

Drawing the Line: University Students' Conceptualisations of Oversharing on Social Media

Abstract: This study explores how university students understand oversharing on social media, the motivations they attribute to it, how they perceive individuals who engage in excessive self-disclosure, and how they regulate their own online sharing practices. Employing a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 22 preparatory school students enrolled at a public university in Türkiye. The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that participants do not define oversharing simply as sharing a large amount of information. Instead, they conceptualise it as a context-dependent communicative practice shaped by privacy boundaries, audience expectations, and the perceived appropriateness of disclosed content. Participants associated oversharing primarily with revealing sensitive personal information, while emphasising that acceptable disclosure depends on contextual factors, such as audience, purpose, and account visibility. They attributed oversharing to multiple interpersonal and emotional motivations, including attention seeking, social validation, emotional support, loneliness, and self-expression. Furthermore, participants frequently evaluated individuals who overshare through broader social judgements, often associating excessive disclosure with insecurity, attention seeking, or emotional vulnerability. The findings suggest that oversharing should be understood not merely as excessive disclosure but as a socially negotiated communication practice situated at the intersection of self-disclosure, privacy management, audience awareness, identity performance, and self-regulation. The study contributes to the growing literature on digital communication by providing a user-centred perspective on how the boundaries of oversharing are constructed and negotiated in contemporary social media environments.

Keywords: oversharing; self-disclosure; social media; privacy management; digital communication; university students

I. Introduction

Social media has become one of the primary environments through which individuals communicate, construct identities, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Rather than functioning solely as channels for information exchange, digital platforms have evolved into spaces where everyday experiences, emotions, opinions, and personal narratives are routinely shared with diverse audiences. Consequently, self-disclosure has become an increasingly visible and expected component of digital communication, enabling individuals to establish relationships, express emotions, seek social support, and negotiate their identities in networked environments (Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Anderson, 2020; boyd, 2008; Ertunç, 2025; John, 2016). At the same time; however, the growing visibility and persistence of online communication have made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between appropriate personal disclosure and excessive disclosure, raising new questions regarding the boundaries of sharing in digital environments.

Self-disclosure has long been recognised as a fundamental process in interpersonal communication. Classical theories conceptualise disclosure as a gradual, reciprocal, and relational process through which intimacy and trust develop over time (Jourard, 1971; Altman & Taylor, 1973). With the emergence of computer-mediated communication, however, scholars have argued that online environments reshape this process by reducing social constraints while simultaneously increasing users' control over self-presentation (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Joinson, 2001). Studies of online interaction further demonstrate that individuals strategically manage personal

information to balance authenticity with favourable self-presentation (Gibbs et al., 2006). Consequently, disclosure is no longer understood solely as an interpersonal act but also as a communicative practice shaped by the affordances and expectations of digital media.

Within this broader discussion, oversharing has emerged as an increasingly significant concept in digital communication research. Agger (2012) defines oversharing as the disclosure of highly personal information beyond socially appropriate boundaries and argues that the distinction between sharing and oversharing is ultimately a matter of social judgement rather than disclosure itself. Similarly, John (2016) suggests that contemporary cultures of sharing have transformed personal disclosure into an ordinary social practice, while Kennedy (2018) argues that intimate expression has become increasingly normalised within digital publics. Rather than representing a simple excess of information, oversharing reflects changing understandings of privacy, visibility, and interpersonal communication in digitally mediated environments.

Recent scholarship has further demonstrated that digital self-disclosure is shaped by the increasing importance of visibility, authenticity, and participation in online environments. Social media users continuously negotiate how they present themselves while responding to audience expectations and platform cultures (Barta & Andalibi, 2021; Baş et al., 2023; Marwick, 2015; Duffy & Hund, 2019). Likewise, emotional expression has become embedded within networked forms of participation where personal narratives circulate as publicly shared experiences (Papacharissi, 2014; Senft & Baym, 2015; Shifman, 2014). At the same time, emerging studies have highlighted both the opportunities and risks associated with oversharing, including privacy concerns, emotional vulnerability, interpersonal judgement, and digital permanence (Shabahang et al., 2024).

Despite this growing body of research, existing studies have predominantly examined oversharing through psychological outcomes, privacy risks, platform characteristics, or patterns of online behaviour. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding how users themselves conceptualise oversharing, how they distinguish acceptable sharing from excessive sharing, and which social criteria they employ when making these judgements (Kaye et al., 2020; Omar & Dequan, 2020). Since the boundaries of oversharing are socially negotiated rather than objectively fixed, examining users' own perspectives provides an important opportunity to better understand contemporary digital communication norms.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores how university students conceptualise oversharing on social media. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 22 preparatory school students enrolled at a public university in Türkiye, the study investigates students' understandings of oversharing, the meanings they attribute to this phenomenon, and the ways they evaluate and regulate online self-disclosure. By foregrounding participants' own interpretations rather than platform-specific practices or behavioural outcomes, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on digital communication and self-disclosure by offering a user-centred understanding of how the boundaries of oversharing are socially constructed and negotiated.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. RQ1. How do university students conceptualise oversharing on social media?
2. RQ2. Why do university students think people engage in oversharing on social media?
3. RQ3. How do university students perceive individuals who engage in oversharing on social media?
4. RQ4. How do university students regulate their own sharing practices on social media?

II. Literature Review

2.1. Self-Disclosure in Digital Communication

Self-disclosure has long been regarded as one of the fundamental processes through which interpersonal relationships are initiated, maintained, and strengthened. Early communication theories conceptualised self-disclosure as the voluntary sharing of personal information that gradually develops intimacy and mutual trust between individuals (Jourard, 1971; Altman & Taylor, 1973). Rather than representing a simple transfer of information, disclosure has traditionally been understood as a dynamic relational process through which individuals negotiate closeness, reciprocity, and social connection.

The emergence of computer-mediated communication has substantially transformed this process. Unlike face-to-face interaction, digital communication enables individuals to disclose personal information to audiences that are larger, more diverse, and often invisible. Scholars have argued that online environments reduce many of the social constraints associated with offline communication while simultaneously providing users with greater opportunities to control how they present themselves (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Joinson, 2001). Consequently, self-disclosure in digital settings is no longer limited to interpersonal relationship development but has become closely connected to identity construction, impression management, and participation in networked publics (boyd, 2008; Gibbs et al., 2006). Recent studies have also shown that social media cultures increasingly encourage the public display of everyday and intimate experiences, making extensive self-disclosure a normalised aspect of online participation (Abidin, 2017).

At the same time, social media has expanded both the frequency and visibility of personal disclosure. Everyday experiences that were once shared within relatively private social circles are now routinely communicated to broad audiences through digital platforms. This transformation has altered not only how people disclose personal information but also the social expectations surrounding disclosure itself. As John (2016) argues, sharing has become a defining cultural practice of the digital age, where communication increasingly involves making aspects of everyday life publicly visible. Accordingly, self-disclosure is now understood as both an interpersonal behaviour and a socially situated communicative practice shaped by technological affordances, audience expectations, and evolving cultural norms.

The growing visibility of online self-disclosure has also complicated the distinction between appropriate and excessive disclosure. Information that individuals perceive as ordinary or authentic may be interpreted differently by diverse audiences, particularly when personal disclosures become persistent, searchable, and widely accessible (Marwick & boyd, 2011). As a result, researchers have increasingly questioned not only why individuals disclose personal information online but also how the boundaries of acceptable disclosure are socially negotiated within digital communication environments. This discussion has provided the conceptual foundation for the emergence of oversharing as a distinct area of inquiry within communication and social media research.

III. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how university students conceptualise oversharing on social media. Since the primary aim was to understand participants' own interpretations, experiences, and meaning-making processes rather than to measure predetermined variables, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate. Qualitative research enables researchers to investigate how individuals interpret social phenomena within their everyday contexts and to examine the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Flick, 2018). In the context of this study, such an approach made it possible to examine how university students define oversharing, negotiate its boundaries, and evaluate their own and others' online sharing practices.

3.2. Participants

The participants consisted of 22 preparatory school students enrolled at a public university in Türkiye. All participants were studying at the B1 proficiency level during the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, as they were expected to possess first-hand experience with social media use and to provide rich descriptions of their perceptions of oversharing. Participation was entirely voluntary. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their identities would remain confidential throughout the research process. No identifying information was collected.

3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected in June 2026 through semi-structured individual interviews. An interview guide consisting of ten open-ended questions was developed based on the literature on self-disclosure, oversharing, and digital communication. The questions explored participants' definitions of oversharing, perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate online sharing, motivations attributed to oversharing, impressions of individuals who engage in excessive self-disclosure, and participants' own sharing practices. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions when necessary while allowing participants to elaborate freely on their experiences and viewpoints. Each interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes.

3.4. Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021). The analysis began with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively from participants' responses rather than being derived from predetermined categories. Similar codes were then grouped into broader candidate themes, which were reviewed, refined, and defined through an iterative analytical process. Throughout the analysis, particular attention was paid to identifying shared patterns as well as variations in participants' understandings of oversharing. The themes presented in the findings section represent recurring patterns across the dataset while preserving the diversity of participants' perspectives.

IV. Findings

RQ1. How do university students conceptualise oversharing on social media?

Analysis of the interview data revealed that participants did not conceptualise oversharing merely as posting frequently or sharing a large volume of content. Instead, they primarily associated oversharing with crossing privacy boundaries and disclosing information that should remain within the private sphere. At the same time, participants emphasised that the boundaries of oversharing are not universal but depend on contextual factors such as the audience, the purpose of sharing, and individual perceptions. Accordingly, two interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Oversharing as Crossing Privacy Boundaries and (2) The Boundaries of Oversharing Are Context-Dependent.

Theme 1. Oversharing as Crossing Privacy Boundaries

Participants consistently described oversharing as revealing information that they believed should remain private. Rather than evaluating oversharing according to the frequency of posting, they focused on the nature of the disclosed content. Family conflicts, romantic relationships, health conditions, financial matters, children's photographs, real-time location, and intimate moments were repeatedly mentioned as examples of disclosures that exceed acceptable privacy boundaries.

Table 1

Theme 1. Oversharing as Crossing Privacy Boundaries

Representative codes	Meaning
Family issues	Disclosure of family-related problems and private family matters
Romantic relationships	Sharing intimate relationship experiences and conflicts
Health information	Public disclosure of illnesses and medical conditions
Financial matters	Revealing personal financial circumstances
Real-time location	Sharing location information that may compromise privacy or safety
Children's photographs	Sharing content involving children's privacy
Intimate moments	Disclosing highly personal or emotionally sensitive experiences

Participants frequently associated oversharing with the disclosure of highly personal experiences. For example, P14 explained that oversharing begins when individuals publicly reveal aspects of their private lives that should remain confidential:

"I think oversharing starts when people share things that should stay private, such as family problems, health issues, financial matters, or their location." (P14)

Similarly, P19 argued that certain aspects of personal life should never become public because doing so may compromise both personal and family privacy:

"I would never share my children's photos, intimate family moments, or every detail of my daily life because some things should remain private." (P19)

Although participants referred to different examples, they shared a common understanding that oversharing is defined primarily by the disclosure of sensitive information rather than by the amount of content shared. This finding suggests that participants conceptualised oversharing as the violation of privacy boundaries rather than simply excessive posting.

Theme 2. The Boundaries of Oversharing Are Context-Dependent

Although privacy emerged as the dominant criterion, participants also emphasised that there is no universally accepted definition of oversharing. Instead, they argued that whether a particular post is considered excessive, depends on several contextual factors, including the intended audience, the purpose of the disclosure, and individual differences. Participants therefore viewed oversharing as a subjective and socially negotiated phenomenon rather than a fixed category.

Table 2

Theme 2. The Boundaries of Oversharing Are Context-Dependent

Representative codes	Meaning
Depends on the individual	Personal values shape perceptions of oversharing
Depends on the audience	Different audiences require different disclosure boundaries
Public vs. private accounts	Sharing practices vary according to account visibility
Purpose of sharing	Intentions influence whether disclosure is considered excessive
No fixed boundary	Oversharing is understood as context-dependent rather than universal

Several participants explicitly stated that oversharing cannot be defined using universal criteria. P8, for instance, argued that personal boundaries differ from one individual to another:

"Everyone has different boundaries. What one person considers oversharing may seem completely normal to someone else." (P8)

Likewise, P12 highlighted the importance of audience in shaping disclosure decisions. According to this participant, sharing practices vary depending on whether content is intended for a close circle of friends or a broader public audience:

"I share different things on my private account because only my close friends can see them. I wouldn't post the same things on my public account." (P12)

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate that participants did not perceive oversharing as an objective characteristic of particular posts. Instead, they regarded it as a context-dependent judgement shaped by audience, purpose, and individual expectations regarding privacy and appropriate online behaviour.

RQ2. Why do university students think people engage in oversharing on social media?

Analysis of the interview data showed that participants attributed oversharing to a range of psychological and social motivations rather than to a single cause. While attention seeking emerged as the most frequently mentioned explanation, participants also associated oversharing with the desire for social approval, emotional relief, loneliness, self-expression, and the pursuit of online visibility. Rather than viewing these motivations as mutually exclusive, participants suggested that oversharing often results from the interaction of several personal and social factors. Accordingly, one overarching theme emerged from the analysis.

Theme 3. Oversharing as a Means of Seeking Attention and Validation

Participants most commonly perceived oversharing as a strategy for attracting attention and gaining recognition on social media. Many believed that individuals disclose highly personal information to increase visibility, receive likes and comments, gain followers, or satisfy a desire to be noticed. At the same time, participants acknowledged that oversharing may also stem from emotional needs, such as seeking support, coping with loneliness, expressing emotions, or relieving psychological distress. These responses indicate that participants understood oversharing not simply as attention-seeking behaviour but as a communicative practice motivated by both social recognition and emotional expression.

Table 3

Theme 3. Oversharing as a Means of Seeking Attention and Validation

Representative codes	Meaning
Attention seeking	Oversharing is used to attract public attention.
Seeking validation	Individuals expect approval through likes, comments, or positive reactions.
Desire for popularity	Increased visibility and recognition motivate disclosure.
Emotional relief	Sharing personal experiences helps reduce emotional burden.
Loneliness	Oversharing is perceived as a way of coping with isolation.
Self-expression	Personal disclosure is used to communicate emotions and experiences.

Several participants directly associated oversharing with the pursuit of attention and online recognition. For example, P6 argued that individuals often disclose private aspects of their lives because they want to become more visible and attract public interest:

"Some people share everything because they want attention. They expect people to react, comment, and notice them." (P6)

Rather than interpreting oversharing solely as a desire for popularity, other participants emphasised its emotional dimension. P17, for instance, suggested that some individuals overshare because they lack emotional support in their offline lives and use social media as an outlet for expressing their feelings:

"I think some people don't have anyone to talk to. They share their feelings online because it makes them feel understood and less alone." (P17)

Taken together, these findings suggest that participants perceived oversharing as a multifaceted communicative practice driven by both interpersonal and emotional motivations. While attention and visibility were regarded as important incentives, participants also recognised that oversharing may function as a means of seeking connection, understanding, and emotional support.

RQ3. How do university students perceive individuals who engage in oversharing on social media?

The interview data revealed that participants generally held negative perceptions of individuals who engage in oversharing on social media. While a small number of participants acknowledged that excessive sharing may sometimes reflect emotional distress or a need for support, most associated oversharing with undesirable personal characteristics and unfavourable social impressions. Participants frequently interpreted excessive self-disclosure as a means of attracting attention, seeking validation, or presenting an exaggerated version of oneself. Accordingly, one overarching theme emerged from the analysis.

Theme 4. Oversharing as a Source of Social Judgement

Participants commonly evaluated individuals who engage in oversharing through negative social judgements. Rather than focusing solely on the content of the posts, they often made inferences about the personality, emotional state, and motivations of those who shared highly personal information online. Individuals who overshare were frequently described as attention-seeking, insecure, lonely, emotionally vulnerable, or excessively concerned with gaining social approval. At the same time, a few participants cautioned against making immediate negative

judgements, suggesting that oversharing may also reflect personal difficulties or a genuine need to express emotions.

Table 4

Theme 4. Oversharing as a Source of Social Judgement

Representative codes	Meaning
Attention seeker	Oversharers are perceived as seeking public attention.
Insecure	Excessive disclosure is associated with low self-confidence.
Lonely	Oversharing is interpreted as a sign of social isolation.
Emotionally vulnerable	Sharing is viewed as a way of coping with emotional difficulties.
Seeking validation	Oversharers are believed to depend on others' approval.
Showing off	Some participants associated oversharing with self-promotion and impression management.

Many participants viewed oversharing as an attempt to gain attention and approval from others. For example, P9 suggested that people who share highly personal information online often seek recognition rather than genuine communication:

"When someone shares every detail of their life, I think they want people to notice them and react to what they post." (P9)

Rather than interpreting such behaviour as simple self-expression, participants frequently associated it with a desire to become visible and receive external validation. These responses indicate that participants often evaluated oversharing through assumptions about the motivations underlying the behaviour rather than the behaviour itself.

However, not all participants adopted a purely negative perspective. P18, for instance, argued that excessive sharing may sometimes reflect emotional difficulties rather than intentional attention seeking:

"Sometimes people overshare because they don't have anyone to talk to. Social media becomes a place where they can express themselves and feel understood." (P18)

This perspective introduces a more empathetic interpretation of oversharing by recognising that excessive self-disclosure may function as a coping strategy for emotional distress or loneliness. Although this view was expressed less frequently than negative evaluations, it suggests that participants' perceptions of oversharing are not entirely one-dimensional.

Overall, participants tended to evaluate individuals who engage in oversharing through predominantly negative social judgements. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that some participants acknowledged the emotional and interpersonal circumstances that may motivate such behaviour, indicating a more nuanced understanding of oversharing than simple social disapproval.

RQ4. How do university students regulate their own sharing practices on social media?

The interview data indicated that participants actively regulated their own social media sharing by establishing personal boundaries regarding what they considered appropriate to disclose online. Rather than avoiding self-

disclosure altogether, participants described adopting deliberate strategies to protect their privacy, ensure their personal safety, and carefully evaluate the potential consequences of sharing. Three interrelated themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Self-Imposed Privacy Boundaries, (2) Privacy as Personal Safety, and (3) Self-Regulation Before Sharing.

Theme 5. Self-Imposed Privacy Boundaries

Participants consistently reported that they imposed personal limits on what they shared online. Rather than disclosing every aspect of their lives, they deliberately avoided sharing information that they considered highly personal. Family matters, romantic relationships, financial issues, health conditions, and intimate experiences were among the most frequently mentioned topics participants preferred to keep private. These responses indicate that participants consciously distinguished between information that could be shared publicly and information that should remain within their private lives.

Table 5

Theme 5. Self-Imposed Privacy Boundaries

Representative codes	Meaning
Limiting personal disclosure	Participants intentionally avoid sharing highly personal information.
Protecting family privacy	Family members' privacy is considered important.
Avoiding relationship disclosure	Romantic relationships are regarded as private.
Protecting financial information	Financial matters are rarely shared online.
Avoiding health disclosure	Health-related information is considered sensitive.

Many participants explained that they intentionally restricted the type of information they disclosed online. P5, for example, stated:

"There are things that I never share, no matter what. My family, my relationships, and my financial situation should remain private." (P5)

Rather than perceiving these limits as restrictions, participants viewed them as personal principles that guided their online behaviour.

Similarly, P15 emphasised that maintaining privacy required consciously deciding what should remain outside social media:

"Not everything needs to be shared. I prefer keeping some parts of my life only for myself and the people close to me." (P15)

These accounts suggest that participants approached self-disclosure as a selective rather than unrestricted communicative practice.

Theme 6. Privacy as Personal Safety

Participants frequently associated privacy with personal safety rather than simply with secrecy. Many expressed concerns that sharing certain information, particularly real-time location, daily routines, or personal details, could expose them to risks such as stalking, fraud, harassment, or other forms of misuse. Consequently, privacy management was described not only as protecting personal information but also as safeguarding one's physical and digital security.

Table 6

Theme 6. Privacy as Personal Safety

Representative codes	Meaning
Location privacy	Real-time location sharing is considered risky.
Digital security	Personal information may be misused online.
Fraud concerns	Oversharing increases vulnerability to scams.
Stranger access	Participants limit what unknown users can see.
Safety awareness	Privacy is directly linked to personal protection.

For example, P10 highlighted the potential risks associated with revealing location information:

"I never share where I am because you never know who is watching. It could create security problems." (P10)

This quotation illustrates that participants viewed privacy as a protective mechanism rather than merely as a personal preference.

Likewise, P21 argued that excessive disclosure could expose individuals to different forms of online harm:

"The more personal information you share, the easier it becomes for people to misuse it." (P21)

Taken together, these responses demonstrate that participants framed privacy management as an important strategy for maintaining personal safety in digital environments.

Theme 7. Self-Regulation Before Sharing

Beyond establishing personal boundaries and protecting their privacy, participants described engaging in conscious decision-making before posting content online. Many explained that they routinely considered the possible consequences of a post, reflected on who might see it, and questioned whether sharing was necessary. These responses suggest that participants viewed responsible social media use as requiring deliberate self-regulation rather than spontaneous disclosure.

Table 7

Theme 7. Self-Regulation Before Sharing

Representative codes	Meaning
Thinking before posting	Participants reflect before sharing content.
Considering the audience	Audience awareness shapes disclosure decisions.
Evaluating consequences	Possible future outcomes are taken into account.
Self-control	Participants deliberately limit their own sharing behaviour.
Responsible sharing	Posting decisions are guided by personal responsibility.

Several participants explained that they rarely shared content impulsively. P3, for instance, stated:

"Before posting something, I always ask myself whether I might regret it later." (P3)

Rather than focusing solely on the present moment, participants considered the long-term implications of digital disclosure.

Similarly, P13 emphasised that awareness of the audience influenced every sharing decision:

"I always think about who will see my post before I decide whether to share it." (P13)

These findings indicate that participants did not regard responsible social media use as avoiding disclosure altogether. Instead, they described an ongoing process of evaluating, limiting, and regulating their own online communication according to personal values, perceived risks, and audience expectations.

V. Discussion

This study explored how university students conceptualise oversharing on social media, the motivations they attribute to it, how they perceive individuals who engage in it, and how they regulate their own sharing practices. The findings demonstrate that oversharing is not understood by participants simply as the disclosure of a large amount of information. Instead, it is interpreted through socially negotiated judgements concerning privacy, appropriateness, audience, intention, safety, and the potential consequences of disclosure. Participants' accounts therefore position oversharing at the intersection of interpersonal self-disclosure, digital self-presentation, privacy management, and social evaluation.

5.1. Oversharing as the negotiation of privacy boundaries

The first research question revealed that participants primarily conceptualised oversharing as crossing privacy boundaries. Although repeated and routine posting was occasionally described as excessive, the sensitivity of the disclosed information appeared to be more important than the volume of content. Family matters, romantic relationships, health conditions, financial circumstances, children, intimate experiences, and real-time location were repeatedly identified as areas that should remain protected. This finding is consistent with early approaches to self-disclosure, which frame disclosure as a gradual and relational process governed by intimacy, reciprocity, and trust rather than as the unrestricted circulation of personal information (Abidin, 2020; Jourard, 1971; Altman & Taylor, 1973). From this perspective, disclosure becomes problematic when intimate information is made available beyond the relational context for which it is considered appropriate.

The findings also support Agger's (2012) argument that oversharing contributes to the erosion of conventional distinctions between private and public life. Agger describes digital communication as enabling individuals to reveal feelings, experiences, and opinions that might previously have remained restricted to face-to-face or intimate contexts. Importantly, however, he also recognises that the point at which sharing becomes excessive, depends on context and the people involved. The present findings provide empirical support for this argument by showing how university students apply such contextual judgements in everyday social media use. Participants did not treat privacy as an absolute category; instead, they assessed the acceptability of disclosure according to the content, audience, relationship, account visibility, and purpose of sharing.

This contextual interpretation also corresponds with Nippert-Eng's (2010) understanding of privacy as an ongoing process of boundary management rather than a fixed separation between public and private domains. Participants' distinctions between public accounts, private accounts, close friends, and unknown followers demonstrate that privacy is actively organised through decisions about access. The same information could be interpreted as acceptable when shared with a trusted group but inappropriate when made visible to an undefined public. In this respect, participants did not reject self-disclosure; they attempted to control its direction, audience, and level of intimacy.

The findings can also be interpreted through Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical account of self-presentation. Participants appeared to distinguish between information suitable for public performance and information that

should remain backstage. Oversharing was perceived to occur when content associated with the backstage—such as family conflict, emotional vulnerability, financial difficulty, or intimate relationships—was brought into public view without sufficient contextual or relational justification. Yet social media complicate this separation because users often address multiple and partially invisible audiences simultaneously. The concept of networked publics is therefore relevant: digitally disclosed content may be persistent, searchable, replicable, and accessible to audiences beyond those originally imagined by the user (boyd, 2006, 2008). Context collapse further weakens users' ability to maintain separate boundaries for different social groups, as family members, friends, peers, instructors, acquaintances, and strangers may all encounter the same disclosure (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

These findings extend previous research by demonstrating that young adults possess a relatively differentiated understanding of oversharing. Participants did not merely reproduce a general belief that personal information should never be shared. Instead, they negotiated the line between sharing and oversharing through judgements of informational sensitivity, relational relevance, audience composition, and potential harm. Oversharing was therefore understood less as a measurable quantity of disclosure than as a perceived mismatch between the information disclosed and the social context in which it becomes visible. This finding is also consistent with recent research conducted in the Turkish context, which demonstrates that perceptions of intimate online disclosure are shaped by socially negotiated understandings of privacy, visibility, and appropriateness rather than by the amount of information shared (Sözen, 2025).

5.2. Social and emotional motivations attributed to oversharing

The second research question showed that participants attributed oversharing to multiple, overlapping motivations. Attention seeking, validation, visibility, popularity, and the aspiration to become an influencer or public figure were frequently mentioned. However, participants also referred to loneliness, emotional emptiness, the need for support, self-expression, and the desire to feel understood. Their accounts therefore suggest that oversharing is perceived as serving both performative and relational functions.

The prominence of attention and validation supports Agger's (2012) discussion of oversharing as a search for recognition, connection, friendship, and visibility. Agger links excessive disclosure partly to the desire to be noticed, but he also observes that individuals use digital communication to seek community and overcome isolation. The present findings similarly indicate that attention seeking and emotional connection should not be treated as entirely separate motivations. A person may seek reactions, comments, or visibility not only to achieve popularity but also to obtain reassurance, acknowledgement, or interpersonal support.

John's (2016) account of sharing as a defining cultural practice of the digital age provides a broader context for this finding. Digital platforms have normalised the expectation that participation involves communicating personal experiences, reactions, preferences, and feelings. Consequently, the pursuit of attention does not necessarily represent an exceptional or pathological motivation; it may emerge from communicative environments in which visibility and interaction are central forms of participation. Similarly, boyd's (2008) work on networked publics suggests that social recognition is produced through visible interaction with peers, making disclosure a means of sustaining social presence.

Research on computer-mediated communication also helps explain why social media may become a preferred environment for emotional disclosure. Reduced social cues, physical distance, perceived anonymity, and greater control over message construction can make online disclosure easier than face-to-face communication (Joinson, 2001; Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Gibbs et al. (2006) further show that users can strategically manage the timing, content, and presentation of personal information while attempting to balance authenticity and favourable self-presentation. Thus, oversharing may be perceived as spontaneous emotional expression while still involving selective and strategic presentation.

The findings are also consistent with recent evidence concerning Gen Z. Susilo et al. (2025) found that oversharing may be driven by social validation, emotional expression, support seeking, and the perception of social media as

a comparatively safe space for communicating thoughts and feelings. Their participants reported both emotional relief and subsequent anxiety concerning how disclosures might later be interpreted. Similarly, Shabahang et al. (2024) associate online oversharing with motives involving attention, social approval, emotional needs, and patterns of problematic digital engagement. These studies reinforce the present finding that oversharing cannot be explained through one motive alone.

Papacharissi's (2014) concept of affective publics is also relevant because emotional expression online may connect personal feeling with wider networks of recognition and response. Individuals may disclose personal experiences not only to report what happened but also to invite emotional acknowledgement from others. Senft and Baym (2015) similarly demonstrate that digital self-representation operates through tensions between performance, authenticity, and audience expectation. What appears to observers as attention seeking may be experienced by the person sharing as sincerity, emotional release, participation, or a request for connection.

The present study therefore complicates interpretations that reduce oversharing to narcissism or self-promotion. Although participants commonly referred to attention and popularity, they also recognised loneliness, emotional distress, and the desire to be heard. Their interpretations position oversharing as a communicative response to both the visibility structures of social media and unmet relational or emotional needs.

5.3. The social construction of the oversharer

The third research question demonstrated that oversharing operates not only as a label for content but also as a basis for judging the person who shares it. Participants frequently described oversharers as attention-seeking, showy, insecure, unhappy, lonely, artificial, or dependent on approval. A smaller number interpreted them as sincere, natural, courageous, or emotionally vulnerable. These findings indicate that judgements of oversharing function as judgements of identity and character.

This pattern corresponds with Goffman's (1959) argument that social actors form impressions from the information others make available. Social media posts become signs through which audiences infer personality, motives, emotional states, and social competence. Yet such interpretations are not transparent readings of the individual; they are audience constructions. Participants inferred that repeated disclosure indicated unhappiness, insecurity, or a desire for attention, even though these internal states could not be directly observed. Accordingly, the findings should be understood as evidence of the social meanings attached to oversharing rather than evidence that oversharers objectively possess these characteristics.

Marwick and boyd's (2011) work on imagined audiences helps explain this tension. Users produce content with an anticipated audience in mind, but actual audiences may interpret the same disclosure in ways that differ sharply from the intended meaning. A post intended as humorous, honest, supportive, or emotionally relieving may be received as artificial, inappropriate, manipulative, or attention seeking. Context collapse increases this interpretive uncertainty because disclosures move across audiences with different norms and expectations.

The distinction between intended authenticity and perceived performance is also important. Senft and Baym (2015) show that digital self-presentation frequently combines authenticity claims with strategic performance. Banet-Weiser (2012) similarly argues that authenticity has become a visible and culturally valued form of self-presentation, while Marwick (2015) and Duffy and Hund (2019) describe the sustained identity work required to maintain visibility and audience engagement. Participants' suspicion that oversharers were "showing off" or constructing an exaggerated self may therefore reflect wider cultural awareness that apparently spontaneous disclosure can also function as impression management (Mendelson, 2024).

Agger (2012) associates oversharing with narcissism, unstable self-presentation, attention seeking, and the projection of the self onto others. Some participant responses clearly echoed this critical interpretation. However, the present findings also suggest the need for caution when applying psychological labels to digital behaviour. Participants' descriptions of oversharers as insecure, lonely, or emotionally unstable represent social attributions,

not clinical assessments. Moreover, the more sympathetic responses indicate that audiences may interpret the same behaviour either as undesirable self-promotion or as evidence of unmet emotional needs.

The social judgement attached to oversharing is itself an important finding (Berlant, 2008). People do not merely decide whether a post contains excessive information; they also use the post to evaluate the poster's authenticity, emotional stability, motives, and social appropriateness. Oversharing therefore functions as a moral and relational category through which users regulate the boundaries of acceptable digital self-presentation.

5.4. Privacy management, safety, and self-regulation

The fourth research question showed that participants regulated their own social media practices through self-imposed privacy boundaries, safety-oriented decisions, audience management, and reflection before posting. They did not describe privacy as complete withdrawal from social media. Instead, they selectively decided what to share, with whom, at what time, and under what conditions.

This finding is consistent with privacy-management perspectives that conceptualise privacy as active control over personal information. Nippert-Eng (2010) argues that individuals continually manage boundaries between what is disclosed and concealed. Participants' practices—avoiding financial information, limiting family and relationship content, withholding real-time location, and using private accounts—illustrate such boundary work in everyday digital communication. Their responses also demonstrate that concealment was not necessarily regarded as dishonesty. In line with Agger's (2012) distinction between concealment and deception, participants understood the decision not to share as a legitimate form of self-protection (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

Audience awareness was central to this process. Participants who distinguished between private and public accounts demonstrated an awareness that disclosure depends on relational access. This supports boyd's (2008) argument that users of networked publics must negotiate complex and partially invisible audiences. It also corresponds with Marwick and boyd's (2011) observation that individuals construct imagined audiences to guide their communication even though they cannot fully control who will ultimately encounter or interpret their posts.

Safety concerns gave privacy management a particularly practical dimension. Participants associated real-time location, personal routines, children's images, financial information, and bodily visibility with stalking, harassment, fraud, data misuse, and physical risk. This supports recent research identifying privacy breaches, personal-data exploitation, cyberbullying, and longer-term digital consequences as important risks of oversharing (Shabahang et al., 2024; Susilo et al., 2025). Susilo et al. additionally identify sensitive information, frequent posting, and repetitive content as common forms of oversharing and emphasise that personal details may create vulnerability to fraud and other forms of misuse.

Participants' emphasis on thinking before posting also marks an important contrast with accounts portraying young social media users as uniformly impulsive or unconcerned about privacy. They described reviewing content, anticipating regret, considering who might see a post, delaying location sharing until leaving a place, and avoiding disclosure when uncertain. Such practices demonstrate reflective self-regulation and an awareness of digital permanence. The findings therefore suggest that young adults are not simply exposed to privacy risks; they also develop informal strategies to manage them.

At the same time, the need for such strategies reflects the difficulty of exercising complete control in networked environments. Content may be copied, recirculated, interpreted outside its original context, or encountered by unintended audiences (boyd, 2006, 2008). Shifman's (2014) discussion of digital circulation further indicates that once content enters participatory networks, its meaning and distribution can no longer be controlled entirely by its original author. Participants' cautious practices may therefore be understood as attempts to reduce, rather than eliminate, the uncertainty associated with online disclosure.

The findings contribute to digital-privacy research by demonstrating that self-regulation involves more than deciding whether to disclose. It includes evaluating informational sensitivity, imagining audiences, assessing

immediate and future risks, controlling timing, limiting access, and anticipating regret. Privacy management is thus embedded in ordinary communicative decisions rather than operating as an abstract attitude toward technology. This emphasis on selective disclosure also supports recent discussions of digital identity, which suggest that social media users continuously negotiate visibility, privacy, and self-presentation through everyday communicative decisions (Yurdakul, 2025).

5.5. Theoretical implications

This study makes three principal contributions to the literature. First, it demonstrates that university students conceptualise oversharing primarily through the appropriateness and sensitivity of disclosure, not solely through its frequency or quantity. This distinction extends definitions of oversharing based on excessive information by showing that a single disclosure may be judged as oversharing when it violates privacy expectations, whereas frequent sharing may remain acceptable when the content is regarded as non-sensitive.

Second, the findings show that oversharing is a relational and context-dependent judgement. Participants considered audience composition, account visibility, purpose, personal values, and possible consequences when evaluating disclosure. This supports theoretical approaches that treat privacy and self-disclosure as negotiated social processes (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Nippert-Eng, 2010) and demonstrates how those processes operate within networked publics (boyd, 2008; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Third, the study identifies oversharing as a category through which users make social and moral judgements about others while regulating themselves. Participants attributed motives and characteristics to oversharingers and used these evaluations to define their own acceptable conduct. Oversharing therefore serves not only as a description of communicative behaviour but also as an informal social norm that separates responsible disclosure from content perceived as inappropriate, unsafe, artificial, or attention seeking.

Taken together, the findings suggest that oversharing should be understood neither purely as a psychological tendency nor simply as the technological consequence of social media. It is a socially interpreted communication practice whose meaning emerges through the interaction of disclosure, audience, context, identity performance, privacy expectations, and perceived risk.

VI. Conclusion

This study explored how university students conceptualise oversharing on social media, the motivations they attribute to it, how they perceive individuals who engage in excessive self-disclosure, and how they regulate their own online sharing practices. Drawing on qualitative interviews with preparatory school students at a public university in Türkiye, the findings demonstrate that oversharing is understood not simply as sharing "too much" information but as a context-dependent communicative practice shaped by privacy boundaries, audience expectations, social evaluations, and self-regulation.

The study shows that participants primarily defined oversharing according to the sensitivity and appropriateness of disclosed information rather than the quantity or frequency of posting. Family matters, romantic relationships, financial information, health conditions, children's privacy, and real-time location were consistently regarded as content that should remain outside public visibility. At the same time, participants recognised that the boundary between acceptable sharing and oversharing is negotiated through context, audience, and communicative purpose rather than fixed or universal rules.

Another important contribution concerns participants' understanding of the motivations underlying oversharing. Rather than reducing excessive disclosure to attention seeking alone, participants acknowledged a range of interpersonal and emotional motives, including the search for social approval, emotional support, self-expression, and connection. Furthermore, participants frequently evaluated individuals who overshare through broader social judgements, associating them with characteristics such as insecurity, loneliness, or attention seeking while simultaneously recognising that excessive disclosure may also reflect emotional vulnerability or unmet relational

needs. Finally, participants described actively regulating their own social media use by establishing personal privacy boundaries, considering audience visibility, evaluating potential risks, and reflecting on the possible consequences of disclosure before sharing content.

The findings contribute to the literature in several ways. First, they provide empirical evidence that oversharing is perceived as a qualitative rather than quantitative phenomenon, with evaluations based primarily on informational sensitivity and contextual appropriateness. Second, they demonstrate that privacy management remains central to young adults' social media practices despite increasing levels of online self-disclosure. Finally, the study highlights that perceptions of oversharing involve not only evaluations of communicative behaviour but also broader social judgements about identity, authenticity, and responsibility in digital environments. Together, these findings position oversharing as a socially negotiated communication practice situated at the intersection of self-disclosure, privacy management, audience awareness, and impression management.

Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of preparatory school students from a single public university in Türkiye, and participants' perceptions may not represent those of students from different age groups, educational settings, or cultural contexts. As a qualitative study, the findings are intended to provide in-depth insight rather than statistical generalisation. Future research could examine oversharing across different social media platforms, compare users from different demographic groups, or adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to investigate how perceptions and practices of oversharing evolve over time. Comparative cross-cultural studies may also contribute to a broader understanding of how cultural norms shape the boundaries between appropriate self-disclosure and oversharing.

Overall, this study suggests that oversharing should not be understood merely as the excessive disclosure of personal information. Instead, it emerges as a socially negotiated communicative practice in which privacy, audience, authenticity, emotional expression, and self-regulation are continuously balanced within the everyday dynamics of social media communication.

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