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# Exploring non-disclosure practices among male university job seekers through communication privacy management theory

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of non-disclosure of personal information among male individuals, employing the Communication Privacy Management Theory as a guiding framework. The objectives of the study encompass identifying the specific types of personal information male students refrain from disclosing, examining the underlying reasons for their non-disclosure practices, and assessing the impact of non-disclosure on their interpersonal relationships. Qualitative research methods, primarily in-depth interviews, were employed to gather insights, with six male students from Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI) participating in the interviews. The findings reveal that male students at UPSI do engage in non-disclosure of personal information, albeit to a certain extent. Specifically, the findings discovered four types of personal information—secrets, traumas, dark history, and family matters—that these students commonly choose not to disclose. Notably, there are four categories of personal information they tend to withhold, namely secrets, traumas, dark history, and family matters. The reluctance to disclose stems from factors such as insecure attachment, a reluctance to worry about their parents, and strained relationships with their family members. Furthermore, the study highlights that non-disclosure of personal information has both negative and positive repercussions on the participants' relationships with others. Moreover, the study underscores that non-disclosure of personal information can have both negative and positive effects on the participants' relationships, shedding light on the complexities of navigating personal privacy choices in the university and job-seeking context. The study contributes valuable insights into the challenges of employability dilemmas faced by male university students concerning the management of personal information.

**Keywords:** communication privacy management; non-disclosure; personal information; in-depth interviews; job seekers

## 1. Introduction

In the digital age, social media platforms have become powerful spaces for individuals to express themselves, share experiences, and engage in conversations that resonate with diverse audiences. Among these platforms, TikTok has risen as a widely accessible center, surpassing age barriers through its captivating content. While exploring TikTok, a widely embraced social media platform across age groups, a video shared by the user "vroken4ever" caught the researcher's attention. In this video, a thought-provoking question was posed by a girl: "Be honest, who do you call when you're at your lowest? Who is that one person?" The answers that followed, mostly from men, highlighted a significant reluctance to discuss their personal struggles and difficulties. The reasons they provided included societal expectations tied to masculinity, which discourage vulnerability; a belief that others are indifferent to their

problems; feelings of isolation and being disconnected from others; and a fear of being judged or criticized if they open up. Prompted by these fascinating findings, the researcher embarked on a study to unravel the underlying reasons driving men's non-disclosure of personal information. Building upon Keum et al., (2021) insights, the study acknowledges the potential influence of traditional masculinity ideology. This ideology suggests that societal expectations contribute to men refraining from sharing their feelings, fearing vulnerability, perceived weakness, or a departure from traditional notions of manliness (Addis and Mahalik, 2003). The men's responses in the TikTok videos align with the notion that conforming to traditional masculinity norms often involves concealing personal challenges.

Furthermore, recent study draws on research conducted by Geena Institute on Gender in Media (2020), highlighting stereotypes men encounter, including the expectation to exhibit toughness and suppress emotions. This research posits that the men who participated in the TikTok video might be influenced by these societal norms. It is crucial, however, to emphasize that the primary focus of the current study is not to definitively establish a link between masculinity and non-disclosure. Instead, the mention of masculinity serves as a signpost, directing attention to the broader societal context and underlining the study's intent to illuminate the stereotypes faced by men without making conclusive assertions about the relationship between masculinity and non-disclosure. Embarking on the proverb that 'A problem shared is a problem halved', this study scrutinizes its relevance to men, considering the challenge men face in disclosing personal information compared to women. Previous studies have shown that men showed a higher tendency towards non-disclosure of difficult feelings that would result to the loss of masculine power (Mérelle et al., 2018). Complementing this, earlier works by several scholars (Mérelle et al., 2018; Petronio and Martin, 1986) collectively establish a pattern where males tend to lean towards non-disclosure of personal information. Despite an abundance of studies highlighting this trend, limited attention has been devoted to unraveling the underlying reasons behind this phenomenon, beyond the socialization differences between men and women. Petronio and Martin (1986) assert that women are socialized in an environment that encourages empathy, openness, and disclosure, whereas men are conditioned to be more concealing, less expressive, and unemotional. This assumption implies that, despite sharing the same criteria for personal disclosure, men possess a higher propensity to share less about themselves than women do.

Further enriching our understanding of this phenomenon, recent research emphasizes that the inclination for women to share more than men is profoundly shaped by the nature of the shared information. Although studies show that women tend to share more than men, but it depends on what kind of information it is. The type of information plays a big role in how much people share. This insight comes from a study by Carbone et al., (2024) which highlights that while both men and women exhibit a similar readiness to disclose positive information, men notably express a lower desire and likelihood to share negative details compared to women. The pervasive stereotypes of masculinity, emphasizing toughness (Geena Institute on Gender in Media, 2020), contribute to the suppression of emotions instilled in men from an early age. According to societal conditioning, men tend to believe that disclosing their feelings may lead to negative consequences, whereas emotional

restraint is perceived as yielding positive outcomes (Petronio and Martin, 1986). Within this intricate landscape, stigma emerges as a prominent deterrent for men, with the potential disclosure of personal information seen as a risk of being perceived as 'weak', 'soft', and 'unmanly' (Addis and Mahalik, 2003; Keum et al., 2021) discourages men from sharing personal information. In simpler terms, in this complex situation, stigma stands out as a big reason why men hesitate to talk openly about their feelings or personal issues. They worry that if they do, they might be seen as less strong or less manly. This fear stops them from opening up. These multifaceted insights highlight the challenges men face in navigating societal expectations and stereotypes, illuminating the intricate interplay between disclosure tendencies and cultural norms.

For workers or job seekers, sharing information with employers carries risks linked to concerns about privacy invasion and the potential loss of control over one's personal details (Bhave et al., 2019). On the positive side, the act of sharing pertinent information can serve as a bridge, closing the information gap between employees and employers. This, in turn, contributes to favorable employment outcomes, such as securing a job. Notably, the significant expansion of access to human resource (HR) technology, encompassing human resource information systems (HRISs), cloud platforms, and apps, has empowered HR departments with enhanced capabilities (McCartney and Fu, 2021). They can now efficiently collect, manage, and analyze substantial volumes of employee data. This technological advancement underscores the evolving landscape of HR practices and the increasing reliance on sophisticated tools to streamline the management of employee information. Employees weigh these risks and benefits when deciding how much information to share, forming their privacy considerations (Bhave et al., 2019). From an organizational perspective, the main risk in collecting information from employees or job applicants is the potential invasion of their privacy, which can negatively impact employee morale and the organization's employment brand (Bhave et al., 2019). On the flip side, the organization benefits by gaining superior information about its employees, enabling better decision-making related to employment, enhancing organizational security, and reducing legal liabilities. Thus, the present study seeks to:

(1) To discover the categories of non-disclosure of personal information that male university job seekers chose to hide.

(2) To explore the reasons for non-disclosure of personal information among male university job seekers.

(3) To investigate the effects of non-disclosure among male university job seekers on their relationship with others.

(4) Following the present research objectives, the researchers aim to answer the following research questions:

(5) What are the categories of non-disclosure of personal information that male university job seekers choose to hide?

(6) What are the reasons for the non-disclosure of personal information among male university job seekers?

(7) How does non-disclosure of personal information affect male university job seekers in their relationships with others?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory

Embedded in empirical evidence, Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory helps us understand why people decide to share or keep such information to themselves (Petronio, 2013). In this way, it provides insights into the dynamics of how individuals navigate the management of private information (Petronio, 1991, 2013; Petronio and Martin, 1986). The theory delineates two key aspects within its first domain, namely privacy ownership. Firstly, individuals inherently perceive themselves as the rightful owners of their private information. Secondly, CPM suggests that there are instances where individuals choose to extend partial ownership of their private information to others through the act of disclosure (Ebersole and Hernandez, 2016; Petronio, 2013). This dual perspective within the privacy ownership domain forms the foundation of CPM's framework for understanding how individuals grapple with the boundaries of their private information in social interactions. According to CPM theory, both males and females adhere to distinct rules governing the disclosure or non-disclosure of their personal information. The choices individuals make regarding sharing or withholding personal details significantly influence their relationships with others (West and Turner, 2021). CPM posits that navigating the decision of what to share and what to keep private requires a delicate balance, with both disclosure and non-disclosure carrying their own set of consequences. In this theory, personal information is seen as important to people, and when they share it with others, it's called personal disclosure within relationships (West and Turner, 2021).

What sets CPM apart from other theories is its emphasis on self-disclosure, specifically in its definition of disclosure, distinguishing it from conventional self-disclosure literature. CPM defines disclosure in three key ways: it focuses on the personal content of the disclosure, examines adherence to disclosure rules, and challenges the idea that self-disclosure is the sole determinant of importance in communication (West and Turner, 2021). This theory highlights a crucial aspect - the act of revealing private information induces a feeling of vulnerability, prompting a natural inclination to control access to that information (Petronio, 2013; Smith and Brunner, 2017). In simpler terms, sharing something personal makes people feel exposed or at risk. This vulnerability sparks a desire to control who knows about that information. This inherent need for control becomes a way for individuals to protect themselves from potential negative consequences or judgments associated with sharing personal details (Petronio, 2013; Smith and Brunner, 2017). This nuanced perspective offered by CPM enriches our understanding of how individuals manage the complex dynamics of disclosing or concealing personal information within their relationships. As the upcoming section delves into non-disclosure and its various types, this groundwork will serve as a foundation for comprehending the multifaceted nature of personal information management in relationships.

### 2.2. Non-disclosure and type of non-disclosure

Navigating the intricacies of human behavior, non-disclosure also referred to as

self-concealment (for consistency throughout this study), is characterized by the intentional and proactive hiding or concealing of negative personal information (Geng et al., 2022). Alternatively, non-disclosure can be defined as the inclination of an individual to withhold personal information, encompassing thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and experiences, from others (Demir et al., 2020). Secrets, a ubiquitous aspect of human existence, entail the desire to keep personal information from being discovered by others (Jaffé and Douneva, 2020). Drawing parallels between the definitions of secrecy and non-disclosure, both involve the suppression of personal information, including problems, emotions, and experiences. Consequently, it can be inferred that non-disclosure and secrecy are correlated, with non-disclosure serving as a psychological construct that propels individuals towards the practice of secrecy (Uysal, 2019). Both concepts involve the concealment of personal matters, such as problems or emotions, indicating a fundamental similarity. The act of withholding information appears to be inherently connected to the act of keeping secrets, suggesting that the decision not to disclose information often initiates the process of secret-keeping.

In this study, non-disclosure is categorized into avoidance, lying, preoccupation, and emotion suppression, following the classification by Uysal (2019). However, the researcher remains open to exploring other types of non-disclosure that may manifest among male university students at UPSI. A comprehensive meta-analysis involving 137 studies conducted by Larson et al. (2015) illuminated the negative consequences associated with non-disclosure. Individuals practicing non-disclosure were found to experience adverse psychological and physical effects, including anxiety, depression, disease. In extreme cases, they may engage in negative behaviors such as eating disorders and suicidal tendencies. In essence, non-disclosure emerges as a factor that can significantly impact one's overall well-being.

Diving deeper into the multifaceted impacts of non-disclosure, it extends beyond individual health concerns, particularly mental health, and significantly influences interpersonal relationships. The act of keeping secrets not only hinders an individual's willingness to seek assistance from others but also affects perceptions of trustworthiness. Individuals who prefer non-disclosure are often perceived as untrustworthy and are subject to negative judgments (Larson et al., 2015; John et al., 2016). Bedrov and Leary (2021) illuminates a nuanced aspect: people often engage in non-disclosure to maintain connection and closeness with others. Disclosing personal information, in certain cases, may lead to conflict or stress, thus prompting individuals to opt for non-disclosure to preserve interpersonal relationships. This suggests that the motivation behind non-disclosure is rooted in the desire to avoid conflict, fostering the maintenance or enhancement of closeness (Bedrov and Leary, 2021).

Moreover, in broader terms, individuals commonly resort to non-disclosure as a protective mechanism against negative judgment, aiming to sustain positive relationships with others (Bedrov and Leary, 2021). The negative impact of keeping secrets, such as feelings of shame and guilt, largely depends on how much people dwell on them (Davis, 2024). He further emphasized that when people ruminate—constantly think about their secrets—they amplify their distress and negative emotions (Davis, 2024). Furthermore, people are less likely to share their secret if they don't have enough trusted and close relationships. Loved ones are essential for discussing

problem, secret and offering support, often even more than professionals. Studies show that lacking these intimate connections makes it more likely for individuals to keep their negative feelings and experiences to themselves (Wagner and Reifegerste, 2024). So, the fewer close and trusted relationships someone has, the more likely they are to hide their negative feelings and experiences. Ultimately, this interplay between non-disclosure and interpersonal dynamics illuminates the delicate balance individuals navigate to protect themselves, maintain positive relationships, and preserve the trust of those around them.

## 2.3. Personal information

Building on Petronio's definition in West and Turner's book (2019), personal information is perceived by individuals as significant and deeply meaningful to them. In the context of this study, where the focus is on understanding why male university job seekers opt not to disclose personal information, this definition is particularly relevant. Personal information also encompasses data recorded electronically or any information that, either independently or in combination with other details, can identify an individual (Fan et al., 2021). Another study frames personal information as data exploitable for identity revelation and profile building (Rafique, 2017). This suggests that personal information, when disclosed publicly, can potentially be used against the individual. Hence, the fear of personal information being misused might be a contributing factor to male non-disclosure, aligning with the concerns expressed in the aforementioned TikTok video.

Highlighting the ongoing challenge of male non-disclosure, particularly in contrast to females, a body of research, including studies by Petronio and Martin (1986), consistently reinforces the notion that men exhibit a lesser inclination to share personal information compared to women. In this study, we concur with the prevailing view among researchers that private includes any data related to an identifiable individual and not intended for public disclosure (Smith and Brunner, 2017; Starcher and Child, 2022). While individuals may be comfortable sharing certain personal details like their name, gender, email address, and place of birth, other information such as social security numbers, home addresses, health records, sexual orientation, and financial details are considered highly personal and are typically kept confidential. This literature review sets the foundation for selecting the appropriate methodology to delve into the complexities of male non-disclosure, which will be further discussed in the subsequent section.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Qualitative research design

The selection of a qualitative research design for this study was driven by its ability to enhance understanding of human experiences, events, cultures, beliefs, and values (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Given the focus on participants' experiences, a qualitative approach was deemed more suitable, allowing the researcher to delve into the intricacies of these experiences and their influence on decisions related to the non-disclosure of personal information. To ensure the richness of data, six male university

students from UPSI were recruited through interviews, with each participant providing informed consent. According to Robert Yin, a prominent figure in qualitative research methodology, he emphasized the importance in qualitative study is to maximize information and no reference to any larger population is relevant, particularly in-depth interviews (Yin, 2016). According to Yin, information power refers to the extent to which each participant can contribute rich and relevant data to the research objectives (Yin, 2016). In the case of in-depth interviews, the emphasis is on the depth and richness of data obtained from each participant rather than the sheer number of participants. Yin argues that even a small sample size can be sufficient if the participants possess a wealth of knowledge and experiences relevant to the research questions (Yin, 2016). Moreover, the interviews were conducted over in two months from April to May 2023, accommodating participants' schedules. Each interview, held in empty classrooms, lasted approximately 30 minutes. The questioning sequence commenced with general inquiries about age, faculty, and program details, gradually progressing to more specific queries aimed at unveiling the subtleties of personal information disclosure and non-disclosure.

The interview questions included:
(1) What personal information would you share with others?
(2) Why do you share that personal information?
(3) What personal information would you not share with others?
(4) Why are you hiding those personal pieces of information?
(5) How did it affect your relationship with others when you hide that personal information?
(6) Do you think that if you share that personal information, your friends and family will stay away from you?

Additional questions were added during the interview when deemed necessary. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and backed up to prevent data loss. The transcription process involved the researcher's annotations, thoughts, and ideas related to the collected data.

## 3.2. Data analysis

Moving to the analysis phase, the researcher engaged in coding, categorizing, and theming. Similar codes were grouped, leading to the identification of emerging themes. This iterative process, complemented by memo writing, facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the data. The final step involved interpreting the data by exploring patterns, connections, and relationships within the identified categories and themes. The cyclical nature of this approach, guided by memo analysis, allowed for a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the male university job seekers' perspectives on non-disclosure of personal information.

## 4. Results and discussion

In our investigation of the phenomenon of non-disclosure among male university students at UPSI, we employed a qualitative research design to gain insight into their diverse experiences, beliefs, and decision-making processes. By focusing on the male perspective, we aimed to understand the intricate dynamics surrounding the disclosure

and non-disclosure of personal information. Through the recruitment of six participants, we were able to explore the nuanced reasons behind their choices to share or conceal personal information, as well as the specific types of non-disclosure they opted for. Over the course of two months, interviews provided a platform for participants to openly articulate their thoughts, offering valuable insights into the factors influencing their decisions. As the analysis and interpretation stages unfold, the subsequent sections will unravel the emergent themes, illuminating the complex dynamics that underlie non-disclosure practices among male university job seekers. Through this exploration, we aim to uncover deeper insights into the motivations, challenges and implications associated with non-disclosure behavior in this specific context.

Theme 1: Selective Disclosure Practices.

Drawing insights from the perspectives of the six interviewed participants, a prominent theme emerged, challenging the preconceived assumption that male university job seekers universally engage in non-disclosure of personal information and thus, adding depth to the understanding of how personal information is navigated. The participants' responses shed light on this aspect, revealing a nuanced picture of their selective disclosure practices.

*I would not share my personal information willingly with people that I've just met. I will share my secrets only with my close friends.*

(Participant 1)

*Some of it (personal information), I can disclose to others that I can trust and some, I cannot share such as my fear. I have a fear of arthropods and my housemate knew about this. Recently, he chased me around the house holding an arthropod.*

(Participant 2)

*I share my secrets and my past trauma with my close friends. Usually, before we go to sleep, we will talk about it first.*

(Participant 3)

*For me, trauma is a part of personal information. I will not share them unless that person is someone whom I am close with.*

(Participant 4)

*If necessary, I would share my personal information. For example, some secrets I can share, and other secrets I cannot share.*

(Participant 5)

*For me, if I am close to someone, I would share them (personal information). It is not a problem for me. I think that if we keep hiding our true selves from others, they will not know about us, so we need to share with them little by little and eventually they will know who we are.*

(Participant 6)

The recurring theme, derived from the participants' responses revolves around the selective nature of personal information disclosure among male university job seekers. Essentially, these individuals expressed a willingness to share personal details, but this openness is contingent upon their familiarity, trust, or longstanding relationships with the individuals involved. In essence, male university job seekers demonstrated a propensity to share their personal lives exclusively with those they

have a genuine connection with, trust implicitly, or have built a longstanding relationship with over time. This finding adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of how personal information is navigated, emphasizing the significance of relational dynamics and trust in the disclosure process.

In the earlier discussion of this paper, three antecedents or categories of personal information that male students might be hesitant to share were identified: traumas, insecure attachment orientations, and dispositional social evaluation concerns (Larson et al., 2015). The initial finding indicates that male university job seekers exhibit a tendency not to disclose personal information, albeit with certain limitations. Before delving into the specific types of personal information participants opted to conceal, the researcher first inquired about their understanding of the concept of personal information.

Upon examining the participants' interpretations of personal information presented in **Table 1**, it became evident that all six individuals shared a unanimous understanding—personal information, according to their perspective, is not willingly disclosed. However, the nuances emerged when participants elaborated on the specific details of personal information they might be reluctant to share. Among the personal information that male university job seekers prefer to hide were: 1) secrets; 2) traumas; 3) dark history; 4) bad experiences and 5) family problems. These insights provide the significance of understanding the diverse reasons behind individuals' reluctance to disclose certain aspects of their personal lives, particularly in the context of seeking employment opportunities.

**Table 1.** Participants' interpretations of personal information.

| Participant | Individual Perspective on Personal Information |
| --- | --- |
| Participant 1 | In my understanding, personal information comprises data that we cannot reveal willingly. It is only disclosed when there is official business. |
| Participant 2 | To me, personal information revolves around one's thoughts or problems that are challenging to share, either due to difficulty or the absence of someone to confide in. |
| Participant 3 | Personal information, for me, pertains to details about ourselves that we guard, and others do not have the right to know. It's information that only we are privy to. |
| Participant 4 | Personal information is something that is related to someone, which is their background and something that is related to them. |
| Participant 5 | Personal information, in my understanding, is related to privacy or important information about someone. |
| Participant 6 | Personally, I would define personal information as something very private and individual. It depends on the person whether they choose to share it with the public or not. Everyone has their own personal information. |

In terms of insecure attachment orientations and dispositional social evaluation concerns, these are not necessarily the types of personal information that participants opt to withhold; instead, they may serve as reasons for refraining from disclosing their personal information.

### 4.1. Reasons for non-disclosure of personal information

As highlighted earlier, participants do engage in disclosing personal information to some extent. However, unanimous among all six participants was the preference for

sharing with close friends initially, rather than with family or other individuals. The reasons for this inclination are multifaceted and are explored below:

### 4.1.1. Insecure attachment orientation

Insecure attachment orientation, characterized as a contributor to social risk factors for psychopathology, has been linked to poor emotional regulation and a lack of close support (Nor Ba'yah Abdul Kadir, 2017). This type of attachment becomes a significant factor influencing the non-disclosure of personal information, as participants seek to avoid negative impacts on their relationships. Consequently, they selectively share personal information only with individuals they trust, based on shared experiences or a long-established relationship. Participant 2 expressed, "When I decide to share my personal information, I let the other person share about themselves first. If that person has the same experience or fate or maybe worse than ours, maybe we can share our story. We are in the same situation. Moreover, the response from Participant 4 stressed that "it doesn't matter whether they are old friends or new friends, as long as I am comfortable with them. I mean they are willing to listen and give their opinion."

Participants, driven by concerns about distrust and anxious attachment orientations, limit personal disclosures to those who have gained their trust, creating a supportive and understanding environment.

### 4.1.2. Not wanting parents to worry

Two participants in the study conveyed a hesitation to disclose personal information to their families, citing a wish to protect them from unnecessary worry. Participant 3 emphasized their less-than-close relationship with family members, especially as they grew older, leading to a preference for keeping secrets from family. Participant 4 echoed this sentiment, expressing a preference for sharing personal matters with close friends rather than family, with the underlying concern of not wanting to burden family members with worries about their problems. Concerns about burdening their families with worries lead these participants to opt for secrecy, sharing their personal information selectively with friends rather than family members.

### 4.1.3. Strained family relationships

One participant attributed their non-disclosure to a strained relationship with their family, especially with their parents. Participant 2 shared, "Some people have good relationships with their parents, some people are close to their siblings. Like me, I have a good relationship with my siblings, but when it comes to my parents, to have a close relationship with them, it's a bit hard." The participant expressed a desire for a closer familial bond, citing observations of others' relationships on social media. However, past mischievous actions during their younger years led to strained family ties, making them hesitant to seek support from their family.

In summary, the reasons for non-disclosure among male university students extend beyond personal insecurities and encompass concerns about family worry and strained relationships, shedding light on the complexity of personal information-sharing practices.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with male university job seekers at UPSI, uncovering recurring themes that shed light on their personal information disclosure practices. Despite initial assumptions that these individuals might exhibit a tendency towards non-disclosure, the findings revealed a more nuanced picture. It was concluded that male university job seekers do engage in personal information disclosure, albeit selectively and with specific individuals. The interviews revealed both the willingness and reluctance of male university students to share various types of personal information. Notably, personal information encompassed a range of topics such as secrets, past traumas, dark histories, and family problems. Contrary to the literature review, where insecure attachment orientations and dispositional social-evaluation concerns were presented as types of personal information that might not be shared, further analysis clarified that these are reasons influencing the non-disclosure of personal information. Moreover, this chapter delves into the consequences of both disclosing and not disclosing personal information. Through a comprehensive examination of these dynamics, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how male university job seekers navigate the complexities of personal information disclosure in their pursuit of employment opportunities.

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