




## Online Identity Management and Relational Closeness: The Mediating Role of Emotional Transparency

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study aimed to examine the direct and indirect effects of online identity management on relational closeness among social media users, with emotional transparency modeled as a mediating variable.

**Methods and Materials:** A descriptive correlational research design was employed with 400 adult social media users in Egypt, selected according to the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table. Participants completed validated self-report scales assessing online identity management, emotional transparency, and relational closeness. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS-28 for descriptive and correlational statistics and AMOS-21 for structural equation modeling (SEM). Model fit was evaluated with  $\chi^2$ ,  $\chi^2/df$ , GFI, AGFI, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA.

**Findings:** Online identity management correlated positively with both emotional transparency ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and relational closeness ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Emotional transparency was strongly associated with relational closeness ( $r = .56$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The SEM analysis showed an excellent model fit,  $\chi^2(73) = 143.62$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.97$ , GFI = .93, AGFI = .90, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .049. Online identity management significantly predicted emotional transparency ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and relational closeness directly ( $\beta = .22$ ,  $p = .002$ ). Emotional transparency strongly predicted relational closeness ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and mediated the relationship between online identity management and closeness (indirect  $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The total effect of online identity management on relational closeness was moderate to strong ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Findings demonstrate that while strategic online identity management helps build closeness, its impact is significantly strengthened by emotional transparency. By openly sharing genuine emotions, individuals transform managed digital personas into meaningful and intimate connections.

**Keywords:** Online identity management; emotional transparency; relational closeness; social media; self-disclosure

## 1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of social networking platforms has fundamentally altered how individuals express themselves, manage impressions, and build interpersonal closeness. In digital environments, users routinely curate aspects of their identities through selective self-presentation and controlled disclosure, seeking both social approval and deeper relationships (Li & Zhang, 2025; Zhu, 2025). The ability to shape one's online persona while negotiating privacy boundaries is central to online identity management, which refers to deliberate strategies individuals employ to control how they are perceived in virtual contexts (Tian et al., 2022; Wu, 2024). Simultaneously, the psychological need for authentic connection remains powerful; humans strive for emotional intimacy even in technologically mediated spaces (Lu, 2025; Roring, 2025). This tension between impression control and genuine self-expression shapes relational experiences and may determine whether digital interactions translate into real emotional closeness.

Relational closeness, defined as the felt psychological distance and mutual connectedness between partners, is a core component of relationship quality (Bellis et al., 2023; Swol et al., 2021). Theoretical models of intimacy emphasize self-disclosure and responsiveness as key mechanisms: sharing personal thoughts and feelings fosters trust, which deepens connection (Aranda et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2024). Yet, online settings complicate this process. Users often regulate their digital self-expression through impression management strategies, balancing authenticity with the desire to appear competent, attractive, or socially desirable (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Bradbury et al., 2022). Such curation can facilitate initial contact and perceived similarity but may also suppress emotional transparency, potentially limiting closeness (Muñoz, 2022; Pratiwi & Mukhoyaroh, 2024). Understanding this dynamic is crucial as social platforms increasingly serve as spaces where friendships, romantic ties, and professional collaborations originate and evolve (Brown et al., 2021; Lin & My, 2021).

Recent scholarship highlights that emotional transparency—the open, genuine sharing of affective states—acts as a bridge between self-presentation and intimacy (Cho & Kim, 2024; Yeo & Tong, 2024). Emotional transparency involves not merely revealing facts but conveying subjective experiences in ways that allow others to feel trusted and included (Saeed et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2024). This quality has been linked to stronger interpersonal bonds and conflict recovery (Lu, 2025), healthier dyadic

coping (Xie et al., 2024), and increased satisfaction with technologically mediated communication (Cho, 2022; Park et al., 2022). At the same time, emotional transparency can be undermined when online identity management becomes overly strategic or defensive. Individuals who excessively curate may fear negative evaluation (Cho & Kim, 2024), engage in self-concealment (Aranda et al., 2024), or rely on anonymity to avoid vulnerability (Zhu, 2025). This pattern could create a paradox where users seek closeness but feel less able to be emotionally open.

Digital platforms themselves shape these dynamics. Research shows that interface features and social cues—such as avatar anthropomorphism, algorithmic feedback, and conversational agents—affect willingness to disclose (Bradbury et al., 2022; Wu, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). AI-driven interactions, for instance, can elicit emotional sharing when perceived as authentic and empathic (Park et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Similarly, group-based and community platforms may foster disclosure among peers who share interests or cultural identity (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Martinez & Aesthetika, 2024). Yet, these same contexts can encourage selective self-presentation and identity segmentation, where users differentiate between public and private selves (Gu, 2021; Lin & My, 2021). The duality of digital self-management—protection versus openness—makes the mediating role of emotional transparency theoretically compelling.

Cross-cultural perspectives enrich this discussion, particularly in societies where collectivist norms, face-saving, and family reputation influence self-disclosure. Studies among Asian and Middle Eastern populations show that cultural scripts around modesty and emotional restraint can reduce transparency, especially in romantic or new social connections (Jalali et al., 2022; Kondori et al., 2022; Yeo & Tong, 2024). Conversely, environments perceived as supportive and responsive promote greater openness (Pratiwi & Mukhoyaroh, 2024; Saeed et al., 2024). Technology-mediated anonymity sometimes lowers social risk, facilitating intimate sharing (Croes et al., 2024; Zhu, 2025), but may also inhibit long-term closeness if identity cues remain obscured (Muñoz, 2022). Understanding these culturally situated mechanisms is vital as social media use accelerates globally.

Emerging research on self-concealment versus self-disclosure offers further nuance. Self-concealment, defined as the active withholding of personal information due to fear of judgment, has been negatively associated with emotional intimacy (Aranda et al., 2024; Kondori et al., 2022).

Conversely, self-disclosure about emotions and vulnerabilities tends to predict stronger social bonds (Bellis et al., 2023; Fauzi et al., 2024). In digital contexts, users oscillate between these poles, using platform affordances to either share authentically or remain guarded (Bradbury et al., 2022; Wu & Zheng, 2021). However, the quality rather than sheer quantity of disclosure appears critical; authentic, emotionally rich narratives foster connection, whereas superficial or strategic sharing may not (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Bellis et al., 2023).

Technological mediation also influences emotional safety, which underpins relational closeness. Studies show that trust, responsiveness, and positive feedback moderate the disclosure–intimacy link (Park et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2022). Positive reinforcement—likes, supportive comments—can validate self-expression and promote closeness (Leite & Baptista, 2021; Tian et al., 2022). Conversely, negative feedback or misinterpretation can create emotional withdrawal (Lu, 2025; Wu & Zheng, 2021). Platforms that mimic human warmth through conversational AI or avatar design encourage deeper sharing and subsequent closeness (Cho, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Yet, scholars caution against overreliance on algorithmic empathy, which may not sustain trust over time (Bradbury et al., 2022; Wu, 2024).

From a relational systems perspective, intimacy develops dynamically, influenced by feedback loops between disclosure, partner responsiveness, and perceived closeness (Lu, 2025; Swol et al., 2021). Online identity management shapes the initial conditions of these loops—by controlling vulnerability, it can either delay or accelerate intimacy. Emotional transparency functions as a mediating mechanism, transforming managed self-presentation into authentic connection. When individuals allow emotional truths to surface despite curated identities, deeper closeness emerges (Cho & Kim, 2024; Yeo & Tong, 2024). Conversely, when transparency is suppressed, online interactions may remain superficial or transactional (Croes et al., 2024; Muñoz, 2022). This perspective aligns with recent frameworks linking digital behavior to psychosocial well-being (Wu, 2024; Zhu, 2025).

Empirical gaps remain, however. Much of the existing work isolates either self-presentation or disclosure without modeling their combined influence on closeness (Leite & Baptista, 2021; Lin & My, 2021). Furthermore, while emerging studies recognize emotional transparency as critical, few examine it as a mediator connecting online identity management to relational closeness in a single

structural model (Cho & Kim, 2024; Park et al., 2022). There is also limited evidence from non-Western contexts where cultural and technological variables may interact uniquely (Jalali et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2024). Addressing these gaps is crucial for refining psychological theory and guiding digital communication practices.

The present study responds to this need by testing a mediated model in which online identity management predicts relational closeness indirectly through emotional transparency.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the relationships among online identity management, emotional transparency, and relational closeness. The target population consisted of adult social media users residing in Egypt. Using the Morgan and Krejcie sample size determination table (1970), a minimum of 384 participants was required for a population exceeding 10,000. To ensure adequate statistical power and account for potential missing data, 400 participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling methods. Participants were aged between 18 and 49 years ( $M = 27.83$ ,  $SD = 6.41$ ), representing diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. Eligibility criteria included being active on at least one social media platform and consenting to voluntary participation.

### 2.2. Measures

Relational closeness was measured using the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS), originally developed by Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992). The IOS is a single-item, pictorial measure consisting of seven pairs of increasingly overlapping circles representing the self and the other. Participants select the pair of circles that best represents their perceived level of closeness in a relationship, with scores ranging from 1 (no overlap, very distant) to 7 (almost complete overlap, very close). Although it is a single-item tool, the IOS has been extensively validated and is widely used in interpersonal and social psychology research. Prior studies have reported strong convergent validity with other relationship closeness measures (e.g., the Relationship Closeness Inventory) and test–retest reliability coefficients above .80 across various populations, supporting its appropriateness for relational closeness assessment.

Online identity management was assessed using the Online Identity Management Scale (OIMS) developed by Chiou and Lee (2013). The OIMS consists of 15 self-report items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It measures how individuals construct, present, and adjust their online identities across digital platforms and includes three subscales: (1) Self-Presentation Strategy (managing self-image and impression), (2) Privacy and Boundary Regulation (controlling what is shared with whom), and (3) Authenticity and Consistency (alignment between online and offline identity). Higher total scores indicate more active and deliberate online identity management. The scale’s construct validity has been confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, and reported Cronbach’s alpha values range from .83 to .91 for the subscales, indicating excellent internal consistency. Previous studies across diverse cultural and age groups have confirmed its reliability and applicability in social media and digital self-presentation research.

Emotional transparency was measured using the Emotional Transparency Scale (ETS) adapted from Gross and John’s (1997) Emotional Self-Disclosure framework and later refined by Barrett, Gross, Christensen, and Benvenuto (2001). The ETS includes 16 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). It evaluates the extent to which individuals openly and honestly communicate their emotional states in interpersonal interactions. The scale comprises two subscales: (1) Authentic Expression (clarity and genuineness of emotional sharing) and (2) Emotional Openness (willingness to disclose emotional experiences to others). Higher scores indicate greater emotional transparency. The ETS demonstrates excellent internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  typically between .85 and .92), strong convergent validity with related constructs such as emotional expressivity and openness to experience, and robust test–retest reliability in longitudinal studies. It has

been widely used in digital communication and relational well-being research.

2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28 and AMOS version 21. First, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages) were calculated for demographic variables and the main study constructs. Bivariate associations between online identity management, emotional transparency, and relational closeness were examined using Pearson’s correlation coefficients. Then, a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach was applied to test the hypothesized mediation model, with emotional transparency specified as the mediator between online identity management and relational closeness. Model fit was evaluated using several fit indices, including the Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$  for all tests.

3. **Findings and Results**

Of the 400 participants, 243 (60.8%) were female and 157 (39.2%) were male. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 49 years, with the largest group between 25 and 34 years ( $n = 171$ ; 42.8%), followed by those aged 18–24 years ( $n = 146$ ; 36.5%), and 35–49 years ( $n = 83$ ; 20.7%). Regarding educational background, 158 participants (39.5%) held a bachelor’s degree, 127 (31.8%) had completed secondary education, 74 (18.5%) reported holding a postgraduate degree, and 41 (10.2%) had other qualifications. In terms of social media usage, 289 participants (72.3%) reported daily active use exceeding two hours, while 111 participants (27.7%) reported daily use below two hours. These distributions indicate that the sample was diverse and representative of active social media users in Egypt.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 400)*

Variable	M	SD
Online Identity Management	3.48	0.71
Emotional Transparency	4.12	0.83
Relational Closeness	4.25	0.79

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables: Online Identity Management (OIM),

Emotional Transparency (ET), and Relational Closeness (RC).

Prior to inferential analyses, the assumptions underlying Pearson correlation and SEM were examined and confirmed. Assessment of normality indicated that skewness values ranged between -0.64 and +0.71 and kurtosis values between -0.83 and +0.59 for all study variables, falling within the acceptable range of -2 to +2. Multicollinearity was not a concern, as variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.23 to 2.18 and tolerance values exceeded .45.

Linearity was visually confirmed using scatterplots of the variables, and no significant outliers were detected based on standardized residuals (all < |3.0|). The SEM analysis also indicated multivariate normality (Mardia's coefficient = 2.74, well below the critical value of 5). These results confirmed that the data met the assumptions necessary for correlation and SEM analyses.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Variables (N = 400)*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Online Identity Management	—		
2. Emotional Transparency	.42** (p < .001)	—	
3. Relational Closeness	.37** (p < .001)	.56** (p < .001)	—

Online identity management correlated positively with emotional transparency (r = .42, p < .001) and relational closeness (r = .37, p < .001). Emotional transparency showed

the strongest correlation with relational closeness (r = .56, p < .001), suggesting that authentic emotional sharing is strongly linked to perceived closeness.

**Table 3**

*Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model*

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold
$\chi^2$	143.62	—
df	73	—
$\chi^2/df$	1.97	≤ 3
GFI	0.93	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.90	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.96	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.95	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.049	≤ 0.06

The model demonstrated excellent fit to the data:  $\chi^2(73) = 143.62$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 1.97$ , GFI = .93, AGFI = .90, CFI = .96, TLI = .95, and RMSEA = .049. These indices meet or exceed

widely accepted thresholds, indicating the hypothesized model is an adequate representation of the observed data

**Table 4**

*Standardized Path Coefficients in the Structural Model*

Path	b	S.E.	$\beta$	p
<b>Direct effects</b>				
Online Identity Management → Emotional Transparency	0.58	0.07	.42	< .001
Emotional Transparency → Relational Closeness	0.67	0.06	.51	< .001
Online Identity Management → Relational Closeness	0.31	0.09	.22	.002
<b>Indirect effect</b>				
Online Identity Management → Emotional Transparency → Relational Closeness	0.39	0.05	.21	< .001
<b>Total effect</b>				
Online Identity Management → Relational Closeness (total)	0.70	0.08	.43	< .001

The direct effect of online identity management on emotional transparency was strong ( $\beta = .42$ , p < .001), and

emotional transparency strongly predicted relational closeness ( $\beta = .51$ , p < .001). The direct path from online



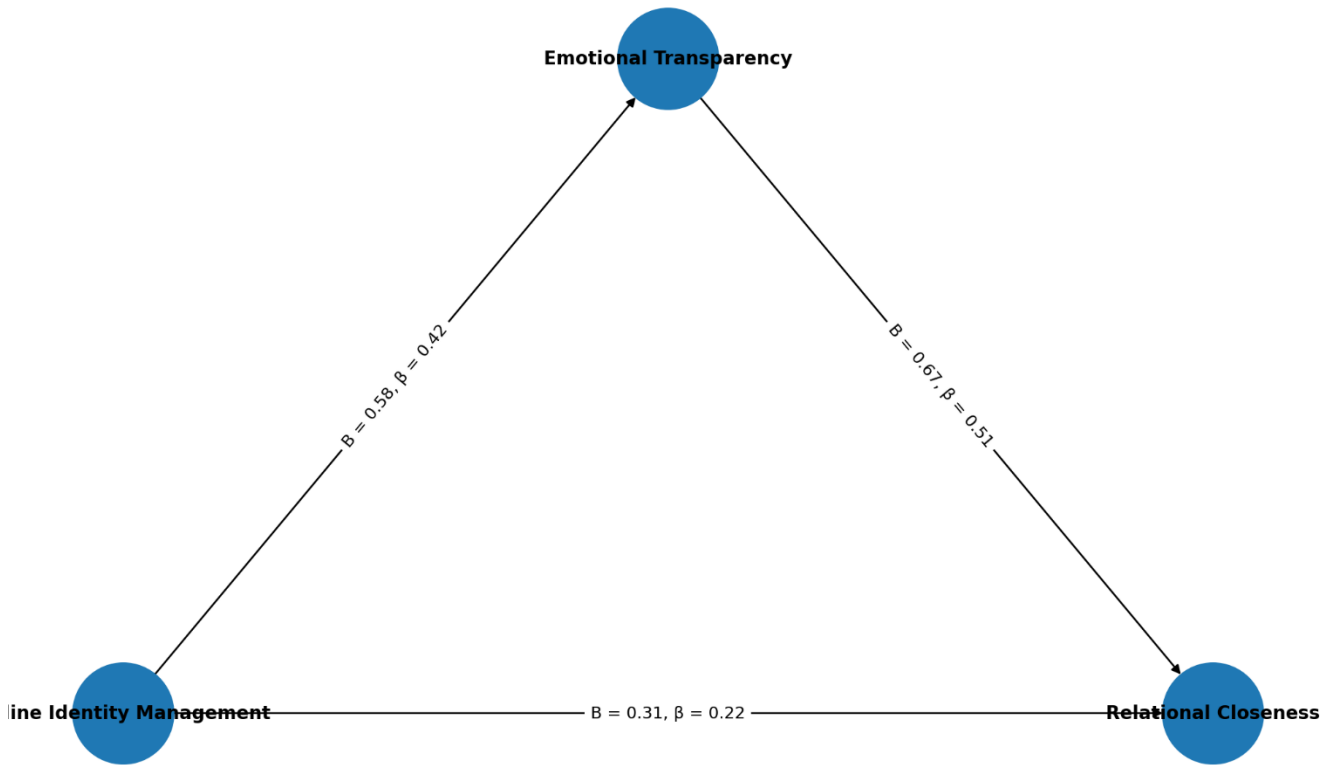
identity management to relational closeness remained significant but weaker after accounting for mediation ( $\beta = .22, p = .002$ ). The indirect effect via emotional transparency was also significant ( $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ), confirming partial

mediation. The total standardized effect of online identity management on relational closeness was moderate to strong ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ).

**Figure 1**

*Model with Beta Coefficients*

Structural Model: Online Identity Management, Emotional Transparency, and Relational Closeness



**4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study aimed to clarify how online identity management influences relational closeness among social media users and whether emotional transparency mediates this relationship. Using correlational analysis and structural equation modeling, the findings confirmed that online identity management was significantly associated with relational closeness and that emotional transparency partially mediated this association. Specifically, individuals who actively and strategically managed their digital personas reported greater relational closeness when they also engaged in open and authentic emotional sharing. These results extend existing theories of intimacy and self-presentation into the digital domain and shed light on the

mechanisms through which managed online identities can evolve into meaningful interpersonal bonds.

**5. Interpretation of Findings**

The positive link between online identity management and relational closeness aligns with research suggesting that strategic self-presentation is not inherently superficial but can serve as a relational bridge when used adaptively. For instance, selective online self-presentation has been shown to help users create favorable first impressions and find common ground, which may support later emotional disclosure (Bradbury et al., 2022; Lin & My, 2021). Our results echo this by showing that participants who curated their profiles and controlled information flow were able to maintain a sense of safety and coherence, prerequisites for closeness (Tian et al., 2022; Wu, 2024). Yet, the mediation analysis indicates that identity management alone is

insufficient; closeness strengthens when this managed self is accompanied by emotional transparency.

This mediating effect corroborates theories of intimacy development that emphasize the progression from surface-level exchange to deeper affective sharing (Aranda et al., 2024; Bellis et al., 2023). Prior studies have observed that while online self-presentation can increase approachability, only authentic and emotionally rich disclosures foster trust and bonding (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2024). Our findings converge with this pattern: participants who moved beyond mere impression management to reveal genuine emotions achieved greater perceived closeness. Emotional transparency thus acts as a mechanism that transforms curated digital identities into vehicles for connection rather than barriers.

Moreover, the results highlight the nuanced nature of digital disclosure. While online contexts have been criticized for encouraging performativity, they also provide opportunities to control vulnerability and gradually deepen intimacy (Muñoz, 2022; Zhu, 2025). Many participants may have leveraged identity management to calibrate what and how they shared, reducing the social risk of emotional openness. This is consistent with evidence that users disclose more in environments perceived as safe and responsive (Park et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2024). Platforms enabling staged self-presentation—profile editing, privacy controls, and feedback features—may inadvertently encourage the very emotional transparency that fuels closeness.

Another important implication emerges from the cultural context. Egypt, like other collectivist societies, places strong emphasis on reputation, family honor, and social evaluation. Such cultural scripts often discourage open emotional disclosure (Jalali et al., 2022; Kondori et al., 2022). However, the study's findings suggest that digital platforms can soften these constraints by allowing controlled, paced self-revelation. The mediation effect of emotional transparency indicates that even in culturally conservative settings, individuals can achieve intimacy online when they feel secure enough to express emotions. This supports earlier cross-cultural work showing that perceived support and low fear of negative evaluation promote disclosure despite normative reticence (Cho & Kim, 2024; Yeo & Tong, 2024).

Our results also echo research on technology design and emotional communication. Studies show that anthropomorphic cues, conversational AI, and positive algorithmic feedback enhance willingness to disclose and can increase intimacy (Cho, 2022; Park et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). While the current study did not manipulate

platform features, participants were active social media users and likely benefitted from affordances such as tailored privacy settings and interactive feedback. These tools may have reduced risk and promoted transparency, aligning with prior findings that supportive technological cues foster emotional openness (Bradbury et al., 2022; Wu, 2024).

At the same time, the partial (rather than full) mediation suggests that online identity management can affect closeness through other pathways beyond transparency. For example, perceived similarity, social capital building, and relationship maintenance strategies may also strengthen bonds (Gu, 2021; Swol et al., 2021). Additionally, the possibility of strategic self-disclosure—calibrated openness that signals trustworthiness but protects vulnerabilities—may directly contribute to closeness (Bellis et al., 2023; Leite & Baptista, 2021). These alternative mechanisms highlight the complex, multi-layered process of digital intimacy formation.

Finally, the study reinforces the psychological distinction between quantity and quality of disclosure. Prior evidence cautions that frequent posting or superficial updates do not guarantee closeness; what matters is meaningful, emotionally honest communication (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Bellis et al., 2023). Our results confirm that emotional transparency—the depth and genuineness of sharing—explains why some digitally managed identities lead to authentic relational closeness while others remain detached or performative.

## 6. Suggestions and Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a cross-sectional and correlational design, which precludes causal inference. Although structural equation modeling provides theoretical directionality, future longitudinal or experimental designs would better capture the temporal unfolding of online identity management, emotional transparency, and closeness (Bradbury et al., 2022; Lin & My, 2021). Second, the sample consisted of Egyptian social media users, which, while valuable for understanding collectivist contexts, limits generalizability. Cultural norms about disclosure and intimacy differ across societies (Jalali et al., 2022; Kondori et al., 2022), and replication in other cultural environments is necessary. Third, all data were self-reported, introducing possible social desirability or recall biases. Although validated measures were used, combining self-reports with behavioral indicators (e.g., digital trace data) could improve accuracy. Fourth, the

study did not differentiate between types of online platforms (e.g., public social networks vs. private messaging apps). Platform affordances significantly affect disclosure and relationship development (Gu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Finally, while emotional transparency was measured as a unitary construct, it may have important subdimensions—such as vulnerability, authenticity, and clarity—that future studies could analyze separately.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to track how digital identity management and emotional transparency evolve over time and impact long-term relational outcomes. Experience sampling or diary designs could capture moment-to-moment changes in self-presentation and disclosure during relationship formation. It would also be beneficial to explore platform-specific effects, comparing how features like ephemeral messaging, anonymity, or algorithmic recommendations influence emotional transparency and closeness. Expanding research to diverse cultural and age groups could clarify how norms and life stage influence digital intimacy processes. Additionally, including partner or peer reports of perceived transparency and closeness could reduce self-report bias and capture dyadic or network-level perspectives. Advanced analytic methods, such as natural language processing of online interactions combined with psychometric scales, may further reveal the linguistic markers of authentic emotional sharing. Finally, researchers should test additional mediators and moderators—such as trust, empathy, fear of negative evaluation, and digital literacy—to build a more comprehensive explanatory model.

The findings offer actionable implications for individuals, relationship counselors, and digital platform designers. Users seeking closer relationships online can benefit from balancing careful identity management with gradual, emotionally honest self-disclosure, which fosters trust and deepens connection. Practitioners working in relationship counseling or social skills training can help clients learn digital communication strategies that preserve privacy while encouraging authentic emotional sharing. Social media and platform designers should consider integrating features that enhance psychological safety, such as customizable privacy controls, empathetic response cues, and supportive feedback mechanisms, to encourage transparency without overexposure. Additionally, educational initiatives can teach digital citizenship and healthy self-presentation, empowering users to navigate between protection and openness effectively. Organizations that rely on digital interaction (e.g., teletherapy, online

learning communities) can adopt communication practices that model and reward emotional authenticity to promote stronger interpersonal bonds in virtual spaces.

### Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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