Safeguarding Personal Information: Communication Privacy Management By Gen-Z Influencers

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***Abstract**.*

This research investigates the utilization of the NGL Link feature in Instagram Stories and its impact on the disclosure of personal information by micro-influencers. The study explores the experiences and privacy management strategies of Gen-Z micro-influencers. The study adopts a post-positivist paradigm and employs a case study approach to delve deeper into the research topic. Four micro-influencers meeting specific criteria were selected as informants for the study. Data collection techniques included interviews and data documentation. The informants shared their experiences, perspectives, and attitudes towards using the NGL Link feature. The findings reveal that the NGL Link feature enables micro-influencers to interact with their followers and share personal information, leading to increased engagement and deeper connections. However, concerns about privacy and the dissemination of personal information arise. The informants employ various filtering methods to protect their privacy, categorizing questions and selectively sharing responses. Dissemination of personal information by followers is observed, particularly among those who know the micro-influencer in real life. The study concludes that filtering serves as the primary privacy management strategy for micro-influencers using the NGL Link feature.

Keywords: *Communication privacy management, Instagram, NGL Link Feature, Micro Influencer, and Gen-Z.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

In July 2022, there was a notable trend on Instagram involving the utilization of the NGL Link or Not Gonna Lie feature in Instagram Stories. The NGL Link feature allows users to receive and answer anonymous questions. Statistical data on NGL Link downloads revealed that Indonesia had the highest number of downloads (3.1 million), followed by the United States (3 million) and India (1.5 million)(1–3).To use the NGL Link feature, users need to download the NGL Link application, enter their Instagram username, share the NGL link on the Instagram platform, write a question they wish to answer anonymously, and upload the link to their Instagram Story (4). By using the NGL Link feature in Instagram Stories, individuals can express honest feelings anonymously to Instagram users (5–7).Recently, there has been a growing concern among Instagram users regarding the use of the NGL Link feature as a means to facilitate interactions with anonymous questions or messages. This enables users to convey various messages without revealing their true identity. Some individuals have used the NGL Link feature on Instagram to receive anonymous questions that provide insights into how others perceive them or satisfy curiosity about their habits and personal matters.Anonymity, generally speaking, refers to the inability to attribute certain characteristics to an individual. Zimmerman and Ybarra categorize anonymity into two types: social anonymity and technical anonymity (8). Social anonymity refers to the inability to identify someone due to the absence of identity cues such as body language, voice, and personality. Technical anonymity, on the other hand, pertains to the lack of identifying information during interactions, such as full name, IP address, and home address (9).Another phenomenon is the use of the NGL Link feature on main Instagram accounts, where users answer various questions, often delving into personal topics such as fond memories, interests, hobbies, and even their ideal partner, leading to self-disclosure.

Privacy, according to Moore (10), encompasses the right to control personal information. Anonymity can lead users to behave in ways they would not normally do, such as revealing personal secrets or engaging in deviant behavior that deviates from societal norms. Anonymity in the online realm can provide individuals with a new identity, facilitate stigma-free discussions, and potentially enable dangerous acts (11). Furthermore, anonymity in the digital age presents opportunities for collecting unexpected information about others and creating an atmosphere where everyone can observe others anonymously. Consequently,

anonymity becomes a concern for protecting one's identity and activities, particularly in terms of personal information theft (12).Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory, developed by Petronio (13), explains how individuals manage their personal information. It suggests that individuals believe they have control over their personal information and employ privacy rules for self-management. According to the theory, individuals who receive or are authorized to access someone's personal information become co-owners of that information. Co-owners need to negotiate privacy rules when disclosing the information to others. Failure to reach a mutual agreement can result in coordination problems (boundary turbulence) among co-owners.Considering the aforementioned background, this study focuses on one main area of interest: How does the interaction with followers contribute to the disclosure of personal information through the NGL Link feature?

II.   METHODS

This qualitative study adopts the post-positivist paradigm, which challenges traditional notions of absolute truth in knowledge by deriving from the positivist view (14). According to Creswell, research within the post-positivist paradigm aims to explore the underlying causes that influence the final results of a specific experiment. Researchers employing this paradigm follow the scientific method, beginning with a theory, collecting data to either support or refute the theory, and making necessary revisions before conducting further tests.The authors employ a case study approach to delve deeper into the phenomenon of communication privacy management among Instagram users using the NGL Link feature, aiming to explore additional possibilities related to the research topic. Robert K. Yin (15) defines case studies as an empirical method used to investigate current phenomena in-depth within their real-world context.

To select suitable participants for the case study, a screening process is necessary. Thus, the researcher collects information on each participant and adjusts the predetermined qualification criteria. This study focuses on micro-influencers, who possess dedicated audiences, high engagement rates, and utilize word-of-mouth techniques (16). This research will involve four informants meeting the following criteria:

1. Gender: Male and Female
2. Generation Z; Age range: 16-24 years old
3. Micro-influencers with 1,000-100,000 followers on Instagram
4. Active Instagram users, spending at least 30 minutes daily on the platform. This is based on reference data indicating that the average active Instagram user in Indonesia spends 15 hours per month on social media
5. Participants who have answered and posted responses to personalized anonymous questions using the NGL Link feature on their Instagram main accounts.

The data collection techniques employed in this research include interviews and data documentation. According to Robert K. Yin, interviews allow for focused discussions on case study topics, providing insights into personal perspectives, attitudes, and meanings.

The following are the details of the informants who have been interviewed by the authors:

1. Leoni Angela, a 23-year-old woman residing in Gading Serpong, Tangerang. Leoni is a micro-influencer with 19,600 followers and 4,114 following. The interview took place on Friday, April 14, 2023, at 08:00 WIB via Google Meet (online).
2. Muhammad Difa Ryansyah, a 21-year-old male living in Jakarta. Difa gained recognition as a child singer and secured 2nd place during the Idola Cilik 2013 audition. Currently, Difa has 90,500 followers and 1,092 following. The interview was conducted on Friday, April 28, 2023, at 15:35 WIB via Zoom (online).
3. Maria Evelyn Winata, a 20-year-old woman residing in BSD, Tangerang. Evelyn leads a student life and works as a social media intern at Adira Finance. She has 1,270 followers and 700 following on Instagram. The interview took place on Thursday, May 4, 2023, at 16:15 WIB at the Millennium Centennial Center building (offline).

4. Swadigya Handaru Irsyad, a 26-year-old male based in Jakarta. Swadigya has 2,235 followers and 1,089 following on Instagram, and he works as an employee at Ninja Xpress. The interview was conducted on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 13:30 WIB via Zoom (online).

III.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Interacting with Followers via NGL Link: Revealing Personal Information

Leoni's experience thus far in using the NGL Link feature on Instagram has been positive, and she considers it beneficial with a good impact on herself.

"Hmm, in terms of positives and negatives, for example, in matters of relationships, it's mostly positive because there's nothing too negative or too private, so I still answer. So far, it has been mostly positive, and the questions are generally okay, make sense, and safe to answer like that." (Leoni, April 14, 2023)

Another benefit she gains from sharing information through the NGL Link feature is the increased engagement of her followers in getting to know her more personally. This is evident from Leoni's emphasis on unique questions from enthusiastic followers who anonymously ask through the NGL Link feature.

"The experience is quite exciting because it's my first time playing it, and so far, so good. Many people are enthusiastic to ask, so it's quite interesting and fun to play with NGL Link." (Leoni, April 14, 2023)

Meanwhile, Difa also feels positive impacts while disclosing information through the NGL Link feature on Instagram, echoing Leoni's earlier statement. Difa describes the benefits he receives, such as a deeper understanding of his career and personality as a musician for his followers.

"Well, so far, it's been positive because it talks about my career, like discussing activities related to singing, acting, and so on. I haven't encountered any negative aspects of NGL Link, especially regarding career discussions. So far, it's still positive." (Difa, April 28, 2023)

Evelyn's experience in sharing posts containing personal information through the NGL Link feature has also been positive, aligning with the experiences of the other two informants. However, she believes that there are negative aspects originating from others' perceptions of her posts, which she cannot control. Some people may consider her attention-seeking or make other judgments.

"Well, it's positive and negative. It depends on who's looking. But for me, it's mostly positive. Because I don't talk about others or share negative information or manipulate opinions. However, if it's negative, it depends on the person who sees it. Maybe some of my followers don't like me, so there are netizens who are judgmental, saying things like 'this person is pretending to be cool.' Those kinds of things that we can't control or prevent. Let it be. But for me, it's mostly positive, especially when there's interaction, and you can talk again with friends who usually stay silent. That's how it is." (Evelyn, May 4, 2023)

Sharing the same viewpoint as the other informants, Swadigya feels the positive impact of revealing personal information through the NGL Link feature. It helps his followers with small things like giving recommendations for good places to eat. However, he also acknowledges the negative side, such as followers expressing hatred or bullying regarding his Instagram posts.

"The positive side is probably that when people see us, they see us as influencers on social media. So, it seems like what they ask is something that might be useful to them. For example, recommendations for delicious food for them... As for the negative side, we definitely avoid hate speech. It's difficult because there are bullies, there is hate speech. Well, that's sometimes negative, and there's no need to share it on social media, right?" (Swadigya, May 9, 2023)

Most of the informants feel that their interaction with followers is facilitated by sharing personal information through the NGL Link feature. Even the anonymous questions that lead to the disclosure of personal information by micro-influencers are considered interesting, making micro-influencers more interested in using the feature. However, Swadigya expresses concerns about hate speech or negative comments about himself, leading him to choose not to post those anonymous questions on Instagram social media.

Maintaining Privacy While Revealing Personal Information

For Leoni, protecting her privacy while answering anonymous questions that involve revealing personal information involves various methods. The first method is filtering by categorizing questions that can still be answered and do not involve personal matters, such as relationship status and ideal partner type. The second method is providing followers with the option to determine the answers to anonymous questions. This means that Leoni directly gives control to her followers to determine the correct answers to those anonymous questions.

"...If it's about relationship status, I keep it general and safe. Even though I don't explicitly share my relationship status, in NGL Link, I created a voting option asking if I have a boyfriend or not, so they answer it themselves. And if someone asks about the ideal guy, I explain what I prefer..."(Leoni, April 14, 2023)

Similarly, Difa employs a similar approach to safeguarding privacy as Leoni. She filters anonymous questions and only answers those that do not lead to personal information, such as her career, hobbies, or providing inspiration to her followers. Difa also avoids answering anonymous questions that involve her personal information as a means of protecting her privacy on social media.

"Well, it's somewhat related to my previous answer. So, the way to protect privacy is through filtering, considering which questions to answer and whether to upload them or not. From there, I can maintain privacy and provide protection from those questions…" (Difa, April 28, 2023)

Evelyn follows the same practice of filtering questions, answering those she finds interesting and can respond to. However, she pays attention to negative-leaning questions and chooses not to share them in her story. Instead, she keeps them within the NGL Link feature for her own review.

"Initially, I didn't share everything. I would see how my friends responded. If there were negative or uncomfortable ones, I didn't feel like sharing them in my story. So, I would let people answer, but I kept it in the NGL Link app for me to see. But I didn't share it in my story, like that."(Evelyn, May 4, 2023)

Filtering questions is also the primary choice for Swadigya in maintaining her privacy, especially when posting answers to anonymous questions in Instagram stories. She determines which questions can be categorized as answers for public consumption, personal consumption, or limited to close friends. Additionally, she uses the "close friends" feature to further safeguard her privacy by restricting the visibility of the posts to selected followers.

So, in terms of privacy, filtering is enough—deciding what can be consumed publicly, personally, or only by close friends. That's how I approach it. I prioritize filtering for everything I post on Instagram, whether it's from NGL Link, stories, or feed content. Even when my friends mention me in their stories, I filter it if it's worthy of being shared, and then I post it. (Swadigya, May 9, 2023)

In their explanations, all the informants use the method of filtering anonymous questions to protect their privacy. By filtering the questions, they decide which ones can be posted for public consumption and which should remain private to the micro-influencer.

Dissemination of Personal Information by Followers

When answering anonymous questions through the NGL Link feature and posting the answers on her Instagram story, Leoni has encountered followers who share her personal information after seeing the posts. Close friends such as church friends have become followers who directly spread her personal information in real life.Unlike Leoni, Difa has not yet encountered followers who publicly share her personal information, nor has she been informed by followers about such dissemination. However, Difa hopes that her followers will share their own personal information and have the opportunity to meet her in person to share their impressions.Evelyn also hasn't experienced followers sharing her personal information either publicly through chat or in person. However, this could be because she was on a long holiday break and didn't meet her friends when the NGL Link trend was high on Instagram.On the other hand, Swadigya knows that her close friends share her personal information widely and often openly discuss her posts through the NGL Link feature on Instagram stories.Based on the accounts of the informants, the dissemination of personal information often occurs among people who know the micro-influencer in real life, such as colleagues or

close friends. This is further supported by the direct experiences of two informants who have witnessed the spreading of personal information by people close to them. However, further investigation is needed regarding the dissemination of personal information by followers other than those known by the micro-influencer.

Micro-Influencers' Privacy Management: Filtering as the Primary Choice

When interacting with followers through the NGL Link feature, micro-influencers are conscious of maintaining their privacy, leading them to engage in privacy management in communication. One of the methods used by the four informants to protect their privacy is by filtering anonymous questions based on their subjective classification into public and private categories.This finding aligns with the research conducted by Siregar (17), which explains that micro-influencers safeguard their privacy by managing their communication privacy through limiting personal and public information. Additionally, this study found that some informants restrict information by giving choices to their followers or leaving anonymous questions unanswered, allowing the questions to accumulate without response.For example, Leoni utilizes the question box feature to answer anonymous questions that she considers touch upon her personal information. By using this feature, she involves her followers in answering the questions, thus avoiding the dissemination of her personal information while increasing engagement through a quiz-like game. Based on these findings and previous research, it can be interpreted that micro-influencers categorize information as personal or suitable for public consumption and utilize additional features on Instagram, such as question boxes, to maintain privacy while enhancing engagement with their followers in an intriguing and curiosity-inducing manner.

On the contrary, these findings contradict the research conducted by Hollenbaugh (18), which found that Snapchat users with extensive contact lists tend to have open privacy management in communication, leading them to openly share personal information with everyone on the social media platform. The current study demonstrates that despite having a large number of followers, micro-influencers do not share all their personal information with the public. This can be seen in their consideration to filter anonymous questions they perceive as falling into the private or public categories. Furthermore, the informants, who are micro-influencers, remain conscious of distinguishing personal and public information, as evident in their practice of filtering NGL Link anonymous questions.In the cultural context, Indonesia is a country with high power distance and a collectivist culture (19). According to Li (20), social media users in collectivist cultures prefer to share personal information with close friends, typically within their real-life friendship groups, compared to users in individualistic cultures. This conclusion can be drawn by comparing the results of Hollenbaugh's research with the current study, indicating that the collectivist culture in Indonesia may contribute to the behavior of social media users who manage their privacy more discreetly compared to users in individualistic cultures, as observed in the participants of Hollenbaugh's study.

IV.   CONCLUSION

The research findings highlight that micro-influencers prioritize filtering as their primary choice for privacy management when interacting with followers through the NGL Link feature on Instagram. By categorizing questions and selectively answering those that do not involve personal information, micro-influencers can protect their privacy while maintaining engagement with their followers. The use of additional features, such as question boxes and voting options, allows micro-influencers to involve their followers in answering questions and avoid direct disclosure of personal information.These findings contradict previous research that suggested users with extensive contact lists tend to have open privacy management and share personal information openly. In the context of Indonesia's collectivist culture, micro-influencers are more inclined to share personal information within their close friendship groups rather than with the public.

This suggests that cultural factors play a role in shaping privacy management practices on social media platforms.Although some micro-influencers have experienced the dissemination of personal information by followers known in real life, further investigation is needed to understand the extent of personal information dissemination by followers who are not familiar with the micro-influencer.In summary, the study underscores the importance of privacy management for micro-influencers and their conscious

efforts to filter and control the disclosure of personal information while maintaining engagement with their followers.

V.   ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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