



**NEGOTIATING SELF-EXPRESSION, DIGITAL PRIVACY, AND RELIGIOUS
IDENTITY ON INSTAGRAM'S CLOSE FRIENDS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MOSQUE YOUTH**

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Abstract

This study examines how mosque youth use Instagram's Close Friends feature to negotiate self-expression, digital privacy, and religious identity. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed with eight members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization in Pertahanan Village, aged 17–20 years. Participants were selected purposively because they were active Instagram users who used Close Friends to share personal content. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in April 2026, one month of non-participant digital observation of relevant Close Friends stories, and consented documentation. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by source and method triangulation and member checking. Close Friends functioned as a semi-private communication space in which participants shared personal opinions, relationship-related experiences, academic pressures, emotional conditions, religious reflections, social criticism, and everyday activities with selected audiences. Participants managed disclosure by choosing trusted audiences, filtering sensitive content, and using indirect forms of expression such as music, quotations, emojis, and short texts. The feature was used to maintain interaction with close friends, seek emotional relief, express opinions, share entertainment, and communicate more comfortably than through public accounts. Religious identity was one consideration when participants assessed possible social judgment and the image they wished to maintain, alongside personal needs, friendship relations, and anticipated audience responses. Restricted audiences, however, did not fully prevent misunderstanding, interpersonal tension, screen capture, or the redistribution of content. Close Friends functioned as a negotiated communication space in which personal expression, social relationships, reputational concerns, and religious identity shaped participants' privacy practices.

Keywords: *Close Friends; digital privacy; mosque youth; religious identity; self-disclosure*

A. Introduction

The development of digital communication has changed how adolescents build relationships, communicate personal experiences, and present their identities. Social media is no longer used merely for information exchange; it has also become a space for developing interpersonal closeness, managing impressions, and determining the

boundaries of personal disclosure. In interpersonal communication, self-disclosure refers to the process through which individuals consciously share personal information with others to build relationships, obtain support, or communicate particular experiences (DeVito, 2015).

Instagram is one social media platform that allows users to present activities, emotions, opinions, and identities through photographs, videos, text, and Instagram Stories. Its visual and interactive features make Instagram not only a platform for sharing information but also a medium for self-expression and the formation of social relationships. Through the Close Friends feature, users can restrict the audience for their posts to a selectively chosen list. This feature allows users to share more personal content without exposing it to all followers of their public accounts (Hapsari & Isnenda, 2022; Sarasati et al., 2022).

The use of Close Friends is closely associated with self-disclosure practices on social media. Disclosure in digital spaces does not occur uniformly because users must consider who can view their posts, what kinds of information are shared, the possibility of negative judgment, and the risk that information may be circulated to others. Sarasati et al. (2022) found that Generation Z users employ Close Friends as a medium for self-disclosure and for fulfilling needs that cannot always be addressed through public accounts. Annabillah and Boer (2023) likewise found that university students who experience social media anxiety use Close Friends to disclose themselves more comfortably to close and trusted friends. These studies indicate that Close Friends can function as a more restricted communication space than public accounts, although it is not entirely free from social risk.

Beyond self-disclosure, Close Friends is also associated with digital privacy management. From the perspective of Communication Privacy Management, individuals have the right and responsibility to determine which personal information may be shared, retained, or jointly managed with others who have gained access to that information (Petronio, 2012). On Instagram, privacy may be managed through audience selection, restrictions on content types, the use of symbols or implicit messages, and adjustments to the list of friends who can access particular posts. Dianiya (2021) found that Close Friends users limit their audiences as a form of control over self-disclosure and protection of private information. Hapsari and Isnenda (2022) also reported a positive relationship between the use of Close Friends and individual privacy management. Asmayulia and Rohmah (2023) further showed that users continue to regulate private boundaries, control information, and select audiences even when posts are shared only with close friends.

International research also indicates that Close Friends is not used merely to share casual activities. It can serve as a space for private expression, the release of negative emotions, interaction, and support-seeking among close friends. Chen et al. (2022) found that young users primarily use Close Friends for interaction and help-seeking, the release of negative emotions, and self-expression. However, the study also cautioned that digital private spaces do not automatically ensure adequate support for users experiencing serious emotional difficulties. Close Friends should therefore be understood not simply

as a safe space, but as a semi-private space that still involves considerations of trust, interpretive risk, and potential information leakage.

Previous studies on Close Friends have largely focused on university students, Generation Z, or adolescents more broadly. They have examined self-disclosure, audience selection, privacy management, social media anxiety, and motivations for using the feature (Annabillah & Boer, 2023; Chen et al., 2022; Dianiya, 2021; Hapsari & Isnenda, 2022; Sarasati et al., 2022). Within the studies reviewed in this article, limited attention has been given to adolescents who are active in religious communities. This gap matters because religious identity may shape how users consider self-disclosure and the social reception of their online expression (Bobkowski & Pearce, 2011; Hayati et al., 2022). In particular, moral expectations, concerns about social judgment, and pressures to maintain a religious image may influence how young Muslims present themselves in digital spaces (Achfandhy & Rohmatulloh, 2025).

This condition is particularly relevant to mosque youth. Mosque youth are members of religiously based social groups who participate in organizational, social, and religious activities while also living within everyday digital communication cultures (Adisaputro et al., 2021). Like other adolescents, they may wish to share activities, opinions, emotions, social criticism, or personal experiences. Yet, as members of religious communities, they may also consider how their posts will be perceived by fellow organization members, family members, surrounding communities, and mosque congregants. Under these conditions, Close Friends may function as a restricted communication space that enables mosque youth to balance the need for self-expression with the need to protect privacy and preserve a moral image in public digital spaces (Zulia et al., 2022).

These considerations are also related to religious values that emphasize caution in communication and the protection of personal dignity. Qur'an Surah Al-Hujurat verse 12 teaches the importance of avoiding suspicion and refraining from seeking out the faults of others. In the context of digital communication, this value is relevant to understanding why users may limit the disclosure of personal information, select trusted audiences, and remain cautious about the possibility that posts may be negatively interpreted or circulated beyond their original context. The use of Close Friends among mosque youth can therefore be understood not only as a technical choice on Instagram, but also as a practice of negotiating self-expression, privacy protection, social relationships, and moral considerations (Sibyan et al., 2022).

This study draws on the Johari Window concept to examine forms of self-disclosure shared with Close Friends audiences. The concept helps distinguish between information consciously disclosed to a restricted group and information retained within the personal domain. The Johari Window has also been used in studies of Close Friends to examine forms of self-disclosure and the boundaries of user openness in digital spaces (Novanra, 2022; Saifulloh & Siregar, 2019; Sarasati et al., 2022)s. In addition, Uses and Gratifications theory is employed to understand mosque youths' motivations for choosing Close Friends as a communication medium. This theory views users as active agents who

select media based on specific needs and gratifications, including social interaction, emotional comfort, entertainment, communication utility, and freedom to express opinions (Ruggiero, 2000). Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the use of Instagram's Close Friends feature among the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization in Pertahanan Village as a space for negotiating self-expression and digital privacy. It focuses on three aspects: the forms of self-expression shared through Close Friends; mosque youths' strategies for managing privacy and religious identity; and their motivations for using the feature as a communication space more restricted than a public account.

B. Methods

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the use of Instagram's Close Friends feature as a space for self-expression, digital privacy management, and the negotiation of religious identity among members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization in Pertahanan Village. This approach was selected because the study focused on participants' experiences, meanings, and considerations when selecting audiences, filtering content, and using Close Friends in everyday communication.

Participants were selected purposively based on three criteria: they were members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization, actively used Instagram, and had used the Close Friends feature to share content involving personal expression or experiences. The study involved eight participants aged 17–20 years. Their general characteristics and patterns of Close Friends use are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Participant Characteristics and Patterns of Close Friends Use

No.	Participant Code	Age	Organizational Role	Characteristics of Close Friends Use
1	IF-01	18	Chairperson	Used the feature to express personal opinions and aspects of personality not displayed on the public account
2	IF-02	19	Treasurer	Shared emotional dynamics and sensitive relational experiences
3	IF-03	17	Member	Expressed hobbies and personal experiences considered private
4	IF-04	19	Member	Shared concerns related to academic pressure and everyday activities
5	IF-05	18	Member	Posted religious quotations as a form of personal reflection
6	IF-06	20	Member	Communicated social criticism and everyday views to a restricted group
7	IF-07	18	Member	Expressed daily activities and changes in mood

8	IF-08	17	Member	Used music and short texts to convey interests and emotional states
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Source: Research data, 2026.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant digital observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in April 2026 and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes per participant. They focused on forms of self-expression, considerations in audience selection, strategies for limiting information, the role of religious identity, and motivations for using Close Friends. Non-participant digital observation was conducted over one month on Instagram Stories shared through participants' Close Friends lists, for which participants voluntarily granted access. The researcher observed approximately three to seven relevant posts from each participant. Documentation in the form of screenshots was used only after obtaining specific consent from participants. Account names, profile photographs, faces, locations, and the identities of third parties were anonymized. All participants received information about the study's objectives, procedures, data use, and their right to withdraw from participation. For participants aged 17 years, additional consent was obtained from a parent or legal guardian.

Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018). The analysis involved transcribing the interviews, categorizing the data thematically, comparing interview accounts with observations and documentation, and interpreting patterns in the use of Close Friends according to the study objectives. Interview accounts were compared with observed Close Friends stories and consented documentation to identify convergences and discrepancies between participants' explanations and their observable posting practices.

The Johari Window concept was used to examine forms of self-disclosure and the boundaries of personal information shared with restricted audiences. Communication Privacy Management theory was used to analyze participants' strategies for selecting audiences, filtering content, managing privacy boundaries, and responding to perceived communication risks. Uses and Gratifications theory was employed to identify motivations for using the feature, including social interaction, emotional comfort, communication utility, opinion expression, and entertainment. Trustworthiness was established through source and method triangulation, as well as member checking. Member checking was conducted by asking participants to review summaries of their interview responses and the researcher's preliminary interpretations to confirm that these accurately reflected their experiences.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Close Friends as a Selective Space for Self-Expression

Members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization used Instagram's Close Friends feature to share forms of self-expression that they did not usually post on their public accounts. These included personal and organizational opinions, relationship-

related experiences, academic pressure, religious reflection, social criticism, everyday activities, and emotional states. Decisions about disclosure depended on the type of content, the perceived closeness of the audience, and the likelihood of social judgment.

Participants described public Instagram accounts as spaces that demanded greater caution. Public posts could be seen by fellow organization members, family members, people in the surrounding community, and followers with no close personal connection to the account holder. Content considered highly personal, sensitive, or likely to invite misunderstanding was therefore more often shared through Close Friends. Although the feature remains part of a social media platform, it gives users greater control over access than public posting.

Table 2 summarizes the main forms of self-expression shared through Close Friends. Participants tended to withhold negative emotions, relationship concerns, criticism, and experiences regarded as too personal for public disclosure.

Table 2.
Forms of Self-Expression Shared Through Close Friends

No.	Participant Code	Dominant Form of Expression	Content Not Shared on Public Accounts	Reason for Restricting Content to Close Friends
1	IF-01	Personal and organizational opinions	Social criticism and organizational views	To avoid negative judgments and social conflict
2	IF-02	Personal relationships and emotions	Romantic dynamics and personal feelings	To protect the privacy of personal relationships
3	IF-03	Hobbies and personal experiences	Personal experiences considered private	To maintain the privacy of personal experiences
4	IF-04	Academic pressure	Academic concerns and emotional conditions	Fear of being perceived as excessive or weak
5	IF-05	Personal religious quotations	Emotionally personal reflections	To maintain personal comfort and religious image
6	IF-06	Social criticism and opinions	Social satire and sensitive views	To reduce the potential for misunderstanding
7	IF-07	Daily activities and mood	Emotional disclosure and psychological conditions	To avoid public comments
8	IF-08	Music and emotional symbols	Sadness and personal conflict	Greater comfort with implicit symbolic expression

Source: Research data, 2026.

IF-01, for example, used Close Friends to communicate personal opinions and views related to the organization:

“On my regular account, I am more careful because people may think that I comment too much about the organization or my personal life. But on Close Friends, I can speak more freely because only people close to me can see it.” (IF-01, personal communication, April 2026)

For IF-01, Close Friends reduced the anticipated risk of negative judgment when expressing views considered sensitive. Rather than avoiding such opinions, the participant limited access to them. From a self-disclosure perspective, disclosure involves not only what is shared, but also decisions about who receives the information and under what conditions it becomes available (DeVito, 2015). Annabillah and Boer (2023) similarly found that Close Friends users share ideas, emotions, complaints, opinions, hobbies, relationships, and entertainment with people regarded as close and trustworthy. Sarasati et al. (2022) also reported that Generation Z users use the feature to share feelings and experiences that they may hesitate to display on public accounts.

Close Friends also provided a channel for expressing emotional strain and receiving responses from close friends. IF-04 explained:

“Sometimes I talk about being tired from college or about personal problems on Close Friends because I feel more relieved when someone understands and responds.” (IF-04, personal communication, April 2026)

In this case, posting served not only to communicate information but also to seek emotional relief and interpersonal support. The limited audience allowed IF-04 to share personal experiences with people thought to understand the situation. Sarasati et al. (2022) link Close Friends use to social interaction and emotional relief, while Chen et al. (2022) identify private communication, self-expression, and help-seeking as common uses among young people. A restricted audience, however, does not guarantee adequate support. Close Friends should therefore be treated as a more controlled communication setting, not as a risk-free space.

Self-expression was not always direct. Several participants used music, quotations, emojis, and short texts to communicate moods or personal experiences indirectly. IF-08 stated:

“I use songs or short texts more often than telling the story directly, because people close to me usually understand what I mean.” (IF-08, personal communication, April 2026)

Such symbolic messages allowed participants to disclose an emotional condition without explaining every personal detail. They could signal that something was happening while retaining the underlying experience within a private domain. Viewed through the Johari Window, this practice reflects an effort to distinguish between information disclosed to a restricted audience and information deliberately withheld. Sisnawar et al. (2023) likewise found that Close Friends may make users feel more comfortable disclosing themselves while maintaining limits on information that should not be available to everyone. This pattern was also reflected in the observed Close Friends

stories, particularly in posts that used song lyrics, brief quotations, emojis, and short text-based expressions to communicate moods without disclosing the full personal context.

Religious reflection formed another type of selective expression. IF-05 used religious quotations to convey personal reflection without openly describing the problem or emotional situation behind the post. Religious quotations thus functioned not only as normative messages but also as an indirect means of personal expression. In these posts, religious and personal expression could overlap as participants interpreted everyday experiences through religious language.

Close Friends was consequently used for more than separating public from private content in technical terms. It allowed participants to regulate communication boundaries, select people they trusted, and adjust the form of expression to their level of comfort. Dianiya (2021) found that Close Friends users select audiences not solely on the basis of closeness but also on whether they trust those people to protect personal information. Hapsari and Isnenda (2022) likewise link Close Friends use to individual privacy management. Among the mosque youth in this study, audience selection and indirect messaging reflected attention to interpersonal relationships and possible social consequences.

For these participants, Close Friends offered a selective space rather than complete privacy. They did not withdraw personal experiences from digital communication altogether. Instead, they chose particular audiences, filtered sensitive material, and sometimes relied on indirect forms of expression. This arrangement enabled them to share opinions, emotions, everyday activities, and personal reflections without exposing every aspect of themselves in Instagram's public space. The next section examines how these practices relate to privacy management and religious identity.

2. Privacy Management and the Negotiation of Religious Identity in the Use of Close Friends

The use of Close Friends among members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization was not limited to sharing personal experiences. It also involved decisions about who could access information, how that information should be communicated, and what social consequences might follow after a post was shared. Participants did not entirely avoid digital self-disclosure. Instead, they distinguished between material appropriate for public accounts and material intended only for a smaller group. Privacy, in this context, was not simply a matter of keeping information secret. It involved managing the boundaries of disclosure in relation to particular relationships, situations, and anticipated consequences. IF-04 described this concern in relation to possible social judgment:

“Sometimes I want to talk about being tired or having personal problems, but I still choose carefully because I am afraid people will think I am being excessive or that it does not fit the image of a mosque youth member.” (IF-04, personal communication, April 2026)

The statement does not indicate that the organization formally prohibited personal posts. Rather, membership in a mosque youth organization formed part of the social context considered when deciding whether a post was suitable for public visibility. Religious identity should therefore not be treated as the sole explanation for participants' digital behavior. It was one consideration among others, including friendship networks, previous experiences, and anticipated audience responses. Rahardjo et al. (2020) found that adolescents' self-disclosure on social media is shaped by perceived privacy risk and the convenience of maintaining relationships, whereas online self-presentation alone was not a significant predictor. Concerns about maintaining the image of a mosque youth member should therefore be read alongside these interpersonal and situational factors.

Audience selection was the most visible privacy-management strategy. Participants included only certain people in their Close Friends lists, particularly those considered close, able to understand the context of a post, and unlikely to share it with others. IF-01 explained:

“The people in my Close Friends list are selected. I do not want everyone to see my posts because they may not understand what I mean.” (IF-01, personal communication, April 2026)

This practice reflects an attempt to reduce context collapse, a condition in which different social groups—such as close friends, organization members, family members, and wider audiences—converge in one digital space, making it difficult for users to tailor messages to each group at the same time (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). On Instagram, Close Friends enables a degree of audience segmentation. However, this segmentation does not eliminate risk because recipients may interpret content differently, save it, or circulate it beyond its intended setting. Julianti et al (2026) similarly found that Muslim university students in Makassar managed digital privacy through private accounts, Close Friends, the hide story feature, and the separation of main and secondary accounts. These practices support the view that digital privacy is an ongoing and context-dependent boundary-management process rather than the mere activation of a technical feature.

Participants also managed disclosure through the form of the message itself. Rather than describing personal experiences directly, some relied on quotations, music, or short texts. IF-05 stated:

“I feel more comfortable using quotations or verses than telling the story directly, because not everything needs to be known by other people.” (IF-05, personal communication, April 2026)

This account shows that religious expression could serve two functions at once. It conveyed religious values while also allowing a participant to communicate a personal condition without revealing the details behind it. Through the Johari Window, such posts can be understood as an effort to retain part of an experience within the hidden area while providing limited signals to a selected audience. Zahra et al. (2023) found that users of secondary Instagram accounts presented different identities to different audiences, separating an idealized persona on the main account from more personal expression in spaces with restricted audiences. Putranto et al. (2025) likewise found that accounts with

smaller audiences could provide room for more spontaneous and emotional expression while users continued to balance personal identity with the social image they wished to preserve.

Audience restriction and indirect messages did not ensure that communication would remain problem-free. The observed stories similarly showed that indirect forms of expression were used when participants appeared to communicate personal concerns while limiting the amount of contextual detail available to the audience. IF-06 recalled an experience in which a post was interpreted more negatively than intended:

“Sometimes I only mean to make an ordinary sarcastic comment or share an opinion, but a friend feels offended and says that my post is too harsh.” (IF-06, personal communication, April 2026)

Even within a limited audience, recipients may differ in their experiences, sensitivities, and relationship positions. Privacy management therefore concerns not only control over who can view a post, but also the limits of control over how that post is interpreted once it has been received. Pohan and Lbs (2022) note that communication spaces with restricted access or identity can allow greater freedom of self-expression while also creating the potential for less accountable communication and negative effects on social relationships. Audience restriction should consequently be understood as a risk-mitigation strategy rather than a guarantee of communicative safety.

Within a religious community, privacy management was also connected to the maintenance of personal dignity and social reputation. Bobkowski and Pearce (2011) showed that religious self-disclosure on social media does not follow a uniform pattern; it is shaped by social context and users’ perceptions of how their environment may respond. In Indonesia, social media can also function as a space in which young people articulate and negotiate religious identity (Hayati et al., 2022). These studies should not be read as evidence that all mosque youth follow the same digital practices. The present data only show that some participants considered their religious image and possible community judgment when deciding how to manage posts.

Religious values were not treated as an independent or deterministic explanation for participants’ use of Close Friends. Qur’an Surah Al-Hujurat verse 12 provides an ethical background concerning caution toward suspicion and the protection of personal dignity. However, the relationship between this value and participants’ digital practices must remain grounded in interview data. The use of Close Friends cannot be assumed to represent the direct application of religious teaching. It is better understood as a communication practice shaped by the interaction of religious values, personal needs, friendship networks, and concern about public responses. This interpretation is consistent with Achfandhy and Rohmatulloh (2025), who found that young Muslims’ digital piety may intersect with social pressure and anxieties about others’ judgments, meaning that religious expression online is not necessarily free from negotiation.

Three interrelated strategies were evident in the participants’ use of Close Friends: selecting trusted audiences, filtering the kinds of information shared, and using indirect messages when content was considered highly personal or sensitive. These strategies

provided room for self-expression but did not remove the possibility of misunderstanding, conflict, or negative judgment. Religious identity did not function as a fixed boundary in this process. Instead, it formed one element negotiated alongside emotional comfort, friendship relations, and the protection of digital reputation.

3. Motivations for Using Close Friends as a Restricted Communication Space

Participants used Close Friends for several overlapping purposes: interacting with close friends, releasing emotional pressure, controlling how messages were delivered, expressing opinions, and sharing entertainment. These motivations did not operate independently. A single post could allow a participant to seek a response from friends, ease an emotional burden, and restrict access to personal information at the same time. The categories discussed below should therefore be understood as intersecting motivations rather than separate and fixed reasons for using the feature.

Uses and Gratifications theory treats media users as active individuals who select particular media to meet particular needs. In social media settings, these needs may include social interaction, relaxation, entertainment, opinion expression, information seeking, and relationship maintenance (Ruggiero, 2000; Whiting & Williams, 2013). This perspective does not assume that media use always produces satisfaction or positive outcomes. Whether users feel satisfied depends on the quality of their relationships with the audience, the responses they receive, the nature of the content, and the risks that emerge after a post is shared (Chen et al., 2022; Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Table 3.

Motivations for Using Close Friends among Members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization

No.	Type of Motivation	Analytical Indicator	Manifestation among Participants
1	Social interaction	Desire for responses, attention, and emotional closeness from selected audiences	Appeared among several participants through interaction with close friends considered supportive
2	Relaxation	Use of media to release emotional and psychological pressure	Evident in IF-04 and IF-08 through posts about stress, music, and emotional expression
3	Communication utility	Managing communication to prevent posts from attracting negative judgment in public spaces	Evident in IF-01 and IF-07, who restricted audiences to protect their social image
4	Opinion expression	Need to express opinions or criticism more safely	Evident in IF-01 and IF-06 through social criticism and personal views

5	Entertainment	Use of media for humor, music, and casual interaction	Evident primarily in IF-02 through light posts and casual stories, and in some participants through music and everyday content
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Source: Research data, 2026.

Social interaction was evident in participants' desire to receive responses from people with whom they already had close relationships. IF-07 explained:

"Posting on Close Friends feels more comfortable because the people who respond are close to me. The conversation feels more connected, and I do not feel judged." (IF-07, personal communication, April 2026)

For IF-07, the value of Close Friends was not limited to technical audience restriction. It also lay in the expectation that responses would be more relevant, sympathetic, and grounded in shared familiarity. In online communication, perceived closeness can make users more willing to disclose because they expect recipients to understand the background of their experiences. This expectation helps explain why participants preferred a smaller group of close friends to the broader audience of a public Instagram account.

Relaxation was especially apparent when participants used Close Friends to release emotional pressure or share experiences they did not want to disclose openly. IF-04 stated:

"Sometimes I just want to talk about being tired or stressed so that I can feel relieved, because keeping it to myself makes it feel heavier." (IF-04, personal communication, April 2026)

In this context, posting functioned as a means of sharing an emotional experience and seeking responses from close friends. This function should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously. Self-disclosure on social media may provide relief for some users, but it does not necessarily improve psychological well-being or produce support suited to a person's needs. Soputan (2021) found that self-disclosure on social media may be associated with psychological well-being, although this relationship is shaped by personal conditions and the quality of social interaction. Chen et al. (2022) likewise found that Close Friends may be associated with help-seeking and emotional expression, but private digital spaces do not replace social support or professional assistance when users face more serious difficulties.

Communication utility appeared in participants' efforts to convey messages without exposing them to all followers. IF-01 explained:

"If I post everything publicly, people may think I am seeking attention or being too open, so I feel more comfortable using Close Friends." (IF-01, personal communication, April 2026)

The feature was useful because it offered greater control over who could access a post. Participants could share experiences or views without immediately addressing a highly diverse audience. Hapsari and Isnenda (2022) link Close Friends use to individual privacy management because it allows users to limit the distribution of personal posts.

Dianiya (2021) similarly found that users select audiences based on trust and concern for information security. Such control was not absolute, however. Participants could not fully control how posts were interpreted, captured through screenshots, or redistributed by recipients.

Opinion expression was another motivation, particularly among participants who used Close Friends to communicate social criticism, organizational concerns, or personal views that they did not wish to present through public accounts. IF-06 noted:

“When I want to talk about criticism or an opinion on my regular account, I am sometimes afraid that people will misunderstand it, especially because I am active in the mosque environment as well.” (IF-06, personal communication, April 2026)

This account shows that Close Friends was used to reduce perceived communicative risk when participants wanted to express views that could be treated as sensitive. Within the Uses and Gratifications framework, users select media according to their assessment of whether a medium can meet a particular communicative need. A feature with a selected audience may appear more suitable when users want to share an opinion with people whom they believe understand the context. As discussed in the previous section, however, audience restriction did not eliminate the possibility of offense or misunderstanding. Close Friends therefore functioned as a strategy for reducing communicative risk, not as a space without consequences.

Entertainment was also part of participants’ use of Close Friends, particularly through music, humor, casual stories, and everyday activities. IF-02 explained:

“Sometimes I post something funny or share a light story just to have fun with close friends.” (IF-02, personal communication, April 2026)

In this case, Close Friends served as a more personal setting for sharing light experiences than a public account. Sheldon and Bryant (2016) found that Instagram use may be motivated by entertainment, the documentation of experiences, social surveillance, self-expression, and interaction with others. Whiting and Williams (2013) likewise identify entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, and opinion expression as common motivations for social media use. In the present study, entertainment remained tied to audience boundaries: even light content was shared with people considered relevant to a particular friendship circle.

The motivations identified in this study included social interaction, relaxation, communication utility, opinion expression, and entertainment. Participants chose Close Friends because it allowed them to adjust the audience and form of expression to immediate communicative needs. For these mosque youth, the feature was not used solely for casual sharing or amusement. It also supported efforts to balance personal expression, emotional comfort, friendship relations, and caution about possible social responses. Its function was therefore situational: Close Friends could make communication feel more manageable, but it did not eliminate the risks of misunderstanding, social pressure, or insufficient support.

D. Conclusion

Among members of the Nurul Hidayah Mosque Youth Organization in Pertahanan Village, Instagram's Close Friends feature served as a semi-private space for sharing personal opinions, relationship-related experiences, academic pressures, emotional conditions, religious reflections, social criticism, and everyday activities. Rather than disclosing these experiences to all followers, participants directed them to selected audiences whom they considered more likely to understand the context of their posts. Participants managed disclosure by selecting trusted audiences, filtering sensitive content, and using indirect forms of expression, including music, quotations, emojis, and short texts. These strategies gave them more control over the visibility of personal information, although they could not fully control how recipients interpreted, captured, or redistributed a post. Misunderstanding and interpersonal tension therefore remained possible even within a restricted audience.

Close Friends was used to maintain interaction with close friends, seek emotional relief, express opinions, share entertainment, and communicate in ways that felt more manageable than public posting. Religious identity was relevant to these decisions, particularly when participants considered possible social judgment and the image they wished to maintain. It did not, however, determine their digital behavior on its own. Their decisions were also shaped by personal needs, friendship relations, and concerns about audience responses. The findings show that privacy management among mosque youth extends beyond the technical use of Instagram features. It is enacted through practical decisions about who is allowed to see a post, what details are withheld, and how personal experiences are communicated. As the study involved eight participants from one mosque youth organization, the findings are specific to this setting and should not be statistically generalized. Further research could compare similar practices across religious youth communities in different locations and examine how Close Friends audiences interpret and respond to semi-private posts.

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