

## **Self-Disclosure in Finding Dating Partners among Users of Online Game Application**



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**ABSTRACT:** Nowadays, starting acquaintance to looking for dates through online media is very common. HAGO, an online game application that is currently popular and widely used by Indonesians, has turned out to be a medium for finding dating partners for some people. This study was conducted to determine the self-disclosure process carried out by users of the HAGO online game application in finding dating partners.

Researchers applied the Social Penetration Theory by Alman and Taylor. There are 4 stages described in the Social Penetration Theory to achieve intimacy, namely the orientation stage, exploratory affective stage, affective exchange stage and stable exchange stage.

This was a qualitative study using a case study method. Researchers took 4 informants who were users of the HAGO online game application who had or were dating and had a relationship with someone he knew through the HAGO online game application.

The result of this study showed that self-disclosure process carried out by the informants was in accordance with the stages in the social penetration theory. Informants sequentially went through the self-disclosure stage from the orientation stage until the stable exchange stage.

**KEYWORDS:** Online Dating, Social Penetration, Online Game, Self-Disclosure.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication technology has enabled major developments in communication media. Everett M. Rogers (in Kurmia, 2005) summarizes these developments into 4 eras. One of them is the interactive communication era, the media developing in this era are digital media, one of which is the internet. Currently, there is a rapid development of digital technology. The use of the internet is fundamental to the world. Everyone starts to use the digital world or the internet almost for their whole activities, starting from basic things such as communicating, playing games, making friends, to finding a partner.

Based on the results of the We Are Social and Hootsuite survey (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2020) regarding the Digital Overview Report as of January 2020, Southeast Asia showed the percentages of internet users of 63% and social media penetration of 61%. Based on the results of the survey by Indonesian Internet Network Users Association (APJII, 2020) on the field data, 64.8% of 264.16 million people in Indonesia were internet users and 56% (150 million people) were active users of social media. This indicated an increase of 13% (for internet users) and 15% (for active users of social media) from the data in the previous year.

Based on the Global web index survey (Globalwebindex, 2020), starting from 2020, the average daily internet usage reached 8 hours 36 minutes with the average use of social media of 3 hours 26 minutes. The majority of social media users had an age range of 18-24 years (15%) for women and 18% for men, for the age range of 25-34 was 19% for men and 14% for women. There were various reasons to use the internet, one of which was for communication via messages (24.7%) and using social media (18.9%). The first position regarding the internet use was for watching videos and the second place was for playing games with a percentage of 17.1%. Based on this data, it can be seen that Indonesians tend to use smartphones to communicate messages and play games.

An interesting feature that is quite developed in the internet media is online games. Online games are digital games or games that can only be played when the device is connected to an internet network so as to allow users to be able to connect with other players who are accessing the game at the same time (Kusumawardani, 2015). Online games are defined as games that can be accessed by many players when the machines used by the players are connected by an internet network (Adams & Rollings,

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2007). Online games are game applications that consist of several genres with certain rules and levels. Playing online games gives a sense of psychological curiosity and satisfaction, making players more interested in playing them. Communicating through social media and playing online games allow each user to meet new people.

Nowadays, the internet is widely used as a medium for online dating. Derived from *kompas.com* (Anggraini, 2018), in 2015 data it was recorded that 8 out of 10 Indonesians had met through the internet network. It is not impossible that this number is increasing every year. A study found that today people tended to spend 10 hours a week using dating apps. This study involved 5000 respondents with a age range of 18-30 years. Most of the respondents chose online applications to find dating partners. In January 2019, it was noted that active users of online dating increased by 23% compared to the previous months regarding meeting new people.

Recently there is an application that combines two online platforms being widely used by Indonesians. This application combines playing games and making friends with the tagline of "Play Game, Make Friends". This online game application is called HAGO. HAGO is an online game application that provides communication media features such as social media where application users can connect and chat using chat room and voice chat features. This actually biases the basic usability of the application.

HAGO allows users to connect with another users by activating the people nearby feature. Technically, users of this game application are likely to get opponents to play with the opposite sex. The provision of personal chatroom and voice chat features gives the opportunity for opponents to get acquainted with each other and communicate personally.

There are several incidents that occur while using the HAGO Online Game application. People usually tend to use online game applications as a means of entertainment, but currently there is a phenomenon that people use the HAGO online game application as a medium to find partners or dates. There are some users who make this application a medium for random acquaintance with their playmates. The profile photo is one of the main attractions for opponents to meet and continue to communicate via chat room or voice chat. In fact, many online portals provide tips and trick to get acquaintances through playing HAGO.

Indirectly, HAGO can also be said to have a role as an online dating medium which brings together various parties to get acquainted and even dating. Therefore, researchers chose the HAGO application to be studied. This study focuses to observe the self-disclosure process of users of HAGO online game application (both verbal and non-verbal) in an effort to find a dating partner. This study intends to determine the extent to which the stages of social penetration in the communication behavior shown by users of the HAGO online game application. Researchers chose the HAGO application which is basically an online game application, but is also used to find partners or dates.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Interpersonal Communication

Joseph A. Devi in his book "The Interpersonal Communication Book" defines interpersonal communication as the process of sending and receiving messages between two persons, or among a small group of persons, with some effect and some immediate feedback (DeVito, 2008). Interpersonal communication can take place between two people who are in pairs, such as a husband and wife during a conversation, or between two people in a meeting, for example between a paper presenter and a participant in a seminar (Effendy, 2003). In addition, Onong Uchjana Effendi (2003) also argues that interpersonal communication is considered the most effective way in changing attitudes, beliefs, opinions and behavior of communicants.

Another opinion delivered by Mulyana (2014) reveals that understanding face-to-face communication must begin with the formation of a self-concept. Self-concept is our view of who we are that can be obtained through information provided by other people. The earliest self-concept is generally influenced by family and other close people around us. They are called the significant other. Our parents or whoever took care of us first were the first party who know how we are. Therefore, Mulyana said that humans never communicate with other humans, they are not aware of how they really are and that awareness is obtained from a communication process called interpersonal communication (Azhar, 2018).

Widjaya (in Azhar, 2018) states that interpersonal communication has the following objectives: 1. To know yourself and others. 2. To know the outside world. 3. To create and maintain relationships. 4. To change attitudes and behavior. 5. To help others.

Based on some of the definitions above, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication is a combination of interpersonal and personal communication, either directly (without a podium) or indirectly (through a podium), for example, face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, cellphones, Internet, teleconferences, personal correspondence. The focus of observation is the forms and characteristics of relationships, conversations, interactions and characteristics of communicators.

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### Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure is the process of sharing personal information with interlocutors, from previously unknowing to knowing. According to Johnson (A. Supratiknya, 1995) self-disclosure aims to reveal or our response to the situation we are facing, as well as providing past information. Self-disclosure can cover several things, among others, adopted values, beliefs and expectations; personal attitudes; self characteristics. Self-disclosure can affect the feelings or responses of others. Self-disclosure can not only be done face-to-face, but also through other media, for example, online communication media. In this study, self-disclosure was defined as communication made by users of the HAGO online game application using the chatroom and voice call features that exist in the application.

Self-disclosure has two sides, namely being "open to" and being "open for". Factors that influence self-disclosure (Yeanita Lestarina, 2012) are as follows:

- a) Group size. Self-disclosure occurs more easily in small communication groups. In this case, interpersonal communication makes self-disclosure easier and more intense. Group of two, or so called Dyad, shows the best self-disclosure process. One party can be an individual who reveals his personality, while the other can understand it more carefully, then do the opposite in turn.
- b) Feelings of liking. We tend to open up more to people us like than to people we don't. Feelings of like or love can encourage a person to communicate more and open up more deeply.
- c) The dyadic effect. Self-disclosure can occur if the communicator also reveals himself. This makes individuals feel safer and strengthens self-disclosure. Dyadic communication is usually spontaneous and informal.
- d) Topic. An individual tends to open up to certain topics than other topics. Topics that are sensitive or personal are less likely to be disclosed.
- e) Gender. Another factor behind self-disclosure is gender. According to Judy Pearson (Lestarina, 2012), women tend to be more open than men.

In a journal entitled "Self Presentation and Self-disclosure on Mobile Dating Apps" (Ward, 2016) it is explained that online dating users will only communicate and do self-disclosure if both are attracted to each other. There are several stages in self-disclosure that are carried out through online dating application that may differ from direct or real self-disclosure, including:

- a) Forming Self-Representation. Online dating application users will form a self-representation in their media dating accounts to be able to show their self-image to the opposite sex.
- b) Choosing a Partner. Users have the opportunity to choose a partner that they feel is appropriate or suitable for them in the dating media.
- c) Performing the first rituals of dating through technology. In online dating, because users do not meet in person first, technology or social media plays a major role in opening up before deciding to go on a date. They use technology in a self-disclosure process.

### Social Penetration Theory

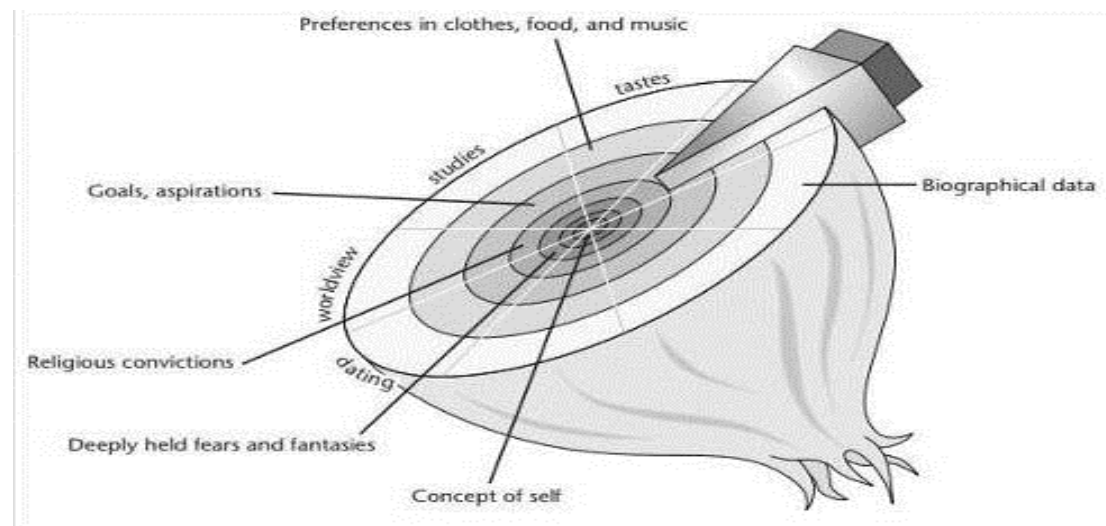
Social penetration theory was put forward by Irwin Altman and Dalm as Taylor (1987) which explains the process of increasing intimacy and openness of a person in establishing interpersonal relationships. The main idea in this theory is that intimacy grows as penetrating interactions between people from the outside to the inner layers of each person's personality. The process of social penetration is a process in which there is a movement of a relationship from non-intimate to intimate, from a shallow self-knowledge to a deeper one. Verbal and non-verbal communication is involved within this process. Researchers examined verbal and non-verbal communication in finding dating partners among users of online game applications.

There are also several assumptions in this theory (West & Turner, 2010), namely:

- a) Individual relationships proceed from non-intimate levels to deeper, more intimate ones. Individual relationships occur from feeling strange to each other to establishing a more intimate relationship and familiar or closer to each other.
- b) Relationships that develop in a systematic and predictable manner.
- c) Relationship development includes de-penetration and its withdrawal can lead to dissolution of the relationship.
- d) Self-disclosure is a source of relationship development.

Altman and Taylor (1987) reveal that a stage or process of relationship development is like a layer of onion skin, which can be divided from the outer layer to the innermost layer. They believe that step by step will be passed if there is a reciprocal relationship between the two parties. Besides that, getting to the intimate stage also takes time and a process that is not short. Individuals will open the next layer if the previous layer has been opened and respond to each other.

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Based on the social penetration theory, the stages of interpersonal relationship are (Morissan, 2013):

- a) Orientation Stage. This is the outer layer of the self. Like an onion, this stage is the outer skin of the onion, where the visible information is only external or impersonal information, for example, name, address, age, tribe, and so on. Just imagine when we are on public transportation and communicate with the person sitting next to us, whom we have never met before. The first thing that will happen is that maybe we will ask where the other person is from, his destination, name, and maybe his profession. When we are just getting to know each other, intimacy only stopped at that stage. If the interlocutor is not disturbed or we feel that we can communicate well, then both parties will continue to the next stage of communication.
- b) Exploratory affective stage. This is like the second layer of onion skin. At this stage the known information is deeper than before. This is the initial stage for obtain more intimate information. Usually, information at this stage is in the form of hobbies, favorite foods, interests, and so on. At this stage the communication carried out is much deeper than the previous stage of communication. Both parties have become more open about personal matters of them. If individuals are interested or feel that they have benefited from this stage, they will usually move on to the next stage, to the next deeper onion skin.
- c) Affective exchange stage. This is the third layer of the onion, at which point the information given starts to become emotionally focused and personal. For example, like starting to share experiences with each other. For example, individuals start telling stories about their past experiences, or telling stories about the sadness that is happening to them. Both parties have started to open up and tell each other about personal problems.
- d) Stable exchange stage. This is the core layer. At this stage, both parties are very intimate and allow them to predict each other's actions and responses well. They already know each other so that they can predict the attitudes or responses to be shown by the interlocutors regarding the message to be conveyed. The information discussed has started to become more intimate and in-depth such as discussing the personal concept of each partner. This may happen among couples who have started dating and talk about each other's life principles, and start talking about the future. Reaching this stage is certainly not an easy thing. Both parties have to go through the layers of penetration first, starting from the very generic and superficial, to the very intimate and deep. If one party feels aggrieved, uncomfortable or does not want to continue at a deeper level, then the communication cannot reach the core layer. Moreover, if both are unwilling to continue step by step then the social penetration process will stop. The example is when there are two people talking on a bus. Then the conversation only reaches the orientation stage, and they go their separate ways at different stops without exchanging phone numbers to be contacted, so their communication stops at the orientation stage.

### Online Dating

Online dating is defined as the development of romantic relationships via the internet (O' Brien in Andrew Teixeira, 2014). According to Brym and Lent on (in Sari & Kusuma, 2018), the motivations of these online dating users also vary, ranging from finding a partner for a serious relationship such as marriage, finding someone to talk in online platforms or just flirting, answering their curiosity and desire, to having fun without any purpose to meet the partner in person.

Nowadays, the existence of internet and various social media platforms make it easier for someone to meet or get acquainted with various individuals. Everyone has a specific purpose and motive when using the online application. Some use online applications for entertainment, work, and even find a partner or date. Online dating is a meeting of two individuals who get acquainted through cyberspace or online platforms. Various online applications are currently packed with various attractive features and facilitate users to communicate and get acquainted with each other. Like the HAGO online game application, in

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addition to become application that provides a variety of simple, interesting games, this application also provides voice chat and personal chat room features. These features allow users to make friends, communicate with a higher intensity and go to a more intimate stage. Along with a profile photo and personal data for each account to know the interlocutor, people tend to change their personality to be more attractive on social media to get more attention and friends.

In a study conducted by Max We is buch (Yeanita Lestarina, 2012), it was found that someone got the same impression when interacting through face-to-face and personal social networks. In this case the study was conducted towards HAGO online game application. In a journal entitled "Single Looking to Mingle: An Analysis of Self Presentation in Online Dating" (Jacobson, Atkinson, Mohamed, & Dorr, 2016), it is explained that people tend to prefer and are more comfortable with online communication and online dating than in person communication. Online dating is viewed as less intimidating and less risky. Rejection that occurs in online dating is also not as scary and embarrassing as when it comes to direct rejection, since rejection occurs online. In online dating, people are also able to do self-disclosure more quickly than dating in person. However, the self-representation shown by online dating users can be either real representation or fake representation. Thus, not all conditions can be considered real.

### METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach. Data in a qualitative study tend to be descriptions and statements rooted in the interpretive/constructive paradigm (Kriyantono, 2006). The strategy used in this study was a case study. Case study is a social research method. Case study was chosen as a research strategy because it is very suitable for a study with question words of "how" and "why". Case study research allows researchers to gain a complete and integrated understanding of the interaction of various facts and dimensions of the special case (Poerwandari, 2007). Case study research suggests using data from multiple sources. Case study research is also commonly used in human-related research (Wulandari, Baskara, & S, 2021).

In this study, researchers made use of the official Instagram media account of HAGO Indonesia. In one of the uploads in such account, it asked users to exchange stories about their experiences using the online game HAGO. Many HAGO online game users share their stories in the comments column. Based on this, researchers tried to contact users via direct messages on Instagram and searched for informants who met the criteria determined for this study. After trying to contact and gather about 25 people, there were 4 informants who could be involved and were willing to be interviewed.

### STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting interviews with 4 informants who met the sample criteria, the researcher obtained the data and then analyzed them with the following results.

#### 1) Use of the HAGO Application

The four informants expressed the same reasons for using the HAGO application. Informants 1, 2, 3, and 4 used the HAGO application to communicate with people they knew through the HAGO application and also to add friends. Meanwhile, informants 2, 3, and 4 used it as the media for entertainment and games. Currently, the four informants had many friends from the HAGO application and also had a relationship (dating). The number of friends that the informant 1 got from the HAGO application was approximately 50 known people, 17 people who were more familiar and communicate often, 3 people had dated/met, and 1 person was in a current relationship. Informant 2 got to know 100 people on the HAGO application, and actively communicated with 50 people he knew through the HAGO application. Informant 2 had had several meetings/dates with people he knew through the application. Informants 1 and 2 tended to use the group chatroom and personal chatroom features more to communicate with friends they knew through the HAGO application. Meanwhile, informant 3 mostly used personal chatroom and open mic features when playing. Informant 4 preferred to use personal chatrooms to communicate with people he knew through the HAGO application.

#### 2) Self-disclosure Process

Before carrying out the self-opening process, the four informants considered several things to get acquainted with. The games in this application have an important role in the creation of a self-disclosure process between users. Informants 1, 2, 3, and 4 usually made introductions, and disclosed themselves to interlocutors who were considered proficient and able to play well. In addition, group chatrooms were also important media for informants 1, 2 and 3 in the processes of self-disclosure and finding new friends.

##### a) Orientation Stage

At the orientation stage, informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 started by playing the game one on one. If their playing opponents were deemed proficient and could play well, the four informants opened themselves to get acquainted. Informants 1, 2 and 3 added the use of group chatrooms as a way for acquaintance. So, it was done not only through one-on-one games, but also through group sharing, which contains 8 people who can chat with each other. If they thought that someone had an interesting story or discussion, they would communicate personally through a personal chatroom. Doing multiple play activities with the same person also encouraged



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the four informants to get acquainted. Usually the opposing party, or the informant, will invite other users to play again after previously playing, be it losing or winning.

### **b) Exploratory Affective Stage**

After being acquainted for a long time, the four informants and their partners began to communicate more intensely. At this stage, informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 began to talk and communicate about each other's interests, hobbies, and favorites. Informants 2, 3 and 4 tended to ask directly about their partners' likes, interests as well as their passion for each other as the communication topics between them. Meanwhile, informant 1 did not ask this directly, but instead drew conclusions from the routine that was carried out by her partner every day. However, informant 1 also confirmed some of her conclusions by asking the person concerned.

### **c) Affective Exchange Stage**

Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 began to show interest in each other with their partners after the previous communication stages. They felt comfortable and fit. They communicated with high intensity. Informants 1, 2 and 3 communicated a lot with their partners through texting, voicecall, and videocall. On the other hand, informant 4 mostly used texting and voicecall communication. Informant 4 never did videocall communication with her partner. Informants 1, 2, and 3 began to show mutual interest in the form of giving and getting attention from their partners. Informants 1 and 3 interpreted the feelings of their partners through the behavior, attention, and non-verbal communication they received. Using videocall, Informants 1 and 3 saw the facial expressions of their partners who showed interest. Informants 1 and 3 also shared their feelings for their partner honestly.

According to DeVito (2008), facial expressions described are categorized as Affect Display of non-verbal communication. Where Affect display is a facial expression used to convey the meaning of existing emotions (fear, anger, joy, surprise, etc.). The four informants have exchanged information and introduced each other (with their partners) to each family.

### **d) Stable Exchange Stage**

After informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 had a relationship with their partners (dating) and met in person, they opened a deeper and more intimate stage. They both started talking about self-concept, and principles in life. In addition, informants and partners could predict the response of their partners. Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 reached this stage after they have passed the previous 3 stages in sequence.

## **3) Information Exchange**

Social penetration theory explains that at the exploratory affective stage, the information exchanged is more intimate information, in the form of interests or preferences. Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 also did this after the orientation stage has passed. Informant 1 did not only exchange information with her interlocutors, but also by paying attention to their habits. Informants 1, 2, 3 and 4 took about 1-2 months to find out about this. After that the next layer is the affective exchange stage. In this stage, both parties had shared feelings and personal matters. The informant's interlocutors began to show concern and express feelings. To talk about things of a more personal nature, informants were more comfortable talking about it after a relationship. Informants 1 and 3 chose to have a relationship before they actually met their partners. Mean while, informants 2 and 4 chose to establish a relationship after meeting their partners in real life. Then the current stage is the stable exchange stage. In the Social Penetration Theory, it is explained that the parties are already at a more intimate stage and can predict each other's actions and responses after dating. The informants have also talked about intimate matters such as principles of life and self-concept.

Their self-disclosure process could run smoothly because they did this to each other in dyadic communication. In the book written by Joseph A Devi to (2001) it is explained that we will open ourselves to people who do self-disclosure as well as the process of dyadic communication. What one person does will be done by another, and will make both parties feel safer and more confident to do self-disclosure.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, it was found that the four informants carried out a self-disclosure process stages in accordance with Social Penetration Theory proposed by Almas and Taylor. They sequentially went through the orientation stage, exploratory affective stage, affective exchange stage and stable exchange stage. All informants carried out the orientation stage at the beginning of their acquaintance as the outermost layer and had reached the stable exchange stage or the core stage. All informants sequentially went through all stages, not randomly or skipping one of them.

In the online game application media (to find a date), one of the most important media is the games in such application. Games in the application are the main media for users to determine their opponents to do self-disclosure. Informants had a special way of meeting new people in the HAGO online game application. For example, they constantly invited their playing opponents to play and had conversations while playing. The features available in the application enabled users to communicate with other

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users. The group chatroom, personal chatroom, and voice call/open mic features facilitated users to communicate with each other and got acquainted with other users. This feature was widely used in the early stages of self-disclosure.

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