This contrasts with societal impositions, often based on limited understanding, that tend to stereotype or misrepresent LGBTQ identities. These adolescents require meaningful and informed discussions within their community and with allies and detractors (Fitri et al., 2019; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021). X emerges as a critical online space for such exchanges, where personal revelations can be shared in a protective realm Hommadova (Lu & Mejova, 2022; Karami et al., 2021). This research emphasizes the significance of comprehending and assisting these adolescents in self-expression and acceptance.

A contrast is drawn between using different social media platforms among Indonesian adolescents. In contrast, Facebook is the predominant social media platform among Indonesian adolescents, widely used for communication, entertainment, and news (Salman & Pulungan, 2017). Sexual orientation is not typically expressed on social media. Platforms like X are more popular among LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia because of this gap. Facebook is often reserved for interactions with family and friends, many of whom, especially parents, may not have an X account (Dhungana Sainju et al., 2021; Malhotra, 2020).

In Indonesia's conservative societal context, adolescents who identify as LGBTQ often conform to societal norms in real-life interactions but express themselves as their authentic selves on social media. Janzen suggests that these adolescents face limitations in public spaces, both in terms of expressing their identities and exploring their sexualities (Jenzen, 2022). Social media thus becomes a vital outlet for them, offering spaces for inclusion and socializing that are otherwise inaccessible in their physical environments (Larnyo et al., 2021; Portsmouth, 2022).

LGBTQ adolescents are more active in online LGBTQ communities, where they feel safer and more supported, engaging in activities such as seeking information and support (Craig et al., 2021). This aligns with Priwanti & Helmi's

findings on Indonesian adolescents' general use of social media for information sharing and educational purposes (Priwati & Helmi, 2021)

LGBTQ teenagers benefit significantly from social media since it fosters community, encourages self-expression, and provides emotional support (Berger et al., 2021; Widyasari & Allert, 2019). Some adolescents are selective and cautious about sharing their sexuality online, with some going to great lengths to conceal their true identities (Gauthier et al., 2021; Ruberg & Ruelos, 2020). This careful approach underscores the complex balance LGBTQ adolescents must navigate between expression and safety on social media platforms.

The concept of safe spaces in this research is adapted from its original usage, described as " Providing a safe environment for individuals with similar views to meet and exchange experiences." (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019). In particular, this concept significantly impacts women and the LGBTQ movement. This idea has been redefined to encompass the virtual environment provided by X, which provides a protective space for Indonesian LGBTQ adolescents to express themselves.

Establishing a protective online realm is a manifestation of social justice, acknowledging and fostering social diversity (Bhugra et al., 2022). LGBTQ adolescents, who perceive themselves distinctly from their heterosexual counterparts, require a space that recognizes and respects their uniqueness. Brownlie emphasized the significance of such a space, including digital platforms, for the emotional expression of sexual orientation (Brownlie & Shaw, 2019).

X is a pivotal platform for LGBTQ individuals, enabling them to share their real-life experiences within the LGBTQ community in a virtual setting deemed safe for support and acceptance (Chan, 2023; Masciantonio et al., 2021). Research by Talbot and Briggs (Talbot et al., 2022). showed that social media platforms, like X, provide LGBTQ adolescents with a

comfortable and secure environment to express themselves and explore their sexuality.

Contrary to the outdated view of Muhammad Nasir, Indonesian Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education serving in the Working Cabinet from 2014 to 2019, who incorrectly labeled LGBTQ as a mental illness (Wijaya, 2020), the American Psychiatric Association has not classified homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder (Schuyler et al., 2020). The existence of a mental illness does not imply the existence of an LGBTQ person. However, LGBTQ members may experience mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. This is often due to the need to hide their identity and face marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, and stigmatization (Labrum et al., 2021), along with early negative experiences (Marzetti et al., 2022; Rivers et al., 2018).

This research examines the dynamics of personal revelation among Indonesian LGBTQ adolescents on X. It delves into how these individuals disclose their identities, a process theorized to culminate in stable communication exchanges (Settle, 2018; Vijayakumar & Pfeifer, 2020). According to Green, Bobrowicz, and Ang (Bond & Miller, 2021). the level of intimacy in personal revelation varies. Indonesian LGBTQ adolescents are cautious when revealing their sexual orientation on X, anticipating potential adverse reactions. The concept of "degree of outness" in social media is diverse, ranging from being mostly hidden to partially or fully open about their sexual orientation (Jaspal, 2022). The prevalence of terms such as closed, half-closed, and out within the LGBTQ community can be explained by this spectrum.

Although there may be negative consequences, these adolescents often come forward online about their sexual orientation in order to enhance interpersonal relationships and well-being, as well as to influence society's perceptions (Gillin & Signorella, 2023). Online revelation, coupled with community support, plays a significant role in addressing mental health concerns commonly associated with the

LGBTQ community. Regardless of its extent, social support and mental health have been demonstrated to be enhanced by online openness (Naslund et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2022). Soohinda, Jaggi, Sampath, and Dutta (Soohinda et al., 2019). further affirmed this in their study on Indian men using a gay dating website, highlighting the importance of personal revelation for LGBTQ identification and social acceptance.

Visibility is of utmost importance for LGBTQ individuals since it allows them to make political statements about their identity and sexuality. This practice, known as the "politics of visibility," is widely promoted in LGBTQ politics.(Binnie & Klesse, 2012; Hanckel et al., 2019; Kerrigan & Pramaggiore, 2021). Nevertheless, not every individual has the opportunity to disclose their sexual orientation publicly. Some individuals resort to anonymous social media platforms like X to express themselves.

Most X users don't use their real names and instead choose to use their usernames. In this regard, it may be possible for them to maintain their anonymity despite revealing their sexuality. Dhoest and Szulc (Paasonen et al., 2023). note that while LGBTQ individuals might be more open on X, they do not always clearly identify themselves. Duguay (Yao et al., 2023). found that those preferring anonymity often gravitate towards X, where they can interact with LGBTQ content and follow related accounts without revealing their real identities.

Based on the above exposition, although social media offers many and extensive benefits, not all social media platforms provide a safe space for LGBTQ adolescents to openly share their identities and personal experiences. Many platforms fail to provide adequate protection and support for LGBTQ adolescents in the face of persistent stigma and discrimination in society. LGBTQ adolescents often feel isolated and fearful of disclosing their identities due to threats of cyberbullying, harassment, and online discrimination. This highlights an urgent need to create safer and more educational digital spaces for LGBTQ adolescents.

Furthermore, the protective space provided by social media is often insufficient to counteract stereotypes and misunderstandings prevalent in traditional societies. Despite social media offering a different and more open environment, many LGBTQ adolescents still feel pressured and unsafe expressing their identities. The negative stereotypes and prejudices ingrained in society lead LGBTQ adolescents to feel compelled to hide their identities to avoid discrimination and rejection. This indicates a gap in the utilization of social media as a tool to combat stigma and negative prejudices against the LGBTQ community.

Additionally, previous research has not extensively explored how online community support can effectively mitigate the mental health issues faced by LGBTQ adolescents. Most studies focus on the technical aspects of social media use without delving deeper into the psychological and emotional impacts of online community support on the desire for positive change among LGBTQ adolescents. LGBTQ adolescents often face mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress due to social pressure and discrimination. Therefore, it is important to further investigate how online communities can serve as effective sources of support in alleviating the mental burdens faced by LGBTQ adolescents.

On the other hand, the lack of attention to how the X platform specifically can assist LGBTQ adolescents in overcoming social and cultural challenges in Indonesia is an issue that needs to be addressed. There has not been comprehensive research on how the use of the X platform can help LGBTQ adolescents safely disclose their identities amidst a conservative society. Yet, the X platform has great potential to become a safe space for LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia, enabling them to connect with peers and receive the necessary support.

Furthermore, the negative impact of the lack of public knowledge and awareness about the

importance of safe spaces for LGBTQ adolescents on social media is also a significant issue. The low level of awareness and support from the general public regarding the necessity of providing safe spaces on social media causes LGBTQ adolescents to feel isolated and deprived of the support they need. Society needs to become more aware of the importance of creating an inclusive environment that supports the mental and orientation changes of LGBTQ adolescents, both in real life and online.

This research is urgent and important due to the limited understanding of the role of social media as a safe space for LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia, particularly in the context of the X platform. The stereotypes and negative prejudices prevalent in traditional society often lead LGBTQ adolescents to feel pressured and unsafe in expressing their identities. Social media has great potential to provide an inclusive and supportive environment, yet there has been little in-depth research on how online community support can alleviate the mental burdens faced by LGBTQ adolescents. The findings of this study are expected to offer solutions to the problems faced by LGBTQ adolescents by providing a better understanding of how social media can be optimized to create a safe and educational space.

Therefore, this research aims to explore how the X platform is used by LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia to safely disclose their identities and experiences. The study also seeks to identify the factors influencing the use of this platform as a protective space and how online community support can help reduce the mental health issues faced by LGBTQ adolescents. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia, as well as to provide insights that can be used to develop better policies and practices in educating them.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to understand the self-disclosure experiences of LGBTQ adolescents on the X (Twitter) platform. The research respondents consist of ten LGBTQ adolescents with various gender identities and sexual orientations. Respondents were selected purposively to ensure data variability. All respondents are aged between 21 and 35 years and have diverse educational backgrounds.

The research instruments include semi-structured interviews designed to explore the motivations, experiences, and impacts of self-disclosure on X. The interviews were conducted online to maintain the anonymity and comfort of the respondents. The collected data were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis methods. Data validity was checked through triangulation with other data sources. Manual coding was used to ensure accuracy in data interpretation.

The research procedure began with the preparation stage, which included the development of interview guidelines and instrument testing. This was followed by respondent recruitment and conducting interviews over a specified period. The data obtained were systematically analyzed to identify main themes. The analysis results are presented in a descriptive narrative that illustrates the respondents' self-disclosure experiences. All procedures were conducted according to ethical research standards to ensure the confidentiality and comfort of the respondents.

Results and discussion

The results of this study indicate that the X (Twitter) platform plays a crucial role in supporting the self-disclosure of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia. Three main themes emerged from this research: motivations for self-disclosure, feedback in disclosure, and the consequences of such disclosure. Firstly,

motivations for self-disclosure include the desire to acquire and disseminate knowledge, personal expression, self-acceptance, and involvement in LGBTQ movements and groups. Secondly, the feedback in self-disclosure encompasses positive responses such as acceptance and recognition, as well as negative responses like rejection and exclusion. Thirdly, the consequences of self-disclosure are divided into internal benefits, such as self-actualization and increased self-esteem, and external benefits, including social connections and recognition from the community.

Table 1: Self-Disclosure Data of Each Participant

Participants	Age	Gender	Gender Identity	Sexual Preferences	Disclosure Status
P1	23	Female	Butch	Lesbian	Partially Open
P2	25	Female	Transman	Pansexual	Open
P3	22	Male	Male	Gay	Open
P4	35	Male	Transwoman	Lesbian	Open
P5	28	Female	Female	Pansexual	Partially Open
P6	23	Female	Female	Bisexual	Partially Open
P7	24	Female	Female	Bisexual	Open
P8	22	Male	Male	Gay	Partially Open
P9	21	Female	Female	Lesbian	Partially Open
P10	26	Male	Male	Gay	Partially Open

Source: Data processed in 2024

Based on the above data and information, it is evident that the primary motivation for self-disclosure is the desire to share knowledge about the LGBTQ community, as emphasized by participant P5, who highlighted the importance of disseminating information to combat negative stereotypes. Additionally, participant P3 felt no need to hide their sexuality and used X to freely express their thoughts. This indicates that X serves as a significant platform for self-expression and self-acceptance among LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia.

Responses to self-disclosure varied, with many participants receiving positive support from the LGBTQ community and their allies. For instance, participant P2 received praise and admiration for their bravery in disclosing their transition process. However, there were also negative responses, as experienced by participant P4, who faced rejection from friends prior to their transition. These incidents highlight the duality of social acceptance faced by LGBTQ adolescents during the self-disclosure process on the X platform.

This study reveals that self-disclosure on X results in various internal and external benefits for participants. Internal benefits include self-actualization and increased self-esteem, while external benefits encompass social recognition and new connections. Participant P1 felt comfortable with their identity after sharing on X, while participant P6 gained recognition as a reference source for others considering disclosing their identities. These findings underscore the importance of X as a platform that protects and supports the self-disclosure process of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia.

The results of this study indicate that the X (Twitter) platform plays a significant role in supporting the self-disclosure of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia, addressing many of the challenges identified in previous research. This platform provides a safer and more educational space for LGBTQ adolescents to share their identities and personal experiences. According to the theory of inclusive digital environments, safe and supportive online spaces can reduce feelings of isolation and fear among LGBTQ adolescents (Craig et al., 2015). This study

supports the view that X can be a platform that protects LGBTQ adolescents from cyberbullying, harassment, and online discrimination, which are often major barriers to self-disclosure.

Although social media often fails to provide adequate protection, this study found that X offers a different and more open environment. The support participants received from the LGBTQ community and their allies on X demonstrates that the platform is effective in countering stereotypes and misunderstandings prevalent in traditional society. This aligns with the theory of online social support, which posits that positive interactions on social media can help individuals feel more accepted and valued (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Therefore, X has great potential to reduce the pressure and insecurity felt by LGBTQ adolescents in expressing their identities.

The study also reveals that online community support on X can effectively reduce mental health issues faced by LGBTQ adolescents. These findings support the literature showing that social support can alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Participants in this study reported increased self-esteem and self-actualization after disclosing on X, indicating that online community support can be a significant source of relief for the mental burden faced by LGBTQ adolescents. This suggests that the X platform can serve as an effective tool in improving the psychological well-being of LGBTQ adolescents.

The lack of attention to how the X platform specifically can help LGBTQ adolescents overcome social and cultural challenges in Indonesia is also addressed in this study. Participants' use of X to safely disclose their identities amidst a conservative society indicates that this platform can be a safe and supportive space. According to the theory of social media as social spaces, online platforms can provide alternative spaces for individuals to express themselves and connect with supportive

communities (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thus, X serves as an important tool in helping LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia navigate the social and cultural challenges they face.

The negative impact of the lack of public knowledge and awareness regarding the importance of safe spaces for LGBTQ adolescents on social media is also addressed by the findings of this study. The dissemination of information and knowledge conducted by participants on X demonstrates that this platform can play a role in raising public awareness. This supports the diffusion of innovations theory, which states that information spread through social networks can change societal views and behaviors (Rogers, 2003). Thus, X has the potential to enhance public awareness and support for creating inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQ adolescents.

Overall, the findings of this study affirm the importance of the X platform as a safe and supportive digital space for LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia. These findings extend current understanding of how social media can be utilized to combat the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ adolescents. Additionally, this research shows that X can play a role in improving the psychological well-being of LGBTQ adolescents through online community support. Therefore, it is crucial to continue developing and promoting platforms like X as effective tools in supporting self-disclosure and the well-being of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the X (Twitter) platform plays a crucial role in supporting the self-disclosure of LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia. X provides a safe and educational space for LGBTQ adolescents to share their identities and personal experiences, combat stereotypes, and receive community support. These findings suggest that X can alleviate the mental burden faced by LGBTQ adolescents by

providing significant online social support. The platform also helps LGBTQ adolescents navigate social and cultural challenges in a conservative society while raising public awareness about the importance of safe spaces on social media.

The benefits of these research findings are significant both theoretically and practically in the related fields. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the theories of online social support and diffusion of innovations, demonstrating how social media can be an effective tool in enhancing the psychological well-being and self-acceptance of LGBTQ adolescents. Practically, this research provides insights for social media platform developers to create more inclusive and supportive environments.

However, this study has limitations, including a sample that only includes LGBTQ adolescents in Indonesia and does not account for other factors that might influence the results. Future research is recommended to expand the sample to various regions and explore the long-term impact of online community support on the well-being of LGBTQ adolescents. Further studies could also examine the interaction between cultural and technological factors in influencing self-disclosure on social media.

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