

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS VIA DATING APPS: TRUST AS THE FOUNDATION OF SELF-DISCLOSURE AMONG EMERGING ADULTS

MENJALIN HUBUNGAN VIA APLIKASI KENCAN: KEPERCAYAAN SEBAGAI FONDASI KETERBUKAAN PADA DEWASA AWAL

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ABSTRACT

Currently, many dating app users in Indonesia fall into the emerging adult age group. This study aims to examine the influence of trust on self-disclosure among emerging adults using dating apps. This study employs a quantitative research method with a cross-sectional survey design. In this study, 210 emerging adult users of dating apps were recruited using purposive sampling. The instruments used were a trust scale and a self-disclosure scale, both of which had been tested for validity and reliability. The data obtained from the questionnaire were then subjected to regression analysis after undergoing tests for normality and linearity. Results showed that trust significantly influenced self-disclosure among young dating apps users ($F = 97.50$; $p < 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.319$), indicating that the trust variable (X) explains 31.9% of the variance in the self-disclosure variable (Y). These findings suggest that trust and self-disclosure are important in building relationships with partners met through dating apps. The results of this study can serve as a framework for understanding the development of trust and self-disclosure in the use of dating apps. Additionally, this research contributes to the literature on the interactions and communication of adults who use dating apps.

Keywords: Trust, self-disclosure, emerging adult, dating apps users

ABSTRAK

Saat ini, banyak pengguna aplikasi kencan di Indonesia yang termasuk ke dalam kelompok usia emerging adult. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh trust terhadap self-disclosure pada emerging adult pengguna aplikasi kencan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kuantitatif dengan desain penelitian cross-sectional survey. Dalam penelitian ini, 210 partisipan emerging adult pengguna aplikasi kencan diperoleh melalui teknik purposive sampling. Instrumen yang digunakan berupa skala trust dan skala self-disclosure yang telah diuji validitas dan reliabilitasnya. Data yang diperoleh dari hasil kuesioner kemudian dilakukan uji analisis regresi setelah melalui uji normalitas dan linearitas. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa trust mempengaruhi self-disclosure secara signifikan ($F = 97.50$; $p < 0.05$; $R^2 = 0.319$), yang menunjukkan adanya pengaruh variabel trust (X) terhadap variabel self-disclosure (Y) sebesar 31.9%. Temuan tersebut mengindikasikan bahwa trust dan self-disclosure penting dalam membangun hubungan dengan pasangan yang dikenal melalui aplikasi kencan. Hasil penelitian tersebut dapat digunakan sebagai gambaran terkait pembentukan trust dan self-disclosure dalam penggunaan aplikasi kencan. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga dapat menambah literatur mengenai interaksi dan komunikasi emerging adult pengguna aplikasi kencan.

Kata Kunci: Kepercayaan, keterbukaan diri; dewasa awal, pengguna aplikasi kencan

INTRODUCTION

As a society with high digital accessibility, the use of online platforms to facilitate the initial stages of forming relationships is a commonly used alternative, often referred to as dating apps (Jordan, 2024). Dating apps can be defined as mobile-based applications designed to help users meet and form romantic relationships with others (Murti & Legowo, 2023). Online communication allows individuals to get to know each other better before deciding to meet in person (Perdana & Dewi, 2022). According to a survey by Social Science Research Solutions (2025), 39% of adults in the United States have used or are currently using dating apps. Additionally, based on Statista data from 2024, the number of dating app users in Indonesia has reached 4.6 million, and is projected to rise to 4.9 million by 2029 (Nurhayati-Wolff, 2026). As of June 2024, Tinder is the most downloaded dating app in the world (Statista Research Department, 2026). Furthermore, the rapid growth in the use of Tinder and Grindr has spurred the emergence of similar apps such as Bumble and Happn (Sumter & Vandenberg, 2019).

Many dating app users in Indonesia are individuals in the emerging adult age group (Christopher & Satiadarma, 2024; Meiliani & Fuady, 2023). As indicated by a Populix survey (2024), dating app users in Indonesia are predominantly individuals aged 17–25. Emerging adulthood refers to the 18–29 age group, which is a period often described as the life stage between adolescence and early adulthood, during which individuals are navigating various experiences in romantic relationships (Arnett et al., 2014). Individuals in the emerging adulthood age group generally face complex developmental tasks, making their lives prone to significant changes (Larasati & Ardelia, 2025). Arnett (2000) states that emerging adults are a group of individuals who are in a phase of exploration regarding love, work, and their worldview. According to Erik Erikson, the emerging adult age group enters the developmental stage of intimacy versus isolation, which involves the challenge of building commitment where a failure to do so can lead to isolation (Santrock, 2019). Today, romantic relationships can form through online dating just as they do from face-to-face meetings (Cessia & Lestari, 2017).

When a relationship lacks physical meetings and face-to-face communication, self-disclosure becomes one of the most important elements in maintaining and enhancing

closeness (Suryani & Nurwidawati, 2016). In Knapp et al. (2020), self-disclosure is defined as the act of revealing personal information about oneself to others. Furthermore, according to Olson et al. (2011), the concept of self-disclosure involves openly sharing personal feelings and ideas. Self-disclosure focuses on perceptions, information, or feelings, conveyed through a message (Dewi & Delliana, 2020; Knapp et al., 2020). According to Wheelless (1978), self-disclosure has five dimensions that characterize it: consciously intended, amount, honesty-accuracy, positiveness-negativeness, and depth-intimacy. In romantic relationships, individuals do not want to feel afraid of being rejected or abandoned after engaging in self-disclosure with their partner (Yulianti & Hijrianti, 2024). In reality, in the context of online dating, many young adults feel afraid after engaging in self-disclosure because they tend to experience digital violence as a result of that experience (Basel et al., 2022).

Although negative experiences in the context of online dating are still felt by some individuals, many others have found partners on dating apps, which can even lead to marriage (Perdana & Dewi, 2022; Sholihah, 2021). This is supported by a Populix survey (2024) of 1,165 dating app users in Indonesia, which found that only 13% of respondents had entered into a dating relationship, and another 7% had reached marriage. The success of online dating relationships is based on trust, allowing for honest and deep self-disclosure (Brata et al., 2023). Self-disclosure is successful when individuals have low concerns about rejection from their partner, a state supported by the presence of trust and a sense of comfort with their partner (Dewi & Delliana, 2020). This can be explained through Social Penetration Theory, which states that satisfaction in interpersonal interactions can determine the level of self-disclosure toward one's conversation partner (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

According to Rempel et al. (1985), trust can be defined as confidence and assurance regarding a partner's caring response and the strength of the relationship. Building trust requires not only supporting one's partner but also maintaining openness about one's own thoughts and feelings when facing the situations they experience (Johnson et al., 2014). Trust, as described by Rempel et al. (1985), can be classified into three main dimensions: predictability, dependability, and faith. Predictability is assessed by the extent to which we can predict a partner's behavior based on the level of consistency,

stability, and control over the behavioral patterns they exhibit. Over time, certain behavioral patterns in a relationship will change, and this is where the role of dependability comes into play. Dependability is not assessed based on specific behavioral patterns but rather on the extent to which we can rely on our partner based on their inherent traits or characteristics. Faith can be defined as the emotional security that allows an individual to be confident that their partner will care for them even in the face of an uncertain future.

A key feature of dating apps is that users can overcome geographical and time constraints when meeting others, allowing them to choose with whom they wish to interact (Yuliastuti et al., 2022). To build intimacy, dating app users ask numerous questions and engage in self-disclosure with their partners (Perdana & Dewi, 2022). Self-disclosure serves as a foundation before users move toward intimacy, such as making a commitment that may lead to marriage (Cattelya et al., 2022). However, for couples who fail to achieve such intimacy, this may be due to a lack of trust stemming from negative experiences the users have had in the past (Perdana & Dewi, 2022).

The detrimental impact on the development of emerging adults can take the form of isolation resulting from a failure to form intimacy (Santrock, 2019). Given this, it is important to examine the process of intimacy formation among emerging adults, particularly within the context of dating apps. Emerging adults use dating apps to build commitment with other users, a process grounded in the gradual development of self-disclosure (Aulia & Agustian, 2024). The formation of intimacy on dating apps is inseparable from the development of trust, where users feel confident enough to share personal information with their partners (Khoiriyah et al., 2024).

This study aims to determine the importance of trust in ensuring the sustainability of these relationships and to examine the influence of trust on self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps. Previous research has focused on the roles of trust and self-disclosure in the initial interactions of dating app users, whereas this study focuses on how trust can predict self-disclosure in interpersonal relationships among emerging adults who use dating apps. Hence, this study hypothesizes that trust influences self-disclosure among emerging adult users of dating apps.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research method using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of trust (X) on self-disclosure (Y) among emerging adults who use dating apps. A cross-sectional survey is a research design in which the researcher collects data at a single point in time (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015).

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique in which respondent criteria are determined before data collection to ensure that each sample is representative of the population's characteristics (Soesana et al., 2023). The following are the criteria for respondents: (1) users of dating apps, (2) the emerging adult age group according to Arnett et al. (2014) (18–29 years old), (3) currently in a close romantic relationship with another user, such as the “conversation stage,” casual communication, a more serious relationship, or an undefined relationship. These criteria were selected to provide a general overview of the extent to which trust influences self-disclosure among dating app users who are currently in a close romantic relationship with another user, regardless of the duration of the closeness or the relationship's status. The data were collected via a questionnaire, with participants instructed to complete it only if they consented to do so. Data collection was conducted through various platforms, particularly TikTok due to its wide-ranging algorithm, as well as through personal networks. The questionnaire includes an informed consent form that respondents are encouraged to read before completing the questionnaire. Respondents were not forced to complete the questionnaire and were free to withdraw at any time. Based on the completed questionnaires, the sample obtained in this study consisted of 210 emerging adult participants.

Trust was measured using the Trust Scale (Rempel et al., 1985), which was modified by Risandy (2018) to include 22 items on a 1–4 Likert scale. Trust was measured using the Trust Scale (Rempel et al., 1985), which was adapted into Indonesian by Risandy (2018) and consists of 22 items. This scale comprises three aspects: predictability, dependability, and faith. Before conducting the pilot study, the researcher modified the 22 items by replacing the word “partner” with “match.” The aim was to ensure that the questions in the questionnaire would be more understandable to emerging adult respondents using dating apps. One of the items reads, “*Saya mendukung penuh cita-cita*

yang dimiliki match saya." Scores were obtained using a 1–4 Likert scale, with categories including: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.

Meanwhile, self-disclosure was measured using the Revised Self-Disclosure Scale (RSDS) (Wheeles, 1978), which was modified by Shara (2023) to include 18 items. This scale covers five aspects: intent to disclose, amount, positive-negative, honesty-accuracy, and general depth-control. Previous researchers adapted the 31-item RSDS into Indonesian, followed by a pilot study, which resulted in the removal of 13 items, leaving the remaining 18 items. One of the items reads: *"Saya sering membicarakan perasaan tentang diri saya sendiri."* Scores are obtained using a 1–5 Likert scale, with categories including 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Prior to the study, both instruments underwent validity and reliability testing. Validity testing was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient, while reliability testing utilized Cronbach's Alpha. Based on the validity test results, the trust scale indicated that 20 out of 22 items were valid, and the self-disclosure scale indicated that 16 out of 18 items were valid. In the reliability test, the trust scale achieved a reliability of 0.908, while the self-disclosure scale achieved a reliability of 0.795. Therefore, these values indicate that the scales are suitable for use as data collection tools.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The data analysis process will involve preliminary tests and hypothesis testing. The first step in the preliminary tests is a normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which aims to determine whether the residual values of the two variables are normally distributed. Following that, a linearity test in the form of a scatter plot will be conducted to determine whether there is a linear relationship between the two variables. Finally, a hypothesis test will be performed using linear regression analysis to determine the effect of the dependent variable, trust (X), on the independent variable, self-disclosure (Y).

RESULT

This study included 34 male respondents (16.19%). Meanwhile, there were 176 female respondents (83.81%). This indicates that the majority of respondents were female, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Respondents by Gender*

Gender	Total	Percentage
Male	34	16.19%
Female	176	83.81%
Total	210	100.00%

Table 2. *Characteristics of Respondents by Age*

Usia	Frequency	Percentage
18-20	61	29.05%
21-24	130	61.90%
25-29	19	9.05%
Total	210	100.00%

Based on Table 2, it is known that 61 respondents (29.05%) were in the 18–20 age range, 130 respondents (61.90%) were in the 21–24 age range, and 19 respondents (9.05%) were in the 25–29 age range. This indicates that the majority of respondents are in the 21–24 age range.

Table 3. *Respondent Characteristics by Relationship Status*

Relationship Status	Frequency	Percentage
Talking Stage	96	45.71%
In a Relationship	66	31.43%
Undefined Relationship	48	22.86%
Total	210	100.00%

Based on the relationship statuses in the table, it is known that 96 (45.71%) respondents were in the talking stage, 66 respondents (31.43%) were in a romantic relationship, while 48 respondents (22.86%) were in an undefined relationship. This indicates that the majority of respondents are in the talking stage with another user.

Table 4. *Characteristics of Respondents Based on Daily Dating App Usage*

Intensity of Dating Apps Usage	Frequency	Percentage
< 1 hour	72	34.29%
1-2 hours	85	40.48%
2-3 hours	38	18.10%
> 3 hours	15	7.14%
Total	210	100.00%

Based on the table, it is found that 72 respondents (34.29%) spend less than 1 hour on dating apps, 85 respondents (40.48%) spend 1 to 2 hours on dating apps, 38 respondents (18.10%) spend 2 to 3 hours on dating apps, while 15 respondents (7.14%) spend more than 3 hours on dating apps. Thus, this indicates that the majority of respondents spend 1 to 2 hours on dating apps.

Table 5. *Intensity of Dating App Usage by Gender*

Intensity of Dating Apps Usage	Male (%)	Female (%)
< 1 hour	6.67%	27.62%
1-2 hours	5.71%	34.76%
2-3 hours	3.33%	14.76%
> 3 hours	0.48%	6.67%
Total	16.19%	83.81%

Based on the table, when examining the daily usage intensity among men and women, it is found that for usage durations of less than 1 hour, 6.67% of male respondents and 27.62% of female respondents were recorded. Meanwhile, for daily usage intensities of 1 to 2 hours, 5.71% of male respondents and 34.76% of female respondents were recorded. In the 2 to 3-hour daily usage category, 3.33% of male respondents and 14.76% of female respondents were recorded. Conversely, for usage durations of more than 3 hours, 0.48% of male respondents and 6.67% of female respondents were recorded. Thus, women use dating apps more frequently than men during the 1 to 2-hour duration, while men use dating apps most frequently during durations of less than 1 hour.

Table 6. *Results of the Normality Test*

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardized Residual
N		210
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	6.59070356
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.056
	Positive	.056
	Negative	-.031
Test Statistic		.056
Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)		.200 ^{c, d}

Before conducting the hypothesis test, normality and linearity tests were performed first. In the normality test table above, the residual value of 0.200 is greater than 0.05; therefore, it can be concluded that the residual values are normally distributed.

Table 7. *Linearity Test Results*

ANOVA Table							
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-Disclosure * Trust	Between Groups	(Combined)	6568.695	40	164.217	4.102	.000
		Linearity	4255.513	1	4255.513	106.306	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	2313.182	39	59.312	1.482	.047
	Within Groups		6765.229	169	40.031		
	Total		13333.924	209			

Based on the linearity test, it was found that the significance value for linearity = $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, the linearity test was fulfilled, leading to the conclusion that there

is a linear relationship between the independent variable (trust) and the dependent variable (self-disclosure). On the other hand, the deviation from linearity value is $0.047 < 0.05$, indicating that the linearity test is not fulfilled.

However, when verified using a scatter plot below, it is evident that linearity is fulfilled, as the data points trend from the lower left to the upper right. This indicates a linear relationship between the independent variable (trust) and the dependent variable (self-disclosure). Therefore, although there are indications of deviation from linearity, the relationship between the two variables can be considered linear, allowing for the performance of a regression analysis.

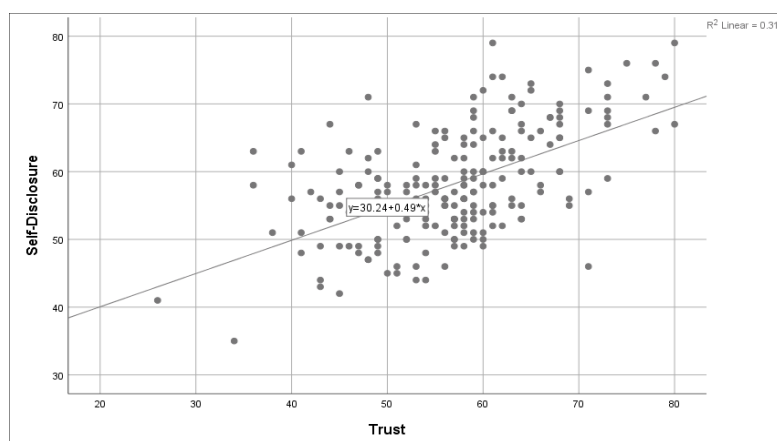


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of Linearity Test

Table 8. ANOVA Result for Regression Analysis

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Model						
1	Regression	4255.513	1	4255.513	97.500	.000 ^b
	Residual	9078.411	208	43.646		
	Total	13333.924	209			

Based on the hypothesis test, it is found that the calculated F-value is 97.500 with a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$; therefore, the trust variable (X) has an effect on the self-disclosure variable (Y).

Table 9. *Model Summary of Regression Analysis*

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.565 ^a	.319	.316	6.607

In the table above, it is noted that the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.565. Additionally, the coefficient of determination (R-squared) is 0.319, indicating that the influence of the trust variable (X) on the self-disclosure variable (Y) is 31.9%.

Table 10. *Coefficients of Regression Analysis*

Coefficients					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	30.239	2.870		10.536
	Trust	.491	.050	.565	9.874

Based on the table above, the regression equation is $Y = 30.239 + 0.491X + e$. The constant (B) is 30.239, which means that if trust remains constant, the level of self-disclosure is 30.239. In addition, the table shows that the regression coefficient (B) for the trust variable (X) is 0.491 (positive), meaning that if trust increases by one (1) unit, there is an increase in self-disclosure of 0.491.

Furthermore, the significance value is $0.000 < 0.05$, while the calculated t-value of 9.874 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.971. Based on these two decision-making criteria, it can be concluded that the trust variable (X) has a positive and significant effect on self-disclosure (Y) of emerging adult dating app users, namely the higher the trust, the more self-disclosure will increase.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the influence of trust on self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps. Based on the results of the hypothesis testing, it was found that trust has a significant effect on self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps. Furthermore, it was also found that the contribution of trust to self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps is 31.9%. Thus, the results of this study can be interpreted as follows: the higher the respondents' trust in their partners on dating apps, the higher their level of self-disclosure.

The majority of respondents in this study were individuals aged 21–24, with 22-year-olds making up the largest group. Arnett et al. (2014) explain that the emerging adult age group (18–29 years) is a period often referred to as a life stage in which individuals are undergoing various experiences in romantic relationships. In this context, emerging adults utilize online dating platforms to find partners. Dating apps can influence how individuals perceive and navigate their romantic relationships because they offer a wide array of potential partners, thereby providing opportunities for individuals to practice their social and communication skills in a low-pressure environment, which is a key advantage of dating apps for those with limited experience (Menon, 2024).

The results of this study are supported by the findings of Andriani et al. (2019), which indicate that trust has a positive influence on self-disclosure among dating app users, driven by mutual attraction. Additionally, research by Nisa and Dayita (2025) yielded similar results among young adult Tinder users. In that study, it was found that users' trust levels fell into the low category, potentially due to past experiences or a lack of social interaction (Nisa & Dayita, 2025). Furthermore, research by Putri et al. (2023) identified a relationship between interpersonal trust and self-disclosure among young adult Tinder users. Previous findings indicate that couples who have built trust in one another will eventually be able to engage in self-disclosure (Fadilla et al., 2023). A relationship lacking trust will not progress to a more serious stage (Taryono, 2025). Thus, a relationship built on strong trust and self-disclosure can support couples in maintaining their relationship due to the comfort they feel in expressing their hearts and minds (Hukamak et al., 2025).

In online relationships, self-disclosure tends to be easier when individuals have already established trust with their conversation partners after interacting over a longer period of time (Aldin et al., 2023). Social Penetration Theory emphasizes that the process of building a relationship in the early stages is crucial before getting to know someone more closely and engaging in more personal self-disclosure (Altman et al., 1981). Specifically in the context of dating apps, the fear of rejection from a potential partner can deter individuals from engaging in self-disclosure with them (Aldyanto & Kristama, 2024). This is consistent with the research by Dewi and Delliana (2020), which found that self-disclosure can occur when individuals have gained the confidence that they will not face rejection from their online partners. Additionally, based on the research by Fadilla et al. (2023), trust combined with shared interests can encourage individuals to engage in self-disclosure with their matches on dating apps.

In this study, the influence of trust on self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps was 31.9%, meaning that there are still 68.1% of other factors that can influence an individual's self-disclosure during the emerging adulthood stage. For example, Blackhart et al. (2021) found that individuals who feel more comfortable revealing their true selves online are more likely to engage in self-disclosure. Furthermore, self-disclosure can also be influenced by the recipient of the disclosure, as individuals tend to be more open with those closer to them (Apriyanti et al., 2024).

Overall, the strength of this study lies in its focus on emerging adults within the context of dating apps. This study examines the role of trust in self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps, as well as the developmental tasks of this age group within the current phenomenon of online relationships. Conversely, a limitation of this study lies in the data collection method used, self-report, which may introduce bias among respondents. Additionally, a limitation in this study's design lies in the use of a cross-sectional survey design, which cannot establish causal relationships between variables. The use of purposive sampling also limits the generalizability of the findings, requiring caution when applying them to a broader population. Furthermore, the number of male respondents in this study is relatively lower compared to female respondents. This author suggests that future research consider other variables such as attachment style, online intimacy, fear of rejection, negative experiences on dating apps, or perceived

safety, when examining the influence of trust on self-disclosure among emerging adults in the context of dating apps. It is also recommended that future researchers focus on more specific relationship criteria, such as romantic relationships or marital relationships.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The majority of respondents in this study are emerging adults who use dating apps and are in the 21–24 age group. This study found that trust influences self-disclosure among emerging adults who use dating apps, with a significance level of $0.000 < 0.05$. This means that emerging adults with higher levels of trust in their partners exhibit higher levels of self-disclosure. Conversely, the lower their trust in their partners, the lower their self-disclosure. The effect of the trust variable on the self-disclosure variable is 31.9%, derived from a coefficient of determination (R-squared) of 0.319. In addition, the constant (B) was found to be 30.239, which means that if trust remains constant, the level of self-disclosure is 30.239. The regression coefficient (B) obtained for the trust variable (X) is 0.491 (positive), indicating that if trust increases by one (1) unit, there is an increase in self-disclosure of 0.491.

Individuals use trust as the foundation for self-disclosure to others. In cyber space, a person can open up after feeling confident that they will not be rejected by their partner. In general, relationships built on trust and self-disclosure can support the longevity of the relationship, which is grounded in a sense of comfort in expressing feelings and thoughts. In building trust, as explained in Social Penetration Theory, the process of establishing a relationship in the early stages is crucial before getting to know someone more intimately and engaging in more personal self-disclosure.

This study contributes to our understanding by highlighting the importance of trust and self-disclosure, particularly in building and maintaining relationships with partners met through dating apps. However, individuals should also consider building trust gradually before engaging in deeper self-disclosure. Emerging adults who use dating apps can ensure they remain mindful of digital safety and the limits of the personal information they share.

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