

# Sadfishing as Emotional Disclosure in the Bipolar Hashtag on TikTok

**Fathiyyah Azizah**

Program Studi Ilmu Komunikasi. , Universitas Ummi Bogor, 16330,  
Bogor, Indonesia

[fathiyyahazizah23@gmail.com](mailto:fathiyyahazizah23@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

Public discourse often dismisses "sadfishing" as manipulative attention-seeking, risking the delegitimization of genuine psychological distress. This issue is compounded by TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system, which privileges high-intensity emotional content, transforming private distress into public viral narratives regardless of creator intent. This study aims to explore how individuals with bipolar disorder experience and interpret their emotional disclosures within the #bipolar hashtag community on TikTok. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two key TikTok content creators and supplemented by non-participant digital observation of three supporting informants. The analysis followed the Miles and Huberman framework, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure analytical rigor. Results indicate that creators utilize the #bipolar hashtag to contextualize emotional states within a clinical identity framework, viewing their posts as legitimate coping mechanisms or cries for help. However, the findings reveal a significant tension caused by algorithmic visibility; emotionally vulnerable content is often amplified to unintended audiences, leading to fragmented responses. While survivors of similar conditions offer empathy and validation, others dismiss these disclosures as "sadfishing," utilizing the term as an external label to delegitimize genuine psychological distress. This study concludes that sadfishing is not a singular behavioral motive, but an interpretively constructed phenomenon mediated by platform affordances, norms, and mental health literacy. Digital vulnerability is a relational process where audience interpretation and platform infrastructures collectively define the perceived authenticity of disclosed emotions.

**Keywords:** *Bipolar Disorder; Hashtag; Sadfishing; TikTok*

## 1. Introduction

Social media platforms have increasingly become central spaces for mental health communication, particularly among young users who engage in emotional self-disclosure through short-form video content. TikTok, as a platform driven by algorithmic recommendation systems, has amplified the visibility of emotionally expressive narratives, including disclosures related to psychological distress and psychiatric conditions (Afrilia, 2024). The urgency of this research stems from the fact that TikTok does not merely host mental health discussions but actively shapes how emotional vulnerability is performed, circulated, and interpreted through platform-specific affordances such as hashtags and algorithmic amplification, often blurring the lines between genuine expression and digital performance (Fitriyani et al., 2025). Recent scholarship within the last five years has provided foundational insights into this phenomenon. First, (Shabahang et al., 2023) identified that negative affect, such as anxiety and depression, combined with low perceived social support, serves as a primary predictor of sadfishing behavior among adolescents. Second, (Ramadhani et al., 2022) highlighted how the sadfishing trend on TikTok is driven by the logic of the "For Your Page" (FYP), where creators compete for sympathy as a form of digital currency to increase their reach. Third, Com et al., (2025) utilized netnography to map audience reactions, finding a complex ambivalence between empathetic support and sharp skepticism regarding the authenticity of emotional content.

Despite these valuable contributions, a significant research gap remains. Existing studies tend to reduce sadfishing to an individualistic "attention-seeking" behavior, often labeling it in purely normative or maladaptive terms (Ramadhani et al., 2022; Shabahang et al., 2023). There is a lack of analysis that situates sadfishing within condition-specific digital communities, such as those under the #bipolar hashtag, where illness identity and lived experience are central to communication practices. Furthermore, prior research frequently overlooks how platform structures and algorithms actively negotiate the meaning of disclosed vulnerability rather than just transmitting it (Hudon et al., 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual shift from viewing sadfishing as an "individual motivational label" to a "negotiated interpretive frame." By focusing on the #bipolar hashtag community, the research examines disclosure as a result of the interaction between psychological needs, platform affordances, and audience

interpretation. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how individuals with bipolar disorder experience and interpret their emotional disclosures on TikTok using a qualitative phenomenological approach focused on hashtag-based communities. This research provides a theoretical contribution by repositioning sadfishing as *negotiated emotional disclosure* rather than mere attention-seeking, and a methodological contribution by applying phenomenology to a hashtag-based digital community.

The core problem lies in the communicative conflict between authentic emotional expression and platform visibility. Public discourse often frames sadfishing as a manipulative performance, risking the delegitimization of genuine psychological distress (Shabahang et al., 2023). Moreover, TikTok’s recommendation system privileges high-intensity emotional content, unintentionally commodifying vulnerability by transforming private distress into public viral content regardless of creator intent (Hudon et al., 2025; Ramadhani et al., 2022). This environment forces creators to negotiate their identities between seeking support and facing accusations of self-diagnosis or trivialization. Digital connectivity in Indonesia has reached a near-universal scale. Data from the Digital 2026 report indicates an internet penetration rate of 80.5% with 180 million active social media users (DataReportal, 2025). This persistent connectivity facilitates constant self-disclosure but also introduces risks of algorithmic manipulation and the distortion of public perception regarding sensitive mental health issues (Gholve, 2025).

**Table 1.** Data Statistics Internet Penetration

<b>Indonesia Digital Indicators 2026</b>	<b>Statistics</b>	<b>Implications for Emotional Communication</b>
Internet Penetration	80.5%	Universal access to self-disclosure platforms.
Active Social Media Users	180 Million	Massive audience scale for mental health narratives.
Daily Usage Average	> 3 Hours	Normalization of constant digital presence.
Mobile Connection Ratio	116%	Multi-device connectivity triggers "oversharing".

The digital landscape in Indonesia for 2026 reflects a profound integration of technology into daily life, creating a fertile environment

for emotional communication and self-disclosure. With internet penetration reaching 80.5%, encompassing 230 million individuals, the country has established a near-universal infrastructure for digital expression (Kemp, 2025). This massive connectivity is channeled through 180 million active social media user identities, which represent nearly 63% of the total population and provide an unprecedented scale for mental health narratives to reach a public audience (We Are Social, 2025). Because the average Indonesian spends over three hours daily on social platforms, a constant digital presence has become a normalized cultural habit, making the act of sharing emotional states a routine social interaction (Zou et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the mobile connection ratio of 116%, representing 331 million connections, indicates that users are perpetually connected through multiple devices (APJII, 2025). This constant, frictionless access often lowers the threshold for impulsive disclosure, triggering "oversharing" as individuals increasingly blur the boundaries between their private lives and the public digital sphere (Salsabila & Nur, 2025). This culture of constant digital presence provides the necessary infrastructure for the emergence of 'sadfishing,' where the platform's visibility-driven environment transforms private distress into a public performance of vulnerability.

TikTok operates through high-speed facial recognition technology that identifies micro-expressions, enabling the platform to recommend content based on emotional displays such as sadness (Ramadhani et al., 2022). This system creates an "engagement economy" where extreme emotional content is amplified by the FYP algorithm to maximize user "flow experience," often at the expense of creator privacy (Afrilia, 2024) Like #bipolar, these affordances can trap creators in a cycle of performative sensitivity to maintain digital visibility.

Beyond the algorithmic push for visibility, the ultimate meaning of this vulnerability is co-constructed through the lens of audience interaction and situational feedback. This necessitates a theoretical shift toward viewing sadfishing not as a unilateral motive, but as a negotiated communicative practice shaped by digital user interactions. Audience responses to sadfishing are highly fragmented, as revealed by netnographic analysis (Com et al., 2025). Users do not passively consume vulnerability; they critically engage with it through a lens of authenticity.

**Table 2.** The Spectrum of Reactions from the Audience

<b>Theme of Audience Reaction</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Psychosocial Implication</b>
Empathy Support	and Emotional closeness and validation.	Reinforces social media as a support system.
Authenticity Concerns	Skepticism and doubt regarding sincerity.	Highlights distrust toward performative identities.
Humorous Satirical	and Sarcasm, mockery, and dismissal.	Risks of trivialization and cyberbullying.
Advice Guidance	and Directive "peer counseling" and encouragement.	Functions as informal digital mentorship.

While *Social Penetration Theory* views self-disclosure as a gradual process of peeling layers to reach intimacy, TikTok’s hashtag ecosystem often bypasses these stages, moving directly to deep emotional revelation to an anonymous audience (Shabahang et al., 2023). Therefore, this study adopts the framework of Negotiated Emotional Disclosure. This perspective posits that sadfishing is not a unilateral act, but a co-constructed meaning shaped by the creator's intent, the algorithm's amplification, and the audience's reactive feedback (Fitriyani et al., 2025).

This study concludes that sadfishing within the #bipolar community on TikTok is a complex negotiation of digital vulnerability. It moves beyond reductive labels of "attention-seeking" to recognize the platform's role in commodifying distress. Stakeholders must prioritize the integration of digital literacy into educational curricula to help users navigate these "visibility regimes" (Hudon et al., 2025). Future research should focus on the long-term clinical impacts of viral emotional disclosure on bipolar recovery and the ethical responsibilities of platforms in managing the algorithmic promotion of psychiatric distress.

## **2. Method**

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how emotional disclosure is experienced and interpreted by TikTok users engaging with the #bipolar hashtag. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to capture the intricate, subjective nuances of human experience that quantitative metrics simply cannot reach (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). By utilizing

a qualitative lens, the researcher can delve into the "why" and "how" behind emotional disclosure, moving beyond surface-level data to understand how TikTok creators personally construct meaning within the specific digital context of a mental health community (Adha et al., 2025).

This approach is essential for exploring the fluid and often contested boundaries between authentic vulnerability and what the digital public labels as "sadfishing," allowing for a rich, context-dependent interpretation of digital mental health discourse. Epistemologically, the study is grounded in interpretive constructivism, which assumes that meaning is not an objective or fixed reality but is instead socially constructed through the ongoing interaction between individuals, their audiences, and the unique affordances of the TikTok platform (Mertens, 2020).

In line with phenomenological principles, the research focuses on participants' subjective accounts of emotional disclosure while acknowledging the researcher's interpretive role in meaning-making (Vagle, 2025). The selection of informants followed a purposive sampling strategy, guided by clearly defined inclusion criteria to ensure "information-rich cases" were analyzed (Patton, 2023). Eligible participants were TikTok content creators who had publicly posted videos using the hashtag #bipolar, shared content involving emotional or experiential narratives related to bipolar disorder, and provided informed consent.

This specific group was chosen because their participation in the hashtag community is rooted in lived mental health experience rather than casual engagement, making them primary witnesses to the phenomenon of digital emotional disclosure (Zhu et al., 2019). The inclusion of both Bipolar I and Bipolar II diagnoses allows the study to explore a spectrum of mood variability and identity negotiation within digital spaces. The study utilizes a distinct hierarchy of informants to balance individual depth with broader community context, categorizing participants as either Key Informants or Supporting Informants.

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how emotional disclosure is experienced and interpreted by TikTok users engaging with the #bipolar hashtag (Vagle, 2025). A qualitative design is appropriate for examining subjective meaning-making processes in digital mental health contexts, where lived experience and narrative construction are central (Adha et al., 2025;

Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This approach enables the researcher to investigate how individuals construct emotional narratives online and how these disclosures are shaped by platform culture and audience interaction (Zhu et al., 2019). The framework also supports analysis of the blurred boundaries between authentic vulnerability and what online audiences interpret as “sadfishing,” a phenomenon increasingly discussed in social media mental health research (Berryman et al., 2017).

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in interpretive constructivism, which views meaning as socially co-constructed through interaction within digitally mediated environments (Mertens, 2020). In line with phenomenological principles, the research privileges participants’ subjective accounts while recognizing the researcher’s interpretive role in sense-making (Smith et al., 2022). Purposive sampling was used to identify “information-rich cases,” a standard strategy in qualitative health communication research (Patton, 2023).

Participants were TikTok creators who had publicly posted emotional or experiential narratives using the #bipolar hashtag. This population is particularly relevant because hashtag communities function as networked support spaces where mental health identities are negotiated and publicly performed (Pretorius et al., 2019). Including both Bipolar I and Bipolar II experiences allows examination of how mood variability intersects with digital identity construction (Armstrong et al., 2025). The hierarchy of Key and Supporting Informants further enables multi-layered contextual understanding of online emotional disclosure practices (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

**Table 1.** List of Informants

No	Name of TikTok	Diagnose	Type of Informant
1	@yovania_aj	Bipolar II Disorder	Key Informant
2	@nadwantsleep	Bipolar II Disorder	Key Informant
3	@paauzziyyah	Bipolar I Disorder	Supporting Informant
4	@afifahriyad	Bipolar II Disorder	Supporting Informant
5	@marshandastar	Bipolar II Disorder	Supporting Informant

Table 1 presents five informants identified through their TikTok usernames who participate in the #Bipolar hashtag space. The group includes individuals diagnosed with Bipolar I and Bipolar II Disorder, with two categorized as key informants (@yovania\_aj and @nadwantsleep) due to their active and consistent engagement in

sharing personal experiences, and three as supporting informants (@paauzziyyah, @afifahriyad, and @marshandastar), who also contribute content but with less intensity or frequency. All informants use TikTok as a platform for expressing emotional states, discussing mood episodes, and reflecting on their lived experiences with bipolar disorder.

The table shows that participation in the hashtag community is rooted in lived mental health experience rather than casual engagement. The dominance of Bipolar II diagnoses suggests a focus on content related to depressive and hypomanic fluctuations, which often translate into emotionally reflective or vulnerable storytelling. Meanwhile, the presence of a Bipolar I informant adds perspective on more intense mood variability and identity negotiation within digital spaces. The distinction between key and supporting informants highlights differences in communicative roles: key informants tend to initiate more personal disclosure and narrative-driven posts, while supporting informants reinforce community dynamics through shared experiences and interaction.

This hierarchy is not based on the importance of the individual's diagnosis, but rather on their communicative role and the intensity of their engagement with the phenomenon. Key Informants are the primary "architects of meaning" in this research; they are the individuals whose content and interviews provide the core data for the phenomenological analysis. In contrast, Supporting Informants reinforce community dynamics through shared experiences and interaction, providing a wider context for how the #bipolar hashtag functions as a space for peer connection. By separating the informants this way, the researcher can maintain a rigorous focus on deep, lived experiences while ensuring the findings are grounded in the broader reality of the TikTok ecosystem.

The decision to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews only with a subset of the informants, specifically the Key Informants, @yovania\_aj and @nadwantsleep, is rooted in the phenomenological emphasis on depth over breadth. In phenomenology, analytical saturation is reached when no substantially new experiential dimensions emerge, which is often more effectively achieved through intense, multi-layered dialogue with a few highly engaged participants rather than superficial surveys of many. These two specific informants were selected for in-depth interviews because they

demonstrated the most active and consistent engagement in sharing personal, narrative-driven experiences on the platform.

Their content provides a longitudinal look at the bipolar journey, making them the most suitable candidates to provide the "thick description" necessary to reach transcendental or existential clarity regarding the phenomenon of emotional disclosure. The roles of the informants differ significantly in how they contribute to the research findings. @yovania\_aj and @nadwantsleep (Key Informants) provide the internal perspective, the motivations, fears, and cognitive processes that drive a creator to share vulnerable moments publicly.

Their interviews, lasting between 45 and 70 minutes, allowed the researcher to uncover the internal "lived experience" of being a creator with bipolar disorder. On the other hand, the Supporting Informants (@paauzziyyah, @afifahriyad, and @marshandastar) serve a triangulation and contextual role. While they also contribute content to the #bipolar hashtag, their presence in the study allows the researcher to observe how different levels of public fame and different diagnostic types (such as Bipolar I) manifest in digital behavior. Their data, primarily gathered through non-participant digital observation, helps verify if the themes emerging from the Key Informants resonate across the wider community or if they are unique to those individuals.

The entire research process is structured through a systematic Research Flow Diagram. The process begins with identifying the Research Phenomenon, where the #Bipolar hashtag and emotional disclosure on TikTok are established as the primary context. This moves into Formulating the Research Focus, where the hierarchy of Key and Supporting informants is defined alongside research objectives. The third stage involves selecting the Research Design, which integrates qualitative phenomenological interviews with non-participant observation. Next is Collecting and Analyzing Data, utilizing in-depth interviews and the Miles and Huberman framework, a three-stage process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Finally, the study reaches Validating and Concluding Findings, which address algorithmic impact on visibility, audience interpretation of "sadfishing," and the broader implications for digital mental health. This rigorous flow ensures that the study reframes emotional expression as a communicative practice shaped by platform affordances rather than reducing it to individual pathology.

To enhance credibility, participants were given opportunities to clarify or elaborate on their statements during interviews. Transferability was addressed through a thick description of context rather than demographic generalization. Dependability and confirmability were supported by maintaining an audit trail of analytic decisions and reflexive notes. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review process prior to data collection. Participants provided informed consent and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Public TikTok content was treated cautiously, with analytic emphasis placed on interview data rather than decontextualized audience comments.

To clarify the stages of the research process, a detailed research flowchart is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the steps from problem formulation to conclusions.

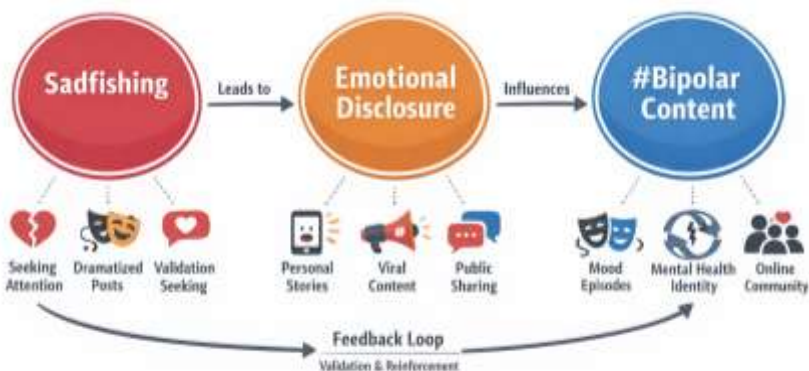


**Figure 1.** Research Flow Diagram

### 3. Results

This study identifies a patterned flow of digital emotional expression within the #Bipolar hashtag on TikTok, as illustrated in the causal flow diagram (Figure 2). The phenomenon of "Sadfishing" serves as the behavioral entry point for a three-stage progression: Sadfishing behavior, Emotional Disclosure, and the

formation of #Bipolar-related identity content, all interconnected through a reinforcing feedback loop.



**Figure 2.** Causal Flow Diagram Sadfishing Phenomenon → Emotional Disclosure → #Bipolar Hastag

This study identifies a patterned flow of digital emotional expression within TikTok content utilizing the #Bipolar hashtag, as illustrated in the causal flow diagram (Figure 2). The phenomenon of "Sadfishing", the act of sharing exaggerated or emotionally charged personal struggles to attract sympathy, serves as the behavioral entry point for a complex three-stage progression: Sadfishing behavior, Emotional Disclosure, and the formation of #Bipolar-related identity content, all of which are interconnected through a reinforcing feedback loop of validation and reinforcement.

The feedback loop was evident in audience interactions. Comments were predominantly empathetic and supportive. Viewers shared similar experiences, offered encouragement, and normalized emotional struggles. Informants stated that such responses motivated continued sharing. However, some also reported disappointment when engagement was low.

This dynamic directly relates to the title *Sadfishing as Emotional Disclosure in the #Bipolar Hashtag on TikTok*, because it demonstrates that what is often labeled as "sadfishing" operates not simply as attention-seeking behavior, but as a communicative pathway through which emotional experiences are translated into publicly visible narratives. Within this context, sadfishing functions as the behavioral entry point that initiates emotional disclosure, while the hashtag environment provides the social and symbolic framework that stabilizes these disclosures into recognizable identity expressions. Thus, emotional

expression moves from an immediate personal impulse to a socially interpreted message embedded within a networked audience.

The findings indicate that disclosure under the #Bipolar hashtag is shaped by the presence of observers. Once emotions are shared, they are no longer solely internal states but become communicative acts open to interpretation, validation, and repetition. Audience responses transform disclosure into a relational process, where meaning is co-constructed between creators and viewers. Supportive comments, shared experiences, and encouragement signals act as social reinforcement, confirming both the legitimacy of the emotion and the value of making it visible. This validation process explains why users often continue sharing, even when their initial intentions were simply to release feelings.

At the same time, the patterned nature of these disclosures suggests that platform aesthetics and circulation logics influence how emotional experiences are framed. Narratives become condensed, symbolically simplified, and visually stylized so they can be quickly recognized within the hashtag community. This does not necessarily mean emotions are fabricated; rather, they are shaped into communicative forms that fit the norms of digital storytelling. In this way, vulnerability becomes both a coping mechanism and a mode of participation in an online mental health discourse.

Therefore, the diagram does not present a one-directional cause-and-effect model, but a cyclical system in which emotional need, public narration, identity formation, and community validation continuously interact. Sadfishing, in this framework, is reinterpreted as a digitally mediated form of emotional disclosure where personal distress, social recognition, and platform structures collectively produce meaning.

To understand how this cyclical system operates in practice, the following findings describe how each stage manifests in observable user behavior and digital outcomes. Rather than treating the process as abstract, the data show that the movement from sadfishing to emotional disclosure and finally to #Bipolar identity content is reflected in concrete shifts in how emotions are expressed, circulated, and socially responded to. Each stage reveals distinct patterns of vulnerability, risk, and platform-mediated consequences. What begins as an attempt to communicate distress gradually becomes embedded in visibility structures, where audience feedback, algorithmic amplification, and hashtag communities shape both the form and meaning of emotional

expression. The stages below, therefore, illustrate how the broader feedback loop identified in the diagram materializes at the behavioral level, demonstrating the transformation of private emotional coping into publicly negotiated identity performance.

### ***3.1 Sadfishing stage***

The primary risk lies in an over-reliance on external approval. Individuals may begin to depend on likes, comments, and expressions of sympathy as sources of emotional reassurance, rather than processing distress internally or within trusted offline relationships. This dependence can make emotional stability contingent on fluctuating audience reactions. In practice, users may post increasingly intense emotional content when engagement declines, exaggerate feelings to maintain visibility, or experience deeper distress when posts receive little response. As a result, self-worth and emotional legitimacy become tied to digital affirmation. The digital outcome of this stage is distorted self-expression, where individuals unconsciously shape their emotional narratives to fit platform norms. Complex psychological experiences may be simplified into dramatic, aestheticized forms that align with trending formats, making expression less reflective of lived reality and more influenced by algorithmic visibility.

The interview findings reinforce that the sadfishing stage is experienced not merely as emotional expression, but as a process shaped by platform feedback mechanisms. Each informant described how emotional disclosure gradually became intertwined with audience validation, confirming the risk of psychological dependence on digital affirmation.

Informant 1 described how posting emotional content initially felt like relief but later became tied to audience response. Their narrative shows the shift from expression to performance.

*“At first I just wanted to share what I was going through, but when the video got a lot of comments, I felt like... people finally saw me. After that, when engagement dropped, I felt worse than before posting.”*

This suggests that emotional reassurance becomes externally regulated. The decline in interaction did not simply mean lower visibility but was interpreted as reduced emotional acknowledgment, intensifying feelings of rejection. Informant 2 emphasized how emotional intensity online can become exaggerated over time. Their experience reflects how distress may be unconsciously dramatized to maintain relevance within the algorithmic environment.

*“Sometimes I feel like my feelings are real, but the way I explain them online becomes more dramatic than in real life. I know sad videos get more attention, so maybe I make it sound heavier.”*

Here, emotional disclosure shifts from reflection of lived experience to strategic expression shaped by platform norms. Informant 3 highlighted the emotional crash that occurs when vulnerable posts receive limited engagement.

*“When I post something deep, and no one reacts, I start thinking maybe my feelings are not important. It makes me question myself.”*

This demonstrates how digital silence is interpreted as emotional invalidation. Self-worth becomes linked to visible reactions, reinforcing dependence on audience approval. Informant 4 explained that emotional posting gradually becomes habitual, even when the intention is no longer clear.

*“Sometimes I post when I’m sad without thinking why. It’s like my first instinct is to share it online, not to talk to someone close.”*

This indicates a displacement of interpersonal coping. Online disclosure replaces offline emotional processing, aligning with the risk of over-reliance on mediated affirmation. Informant 5 reflected on the tension between authenticity and visibility.

*“I want to be honest, but I also know the TikTok style. If it’s not emotional enough, people scroll. So I adjust how I tell my story.”*

This confirms that emotional narratives are shaped by aesthetic and algorithmic expectations, producing distorted self-expression where complexity is simplified into consumable emotional content. Across informants, sadfishing emerges as a cycle in which emotional disclosure becomes entangled with platform feedback. The pursuit of validation encourages intensified expression, while limited engagement produces self-doubt and emotional destabilization.

Rather than serving as purely therapeutic communication, emotional disclosure shifts toward performance-oriented vulnerability, where personal distress is formatted according to platform logic. This supports the argument that the sadfishing stage risks transforming emotional expression into a visibility-driven practice, blurring the boundary between authentic coping and algorithmically shaped self-presentation.

This shift toward performance-oriented vulnerability provides the structural context in which attention-seeking behavior must be understood. Once emotional expression becomes embedded within

platform visibility systems, the act of sharing distress is no longer only about personal release but also about entering a space where recognition is socially and algorithmically mediated. In this environment, visibility operates as a form of acknowledgment, and being seen becomes intertwined with feeling emotionally validated. Consequently, the pursuit of attention emerges not as a superficial desire for popularity but as a response to the conditions created by digital platforms, where emotional experiences gain meaning, legitimacy, and social presence through interaction metrics. It is within this framework that seeking attention becomes a key mechanism in the salfishing stage, linking personal vulnerability to the broader dynamics of visibility, recognition, and platform feedback.

Seeking attention in the context of *Salfishing as Emotional Disclosure in the #Bipolar Hashtag on TikTok* should not be understood as a simple narcissistic display, but as a socially and emotionally situated act emerging from unmet needs for recognition. Within the platform environment, visibility functions as a form of social existence; to be seen is to be acknowledged as emotionally real. For individuals experiencing mood instability, emotional overwhelm, or isolation linked to bipolar experiences, posting becomes a strategy to convert internal distress into socially legible signals. Attention operates as proof of presence, evidence that one's pain is witnessed rather than ignored. However, the platform's metricized system transforms this search for recognition into a quantifiable pursuit, where emotional expression becomes evaluated through numbers: views, likes, shares, and comments. This process subtly shifts the goal of disclosure. Instead of communicating feelings to process them, users may increasingly communicate feelings to secure visibility. Attention, therefore, becomes both emotional and algorithmic currency. The more emotional content receives, the more it is circulated, reinforcing the perception that distress is what makes a person noticeable. In this way, seeking attention becomes intertwined with the platform's visibility logic, where emotional pain functions as content that attracts interaction. Over time, this can reshape how individuals interpret their own emotions: feelings that generate a response appear more significant, while unshared or less visible emotions may feel invalid or negligible. Thus, attention seeking evolves into a structurally encouraged behavior, embedded within the feedback architecture of TikTok rather than solely within individual psychology.

The interview data demonstrate that seeking attention within the #Bipolar hashtag environment is experienced by informants as a search for emotional recognition rather than a mere desire for popularity. Across interviews, attention is described as confirmation that one's internal state is acknowledged by others. Informants consistently link posting to the need to be "seen," particularly during moments of emotional instability.

Informant 1 described attention as emotional visibility that counteracts feelings of isolation.

*"When people respond, it feels like I'm not invisible. Like my feelings actually exist outside my head."*

Her statement shows that attention functions as external confirmation of emotional reality. The act of being noticed reduces the sense of internal confinement.

Informant 2 emphasized how platform metrics translate attention into perceived emotional value.

*"If a video about my feelings gets a lot of views, I feel like what I'm going through matters. If it doesn't, I question myself."*

Here, visibility metrics become indicators of emotional legitimacy. The absence of attention is interpreted not as algorithmic fluctuation but as reduced significance of one's feelings.

Informant 3 framed posting as a way to signal presence within the community.

*"It's like saying, 'I'm here, and I'm going through this too.' When others notice, it feels like I'm part of something."*

For this informant, attention confirms belonging. Being seen means being recognized as a member of the emotional community formed around the hashtag.

Informant 4 acknowledged that awareness of attention influences how and when she posts.

*"I notice that emotional videos get more interaction, so when I'm feeling something heavy, I'm more likely to share it."*

This suggests that emotional states become filtered through anticipated visibility outcomes, demonstrating how attention shapes disclosure decisions.

Informant 5 reflected on the emotional impact of limited attention.

*"When I share something vulnerable, and no one reacts, it feels worse than not posting at all."*

Digital silence is interpreted as emotional neglect, reinforcing the link between visibility and psychological reassurance. Across

informants, seeking attention emerges as a relational coping mechanism where recognition by others confirms emotional presence and reduces isolation. However, because this recognition is mediated through platform metrics, attention becomes both emotional affirmation and algorithmic outcome. This confirms that attention-seeking behavior in the sadfishing stage is structurally embedded within TikTok's feedback system, where emotional expression is shaped by the need to be seen, acknowledged, and socially validated.

This dependence on visibility not only influences why individuals share emotional experiences but also *how* those experiences are presented. Once attention becomes a primary means of emotional recognition, creators become increasingly aware of which forms of expression successfully attract interaction within the platform environment. As a result, emotional disclosure begins to adapt to communicative styles that are more likely to be noticed, understood quickly, and circulated widely. The need to be seen, therefore, encourages the transformation of complex internal states into visually and narratively intensified formats that align with platform aesthetics. In this way, the pursuit of attention naturally leads to the emergence of dramatized posts, where emotional experience is shaped not only by personal feeling but by the representational conventions that make distress visible and legible within TikTok's algorithmic and audience-driven ecosystem.

Dramatized posts emerge as a communicative adaptation to platform aesthetics, where emotional experiences are translated into intensified, stylized, and condensed narratives. TikTok's short-form video format, reliance on music, visual mood cues, and rapid audience scrolling create an environment where subtlety risks invisibility. As a result, complex bipolar-related experiences, which may involve fluctuating, contradictory, or quiet emotional states, are reshaped into recognizable dramatic forms. Sad music, slow motion, dim lighting, tearful close-ups, and brief emotionally charged captions operate as visual shorthand for distress. This dramatization does not necessarily imply fabrication; rather, it reflects the compression of psychological complexity into platform-compatible symbolism. Emotional nuance is sacrificed for immediacy, and lived experience is filtered through aesthetic conventions that signal "this is pain" in ways the algorithm and audience can quickly process. Over time, creators may internalize these conventions, perceiving dramatic framing as the most effective or even the most legitimate way to express emotion online. The danger

lies in the feedback reinforcement: dramatic expressions receive more engagement, which confirms their communicative effectiveness. Consequently, the representation of emotion may drift further from internal reality and closer to performative coherence. Emotional life becomes narrated through extremes, while moderate or ambiguous states become underrepresented. In this sense, dramatization is not merely exaggeration but a structural outcome of platform design, where emotional disclosure is formatted into visually compelling, emotionally intensified, and algorithmically promotable content.

The interview data confirm that dramatized presentation is not experienced by informants as deliberate falsification, but as an adjustment to communicative norms on TikTok. Participants described consciously or semi-consciously shaping how emotions were displayed so they could be understood quickly and resonate with viewers.

Informant 1 explained how visual and narrative choices help communicate feelings more clearly.

*“Sometimes my feelings are complicated, but on TikTok I turn them into short, emotional sentences so people can understand fast.”*

Her statement suggests that simplification functions as a communicative strategy rather than distortion in intention. Informant 2 acknowledged that emotional intensity is heightened during online storytelling.

*“In real life my mood changes quietly, but online I show the stronger part of it. Otherwise people might not get it.”*

Here, dramatization serves as emphasis, selecting the most visible aspect of an emotional state. Informant 3 described the use of aesthetic cues to make emotions legible.

*“I use sad music and certain filters because it matches the mood. It helps people feel what I’m feeling.”*

This indicates that aesthetic elements operate as emotional translation tools. Informant 4 reflected on the influence of audience attention on expressive style.

*“I notice that when the video feels more emotional, more people react. So I try to express it in a stronger way.”*

This demonstrates feedback reinforcement, where engagement shapes future expressive choices. Informant 5 showed awareness of the tension between complexity and platform format.

*“What I feel is not always dramatic, but TikTok needs something clear and strong. So I focus on the part that stands out most.”*

Her account highlights the compression of emotional nuance into a format suitable for short-form media. Across informants, dramatization is described as an adaptive communicative practice that translates internal emotional experiences into recognizable, platform-compatible forms. Rather than indicating insincerity, these adjustments reflect how creators navigate the constraints of short-form video culture, where emotional clarity, intensity, and visual symbolism are necessary for expression to be noticed and understood.

As emotional expression becomes increasingly shaped by aesthetic intensification and narrative compression, the purpose of dramatization extends beyond visibility alone. These stylized forms of disclosure are not only designed to be seen, but also to invite response. By making emotions clearer, stronger, and more symbolically recognizable, creators create conditions that encourage audience engagement and emotional resonance. In this way, dramatization prepares the ground for interaction, positioning emotional content as something that can be acknowledged, affirmed, and mirrored by others. The emphasis therefore shifts from how emotions are presented to how they are received, marking a transition from expressive adaptation to relational feedback. It is within this interactional space that validation seeking emerges as the psychological core of the sadfishing stage, where audience responses begin to function as mechanisms of emotional regulation.

The interview findings show that audience responses are not experienced as passive reactions, but as emotionally consequential signals that shape how informants interpret their own feelings. Across participants, comments, likes, and messages function as forms of reassurance that their emotional experiences are real, understandable, and shared. Informant 1 described validation as emotional confirmation that reduces feelings of isolation.

*“When people say they understand, it feels like my emotions make sense. I don’t feel crazy for feeling that way.”*

Her statement indicates that validation operates as social grounding, stabilizing emotional interpretation through shared recognition. Informant 2 emphasized the regulatory function of comments in shaping mood.

*“Reading supportive comments actually calms me down. It feels like someone is there, even if I don’t know them.”*

Here, audience feedback acts as a form of mediated emotional support, substituting for immediate interpersonal reassurance. Informant 3 linked validation to a sense of belonging.

*“When people respond, it feels like we’re connected through the same struggle. It’s like we understand each other without explaining too much.”*

This shows that validation reinforces collective identity, where shared experiences become the basis of relational bonds. Informant 4 acknowledged how anticipation of validation influences posting behavior.

*“Sometimes I share because I know people will relate and respond. It makes me feel supported.”*

This suggests that expected feedback becomes part of the motivation for disclosure, not just its outcome. Informant 5 described the emotional impact when validation is absent.

*“If I post something vulnerable and no one reacts, I feel worse than before. It’s like talking into an empty room.”*

Digital silence is thus experienced as emotional absence, highlighting how reassurance has become externally mediated. Across informants, validation seeking functions as an ongoing feedback loop where emotional expression invites response, and response shapes emotional stability. Audience interaction becomes intertwined with self-perception, confirming that within the #Bipolar hashtag environment, emotional disclosure operates not only as expression but as a socially regulated process of emotional affirmation.

Informant 1 described virality as something that happens when emotional expression feels “raw” and unfiltered. She noted that posts where she shared detailed personal episodes about mood instability received far higher engagement than general mental health reflections.

*“The videos where I explain what actually happened to me that day like a fight, a breakdown, or not sleeping for days — those are the ones that blow up. When it’s too general, people scroll. But when it’s specific and emotional, it spreads.”*

This suggests that narrative specificity functions as a trigger for algorithmic circulation. Informant 2 emphasized that emotional intensity shapes visibility. She noticed that her content gained traction when she appeared visibly distressed rather than composed.

*“If I look calm, nobody reacts. But when I’m crying or my voice shakes, suddenly it gets shared everywhere. It feels like the algorithm pushes the version of me that looks most broken.”*

Her account highlights how emotional performance becomes linked to platform amplification. For Informant 3, virality created a sense of disconnection from the original purpose of posting. What began as self-expression became content circulating among strangers.

*"At first I just wanted to let it out. Then the video hit 200k views and people I don't know started analyzing my life. That's when I realized it wasn't just my story anymore, it became public content."*

This indicates how viral reach transforms personal disclosure into collective digital material. Informant 4 discussed how emotionally vulnerable videos tend to be reinterpreted by audiences as relatable "mental health content," increasing shareability.

*"People comment 'this is me' and repost it. I think once others see themselves in your pain, the video moves faster. It stops being just about you."*

Here, virality emerges through identification and emotional mirroring. Informant 5 linked virality with pressure to maintain emotional intensity over time.

*"After one video goes viral, you feel like you have to be that open again, or even more. It's like the platform expects a stronger story every time."*

This shows how viral success can shape future self-disclosure practices. Across informants, viral content is consistently associated with emotional intensity, narrative detail, visible vulnerability, and audience identification. These elements increase engagement and algorithmic circulation but also shift emotional disclosure from a personal coping practice into scalable digital content shaped by platform logic.

### **3.2 Emotional Disclosure stage**

The central risk involves the erosion of privacy boundaries. Deeply personal experiences related to mental health move from private reflection into a public, persistent, and often uncontrollable digital space. Unlike interpersonal disclosure, which develops gradually and reciprocally, TikTok disclosure reaches unknown audiences and may be shared or interpreted beyond the creator's original intent. Users may underestimate the long-term visibility of vulnerable content, which can lead to feelings of overexposure or regret. The digital outcome here is high-engagement viral reach, as emotionally intense disclosures tend to attract algorithmic amplification. Personal distress may thus transform into widely circulated content, shifting vulnerability into a form of platform value and reducing the creator's control over how their story spreads.

The interview data reveal that emotional disclosure on TikTok is experienced not merely as expression, but as a complex negotiation between relief, visibility, and loss of control. Each informant describes disclosure as emotionally driven yet digitally consequential.

Informant 1 views disclosure as an unplanned emotional overflow that becomes public before she fully realizes the consequences. Her experience reflects how vulnerability moves rapidly from private emotion to platform circulation.

*“Sometimes I don’t even plan to talk about my feelings, but when the episode hits, I just record and upload. Later I realize thousands of people have seen something I haven’t even processed myself.”*

Her statement shows how emotional urgency overrides boundary-setting. Disclosure occurs first, reflection comes later. This supports the idea that TikTok accelerates the transition from internal distress to public content, reducing the creator’s control over timing and audience.

Informant 2 emphasizes the tension between feeling understood and feeling exposed. While disclosure brings connection, it also produces anxiety about permanence.

*“At first, I feel relieved because people relate. But after some days, I start thinking, why did I tell strangers something that even my family doesn’t know?”*

This indicates a delayed awareness of digital persistence. Emotional disclosure initially functions as catharsis, but later transforms into perceived overexposure, illustrating how platform memory differs from interpersonal forgetting.

Informant 3 highlights algorithmic amplification as something she did not anticipate. Her content spread beyond her intended support community.

*“I only meant to talk to people who also have bipolar, but the video went to people who don’t understand and judge. I didn’t expect it to go that far.”*

Her experience demonstrates how platform distribution disrupts imagined audiences. Disclosure framed for a peer group becomes exposed to unsympathetic viewers, confirming the loss of contextual control described in the theoretical framework.

Informant 4 describes disclosure as a moment of emotional impulsivity rather than strategic communication.

*“When I’m emotional, I just post. It’s not for attention. But when the video blows up, people think I’m seeking sympathy.”*

This reflects the interpretive gap between creator intention and audience perception. Emotional disclosure becomes vulnerable to re-labeling, where sincerity may be reframed as performance or “sadfishing,” regardless of the creator’s motivation.

Informant 5 provides insight into the transformation of personal distress into digital value.

*“The more emotional the video, the more views it gets. It feels strange, like my breakdown becomes content.”*

Her reflection directly captures the platform logic described earlier: vulnerability becomes engagement currency. Emotional intensity is algorithmically rewarded, shifting disclosure from personal coping into a form of monetizable visibility. Thus, emotional disclosure on TikTok is not simply interpersonal openness in digital form. It is a platform-mediated exposure process where personal emotion becomes persistent, searchable, and algorithmically circulated material. The interviews confirm that creators experience a gradual realization that once vulnerability enters the platform, it no longer belongs solely to them, but to the dynamics of visibility, interpretation, and engagement economies.

While these findings demonstrate how emotional disclosure becomes entangled with visibility, audience reach, and loss of contextual control, they also point to the narrative form through which vulnerability travels on the platform. Disclosure on TikTok rarely appears as abstract emotional statements; instead, it is embedded in short, autobiographical fragments that frame distress as lived experience. The circulation of vulnerability therefore depends on the telling of personal stories, where individual episodes, memories, and emotional moments are translated into narrative units that audiences can follow, interpret, and respond to. This narrative framing transforms psychological experience into shareable accounts that invite empathy and recognition but also increase exposure by attaching emotions to identifiable life events. It is through these personal stories that private experiences become publicly legible, marking a shift from emotional expression as a state to emotional disclosure as narrative self-representation within a networked public environment.

The interview data show that informants consciously or unconsciously frame their emotional experiences through personal stories that make their feelings more understandable to others. Rather than speaking in abstract psychological terms, participants describe translating distress into narrative moments drawn from everyday life.

Informant 1 explained that she often connects her emotional state to specific situations.

*“It’s easier to talk about how I felt after an argument or a bad day than just saying I’m not okay. People understand stories better.”*

Her statement indicates that narrative context functions as an interpretive bridge, allowing viewers to grasp emotional meaning through relatable events. Informant 2 described storytelling as a way to make internal experiences visible.

*“Sometimes I tell a short story about what happened that day, because feelings alone are hard to explain. The story shows why I felt that way.”*

Here, personal episodes serve as explanatory frameworks that give shape to otherwise invisible emotional processes. Informant 3 highlighted how sharing life moments creates connection.

*“When I share something that actually happened to me, people respond with their own stories. It becomes like we’re exchanging experiences.”*

This suggests that personal storytelling invites reciprocal disclosure, reinforcing relational bonds through shared narrative exchange. Informant 4 acknowledged that storytelling helps structure emotional expression.

*“If I just say I’m overwhelmed, it feels vague. But when I talk about a specific moment, it feels more real, even to me.”*

Narrative framing therefore aids not only audience understanding but also self-clarification, organizing emotional experience into coherent episodes. Informant 5 reflected on the exposure that comes with story-based disclosure.

*“When I share a real story, it feels more honest, but also more exposing, because people know details about my life.”*

Her account highlights the trade-off between authenticity and privacy, where narrative specificity increases emotional resonance while reducing personal boundaries. Across informants, personal stories function as the primary vehicle through which emotional disclosure becomes socially meaningful on TikTok. By anchoring feelings in lived events, creators transform internal states into shareable narratives that foster empathy and connection, while simultaneously increasing the visibility and permanence of their personal experiences within the digital space.

This narrative-driven form of emotional disclosure does not remain confined to interpersonal meaning-making but becomes

entangled with platform dynamics that determine visibility. As personal stories gain emotional depth and specificity, they also align more closely with the types of affective intensity favored by TikTok's algorithmic system. Emotional narratives framed through lived experiences are more likely to be interpreted as authentic, which increases audience engagement in the form of likes, comments, shares, and reposts.

At this point, emotional disclosure begins to shift from a relational act into a form of high-performing content. The same elements that foster empathy vulnerability, detail, and emotional clarity also function as signals of algorithmic value, allowing posts to circulate beyond the creator's intended audience. Consequently, sadfishing within the #bipolar hashtag operates at the intersection of personal storytelling and platform amplification, where emotional expression becomes structurally positioned to achieve virality. Viral spread, therefore, is not incidental but emerges from the convergence between affective authenticity and engagement-driven visibility mechanisms, transforming individual vulnerability into scalable digital content.

Here, public sharing becomes the pivotal transition that connects intimate emotional expression with platform-wide circulation. What initially emerges as a personal attempt to articulate lived experiences of bipolar disorder no longer remains confined to self-reflection or a bounded audience; instead, it enters a networked public space where visibility is structured by algorithmic distribution and audience interaction. In this stage, disclosure is detached from the relational context that typically gives vulnerability its interpersonal meaning and is recontextualized as content available for mass interpretation. The act of sharing thus acquires dual significance: it is simultaneously a coping-oriented communicative practice and a public performance shaped by imagined audiences, platform norms, and expectations of engagement. As emotional narratives become accessible to strangers, interpretation shifts from empathetic witnessing to collective evaluation, where authenticity, legitimacy, and emotional intensity are judged through likes, comments, and shares. Public sharing therefore functions as the structural bridge between disclosure and virality, positioning vulnerability within a socio-technical environment that amplifies, reframes, and redistributes personal distress as part of TikTok's broader attention economy.

Informant 1 describes public sharing as something that quickly moved beyond personal control. What began to “release emotions” turned into unexpected visibility.

*“At first, I just wanted to get it out of my chest. I didn’t think many people would see it. But suddenly, strangers were commenting like they knew my life. It felt comforting but also scary, because my feelings were no longer just mine.”*

This shows how emotional disclosure shifted into public exposure, where vulnerability became accessible to unknown audiences. For Informant 2, public sharing created awareness of performing emotions for an audience rather than simply expressing them.

*“When I post about my bipolar episodes, I realize I choose words that people will understand quickly. I don’t explain everything. I make it short, emotional, and clear. I guess I shape it so it ‘fits’ TikTok.”*

This suggests that public sharing encourages narrative simplification and adaptation to platform norms. Informant 3 emphasizes the tension between support and judgment once content becomes public.

*“Some comments are supportive, like they feel what I feel. But others say I’m exaggerating or seeking attention. When it’s public, everyone thinks they have the right to judge your mental state.”*

Here, public sharing transforms disclosure into an object of collective evaluation rather than private understanding. Informant 4 connects public sharing with the experience of algorithmic amplification.

*“One of my videos about a depressive episode suddenly went viral. I didn’t plan that. After that, I felt pressure to talk about my feelings again, because that’s what people expected from me.”*

This illustrates how virality feeds back into self-presentation, shaping future disclosures. Informant 5 reflects on the loss of emotional boundaries once disclosure enters the public sphere.

*“Offline, I choose whom I open to. Online, once I post, I can’t control who sees it or how they use it. My sadness becomes something people scroll through.”*

This highlights how public sharing redefines vulnerability as circulating digital material rather than relational exchange. Together, these findings show that public sharing is not merely distribution, but a transformational stage where emotional disclosure becomes structurally embedded in TikTok’s attention economy.



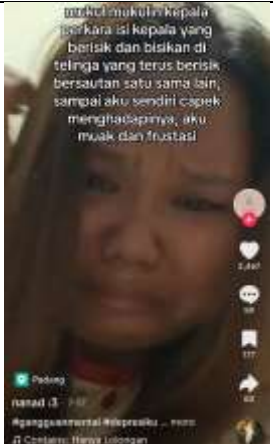



### ***3.3 #Bipolar content stage***





The key risk becomes identity misalignment. As users repeatedly share bipolar-related experiences, their online identity may increasingly revolve around the illness, overshadowing other aspects of the self. Audiences and algorithms may begin to associate the individual primarily with mental health content, creating subtle pressure to maintain this narrative even when their lived experiences evolve. This can lead to a tension between a person's multifaceted identity and the narrower identity recognized online. The digital outcome, however, is community-driven validation, where users gain empathy, shared understanding, and peer support from others with similar experiences. While this fosters belonging and reduces isolation, it also reinforces the cycle of public disclosure, as continued participation in the community often depends on sustained visibility of personal struggles.

Overall, the table demonstrates a gradual transformation from private emotional coping to public identity performance. Emotional expression becomes shaped not only by personal needs but by platform systems, audience expectations, and hashtag communities. What begins as an attempt to be understood can evolve into a feedback cycle in which vulnerability, identity, and validation are continuously negotiated within digital visibility structures.

From the observational side, the informants' posted content showed recurring stylistic patterns that visually and narratively framed emotional experience in recognizable ways. Across videos, there was frequent use of soft lighting, melancholic background music, slow transitions, and close-up camera angles that emphasized facial expression and mood. Text overlays were commonly used to describe internal states such as emotional exhaustion, overthinking, mood swings, or feelings of emptiness. Rather than presenting symptoms in clinical language, creators translated their experiences into short, relatable statements that audiences could easily interpret and emotionally connect with.

Table 3. Emotional Disclosure in the #Bipolar Hashtag on TikTok

No	TikTok account	Sadfishing behavior is shown in the content	Form of Comments from the Audience
1	@yovani a_aj	 <p>Fase Depresi dari Penyintas Bipolar</p> <p>Triger Warning: Depression, Screaming</p> <p>Yova RSJ Survivor IG Fase depresi memang... Seni Nalanda P. Pula Projector - @liver 0...</p>	 <p>Search: ciri ciri penderita bipolar</p> <p>7,509 comments</p> <p>yunia wibowo Mereka yang ga pernah ada di situasi ini g bakal tau, gimana rasa ingin cepet cepet menyelesaikan hidup karena merasa sendiri 2023-4-8 Reply 18,7K</p> <p>Yova RSJ Survivor IG @paati.Lid · Creator "masih banyak yang lebih menderita da kamu, kamu kurang bersyukur" they sai 2023-4-8 Reply 2,795</p> <p>View 152 replies</p>
2	@nadwa ntsleep	 <p>tidak mukul kepala jerkara isi kepala yang berisik dan bisikan di telinga yang terus berisik bersautan satu sama lain, sampai aku sendiri capek menghadapnya, aku muak dan frustrasi</p> <p>Padang nanad 3 P-8 #gangguanmental #depresiku... nemo P Content: Hanyu ulangan</p>	 <p>Padang 876,774 likes on posts of this page</p> <p>59 comments</p> <p>butterfly kak semangat, ga boleh gitu lagi ya cantik 2:10 Reply 4</p> <p>yoga04 kak,, I feel u,, gpp kak sedih,,lelah,,itu manuslawi,,semangad kak,,kakak harus tau kakak diposisi skrng udah keren bangett 2:10 Reply 2</p> <p>VIYona ke dokter kak bkian lebih baik lgi 2:10 Reply 2</p>
3	@paauz ziyyah	 <p>Hai, Aku lrtan</p>	 <p>Share: Ruzka Kaban</p> <p>2:10 Reply 1</p> <p>2:10 Reply 1</p> <p>2:10 Reply 1</p>

No	TikTok account	Sadfishing behavior is shown in the content	Form of Comments from the Audience
4	@afifahriyad		
5	@marshandastar		

(Source: Processed Researcher, 2025)

Table 3 presents observational findings that link specific TikTok accounts with visible sadfishing-related behaviors and the types of audience responses those posts generated. Across the five accounts: @yovania\_aj, @nadwantsleep, @paauzziyyah, @afifahriyad, and @marshandastar, the content commonly displayed emotionally expressive elements such as narratives about feeling overwhelmed, captions describing mood instability, tiredness, or emotional

numbness, and the use of melancholic music or subdued visual tones. These posts often framed personal struggles in direct, relatable language, sometimes using short statements that implied emotional exhaustion or internal conflict. Although such expressions could be interpreted superficially as attention-seeking, within the context of the #Bipolar hashtag, they functioned as forms of emotional disclosure that made internal psychological experiences visible and understandable to others.

The audience comments shown in response to these videos were largely supportive and empathetic. Viewers frequently shared similar experiences, offered encouragement, or expressed understanding through phrases that signaled emotional resonance. Rather than accusing creators of exaggeration, commenters tended to normalize the feelings being expressed and reinforce a sense of shared struggle. This interaction pattern indicates that meaning was co-constructed between creators and audiences: emotional posts invited recognition, and comments served as validation mechanisms. As a result, Table 3 illustrates how sadsfishing-like content operates within a relational dynamic where personal vulnerability is met with community affirmation, supporting the study's argument that such content is better understood as digitally mediated emotional disclosure rather than merely attention-seeking behavior. This pattern of audience validation is further clarified through interview data from the five key informants, who directly described how comments shaped their decisions to continue sharing.

The interview findings show that in the #Bipolar content stage, emotional disclosure evolves beyond momentary expression into a process of identity negotiation within a visible community space. Informants describe how repeated sharing of bipolar-related experiences not only invites support but gradually shapes how they are recognized, both by audiences and by themselves. This confirms that validation does not merely comfort; it also stabilizes a particular version of identity online.

Informant 1 explained that while support from viewers felt reassuring, it also narrowed how she was perceived.

*“People are kind and supportive, but sometimes I feel like they only know me for my bipolar side. When I post something unrelated, it doesn’t get the same response.”*

Her statement indicates that audience engagement patterns subtly define which aspects of the self gain visibility. Identity becomes

platform-filtered, where mental health narratives are amplified while other dimensions receive less recognition. Informant 2 described how belonging to the hashtag community creates emotional safety but also encourages continuous disclosure.

*“When I see others sharing similar experiences, I feel understood without explaining everything. But it also makes me want to keep sharing, so I stay part of that space.”*

Here, community validation reinforces the cycle of visibility. Participation in the collective identity of the hashtag depends on sustained personal sharing, linking belonging to continued self-exposure. Informant 3 reflected on how audiences begin to anticipate certain types of content.

*“Sometimes I feel like people expect me to talk about my struggles. If I post something light, it feels out of place.”*

This suggests the emergence of role expectation. The creator becomes associated with a specific emotional narrative, and deviation from that narrative produces a sense of dissonance. Informant 4 highlighted the influence of presentation style on how identity is expressed.

*“I choose music and captions that match the mood, because that’s how people connect. It’s still my story, but told in a way that fits TikTok.”*

Her experience shows how identity expression is mediated through platform aesthetics. Emotional experiences are not only shared but formatted into recognizable styles that align with algorithmic and audience preferences. Informant 5 expressed concern about the long-term persistence of this identity framing.

*“I’m afraid that even when I’m doing better, people will still see me as someone who’s struggling. Once it’s online, it stays.”*

This reflects awareness of digital permanence. Online identity, once linked strongly to vulnerability, may remain fixed even as personal circumstances change. Across informants, the #Bipolar content stage demonstrates a shift from emotional disclosure toward identity stabilization through community recognition. Audience empathy fosters belonging and reduces isolation, yet it also strengthens the association between the individual and a mental-health-centered identity. Validation, therefore, operates ambivalently: it supports emotional connection while simultaneously narrowing self-representation. Thus, this stage reveals that sadfishing-like content functions not simply as attention-seeking or therapeutic release, but as a social identity practice, where vulnerability becomes the basis for

recognition, inclusion, and ongoing participation in digitally mediated communities.

This identity stabilization process cannot be separated from the cyclical nature of mood episodes that characterize bipolar disorder. Emotional disclosures shared under the #Bipolar hashtag are not produced in a static psychological state; rather, they often emerge during fluctuating phases of depression, hypomania, or emotional instability. These mood episodes shape both the intensity and the form of online expression. During depressive phases, disclosures tend to center on exhaustion, hopelessness, and a desire for validation or understanding, which may resemble sadfishing patterns as users seek emotional resonance from audiences. Conversely, during hypomanic or elevated states, individuals may post more frequently, express heightened confidence in sharing personal narratives, or frame their experiences in more dramatic or aestheticized ways. As a result, the platform does not merely host emotional expression but becomes intertwined with the lived rhythm of the disorder itself. The digital space thus functions as a temporal archive of mood fluctuations, where each post reflects not only communicative intent but also the psychological phase in which it was created. This connection complicates the interpretation of sadfishing, because what appears as strategic emotional performance may instead be an artifact of episodic mood shifts. Therefore, mood episodes operate as an underlying psychological structure that mediates how emotional disclosure is produced, interpreted, and circulated within the #Bipolar TikTok community, linking identity formation directly to the embodied experience of mental health variability in digital environments.

Informant 1 explained that their posting behavior often aligns with depressive episodes. They described using TikTok as a space to release emotional weight when feelings become overwhelming. The motivation was not to gain attention but to feel understood during moments of emotional isolation.

*“When I’m in a low phase, I don’t have the energy to talk to people offline. Posting feels easier. I just want someone to say, ‘I get it.’ Sometimes I reread the comments at night because it makes me feel less alone.”*

This shows how emotional disclosure emerges from psychological vulnerability rather than calculated performance. Informant 2 highlighted that hypomanic periods influence the frequency and confidence of their content sharing. During these phases,

they feel more open and expressive, which leads to more frequent posts about their experiences.

*“When my mood is up, I feel like I can talk about everything. I even think my story might help others. Later, when my mood drops, I’m surprised I shared that much.”*

This indicates that disclosure intensity can be mood-driven rather than strategically planned. Informant 3 reflected on the contrast between mood states and how they affect how their content is perceived by others. They felt that audiences often misinterpret emotional posts as attention-seeking without understanding mood fluctuations.

*“People think I’m being dramatic, but they don’t see that my feelings change a lot. What I post depends on what I’m going through that day.”*

This highlights how episodic mood shifts complicate the interpretation of sadfishing. Informant 4 described TikTok as a “timeline of moods,” where their profile unintentionally documents their psychological cycles. They noted that old videos remind them of past emotional phases.

*“If I scroll down my page, I can literally see when I was depressed or when I was more energetic. It’s like a diary I didn’t plan to write.”*

This shows how digital platforms become archives of emotional rhythms. Informant 5 emphasized the ambivalence of sharing during mood episodes. While validation helps them cope, they later worry about how their identity becomes tied to vulnerability.

*“Support feels good, but sometimes I feel like people only see me as ‘the bipolar girl who’s struggling.’ I’m more than that.”*

This demonstrates how mood-based disclosure contributes to identity stabilization but also narrows self-representation. Across informants, mood episodes act as a psychological driver shaping when and how emotional disclosure occurs. Depressive states encourage vulnerable expression seeking empathy, while hypomanic phases increase openness and posting frequency. TikTok thus becomes intertwined with the lived cycles of bipolar disorder, turning emotional disclosure into both a coping mechanism and a visible record of psychological fluctuation.

This pattern indicates that emotional disclosure not only functions as a momentary expression but also gradually contributes to the formation of a mental health-based identity. As mood states repeatedly structure when, why, and how users share their experiences, bipolar disorder becomes more than a clinical condition; it evolves into a central interpretive framework through which individuals understand

and present themselves. The #bipolar hashtag operates as a symbolic anchor that connects personal emotion with a shared illness discourse, allowing users to situate their feelings within a recognizable community narrative. Over time, recurring mood-linked disclosures create continuity between internal psychological fluctuation and external self-presentation, stabilizing identity through repetition while simultaneously narrowing it around mental health experiences. Thus, sadfishing practices in this context are not solely attention-seeking behaviors, but part of an ongoing process of identity negotiation, where vulnerability, diagnosis, and digital visibility intersect to shape how individuals come to see themselves and to be seen by others primarily through the lens of mental health.

Informant 1 described how repeated emotional posting gradually reshaped how she understands herself. Initially, she saw her videos as temporary expressions of sadness, but over time, she felt that bipolar disorder became the main lens through which others and eventually she herself interpreted her identity.

*“At first, I just shared when I felt really low, like I needed someone to hear me. But now, whenever people see my account, they immediately think ‘oh, she’s bipolar.’ Sometimes I also start thinking of myself that way first, before anything else.”*

Her statement shows how digital disclosure stabilizes identity through repetition, but also risks reducing self-perception to a single psychological label. For Informant 2, the hashtag created a sense of belonging, yet also subtly shaped self-definition. She explained that participating in the #bipolar community helped her make sense of her experiences, but she noticed that her content increasingly revolved around symptoms and episodes.

*“Using the hashtag makes me feel understood, like I’m not alone. But at the same time, I realize most of what I post now is about my condition. It’s like my account slowly turned into a ‘bipolar diary.’”*

This illustrates how platform-based communities anchor identity while narrowing the range of self-representation. Informant 3 highlighted how audience reactions reinforced this identity formation. Supportive comments validated her experiences, but also solidified her public image as “the bipolar creator.”

*“People always comment, ‘Stay strong, you’re so brave for sharing about bipolar.’ I appreciate it, but sometimes I feel like that’s the only role I have there, being the ‘mentally ill one’ who shares struggles.”*

Here, identity is co-constructed through interaction, not only self-expression. Informant 4 reflected on how mood cycles influenced not just posting behavior but self-concept. During hypomanic phases, she felt confident embracing the identity, while depressive phases made her feel trapped by it.

*“When I’m hypomanic, I’m proud to talk about it, like I’m raising awareness. But when I’m depressed, I feel like this label defines me too much, like I can’t escape being ‘the bipolar girl.’”*

This shows that mental health identity is not fixed but emotionally negotiated across psychological states. Informant 5 emphasized the long-term effect of archiving emotional moments online. Seeing her past videos created a narrative continuity that tied her life story closely to the disorder.

*“When I scroll back to my old posts, it’s like a timeline of my episodes. It helps me understand myself, but it also makes me feel like my whole story online is just about my illness.”*

Her experience demonstrates how digital permanence contributes to identity stabilization while limiting alternative self-narratives. Across informants, mental health identity emerges as relational, platform-mediated, and mood-dependent. TikTok does not simply host emotional expression; it becomes a space where diagnosis, narrative repetition, and audience feedback converge to shape how individuals define and present who they are.

This identity formation process does not occur in isolation but unfolds within the structure of online community interaction. The #bipolar hashtag functions as more than a labeling tool; it operates as a networked gathering space where individuals encountering similar diagnoses, emotional cycles, and lived experiences become mutually visible to one another. Within this community environment, emotional disclosure gains social context as personal narratives are interpreted, validated, or reshaped through collective response. Audience reactions, supportive comments, shared experiences, or even silence serve as social cues that influence how creators understand the legitimacy and meaning of their own feelings. As a result, identity stabilization becomes a communal process rather than a purely personal one. The online community thus acts as a feedback system where vulnerability circulates, norms of expression are learned, and certain ways of narrating distress become recognizable and repeatable. In this sense, TikTok’s #bipolar space operates as an affective public, where

emotional disclosure is both an act of self-representation and a form of participation in a shared mental health discourse.

Informant 1 described the #bipolar community as a space of recognition rather than merely an audience. She explained that reading similar stories in the comment section helped her interpret her own emotional shifts:

*“When people say ‘I feel this too,’ it makes me think maybe what I’m going through is not just me being dramatic. It feels more real, like it belongs to something shared.”*

Her statement shows how validation from the community contributes to emotional legitimacy and reinforces her bipolar identity as socially recognized rather than privately uncertain. Informant 2 emphasized how community response shapes how she narrates her experiences over time:

*“I notice the videos where I talk openly about my low phase get more comments from people who understand. So I start explaining my feelings in ways they relate to.”*

This indicates that emotional storytelling is not static but adjusted according to communal norms of expression learned through interaction. Informant 3 highlighted the importance of silent observation within the hashtag community:

*“Sometimes I don’t post, I just watch others. Seeing them talk about mood swings helps me label what I feel, even before I say anything.”*

This suggests that community participation does not require active posting; exposure to shared narratives already shapes self-understanding and identity construction. Informant 4 pointed to the emotional safety derived from perceived sameness:

*“It feels safer to talk there because people already ‘get’ bipolar. I don’t have to explain from the beginning.”*

Her experience shows how the hashtag community reduces the burden of justification, enabling disclosure through assumed shared knowledge. Informant 5 reflected on how feedback influences how long she keeps certain content visible:

*“If people respond with support, I leave the video. If the reaction feels off, I delete it. Their response tells me if the story fits or not.”*

This demonstrates how community reaction functions as a regulatory mechanism, shaping which narratives persist and which are withdrawn. Together, these accounts show that emotional disclosure within the #bipolar hashtag operates as a collective meaning-making process, where identity, emotional legitimacy, and narrative style are

continuously negotiated through online community interaction.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study shows that content often labeled as *sadfishing* within the #Bipolar space on TikTok is better understood as a digitally mediated form of emotional disclosure rather than merely attention-seeking behavior. The findings reveal a cyclical process in which emotional distress is first expressed through intensified, emotionally visible posts (*sadfishing* stage), then becomes publicly articulated as personal narrative (emotional disclosure stage), and eventually contributes to the formation of a mental health-centered online identity (#Bipolar content stage). This cycle is sustained by audience feedback and platform visibility mechanisms, creating a reinforcing loop between emotional need, social recognition, and digital circulation.

These findings align with prior research showing that social media functions as both a support environment and a risk environment for mental health communication (Naslund et al., 2020). Similar to studies on online self-disclosure, the present study demonstrates that once emotional experiences are shared in networked publics, they become persistent, searchable, and open to interpretation beyond the creator's control (Andalibi, 2020). Informants' experiences of relief followed by regret reflect this shift from private coping to public exposure. Emotional disclosure on TikTok, therefore, differs from interpersonal disclosure because it is shaped by algorithmic amplification and audience reach, not just relational trust.

The study also supports research on platformed authenticity, which suggests that online emotional expression becomes formatted to meet platform norms (Maares et al., 2021). Participants described simplifying complex bipolar-related experiences into short, emotionally intense, visually stylized posts so that audiences could understand quickly. This does not indicate that emotions are fabricated, but that emotional expression is translated into communicative forms that are legible within TikTok's aesthetic and algorithmic environment. Thus, vulnerability becomes both a coping mechanism and a mode of participation in digital mental health discourse.

Furthermore, the study extends the *sadfishing* literature (Shabahang et al., 2023) by demonstrating that attention-seeking in this context functions as a search for emotional recognition, not superficial popularity. Informants linked visibility with feeling "seen," suggesting that engagement metrics operate as signals of emotional legitimacy.

This finding reframes sadfishing from a purely individual psychological tendency into a structurally encouraged practice shaped by platform feedback systems.

At the identity level, repeated bipolar-related disclosures led to what can be called identity stabilization through validation. Consistent with research on digital self-presentation, audience empathy fostered belonging but also narrowed how individuals were recognized. Informants expressed concern that their online identity became centered on illness, illustrating the tension between community support and identity reduction.

Overall, the discussion indicates that sadfishing in the #Bipolar hashtag operates at the intersection of psychological vulnerability, narrative storytelling, community validation, and algorithmic visibility. Emotional disclosure becomes a coping strategy, a communicative act, and a form of identity performance simultaneously. Rather than a linear cause-and-effect model, the phenomenon functions as a cyclical socio-technical system, where personal distress gains meaning through interaction metrics and platform circulation. This study, therefore, contributes by reframing sadfishing as a communication process shaped by digital environments, emphasizing that emotional expression on TikTok cannot be separated from the structures that amplify, interpret, and sustain it.

The findings of this study show several similarities with previous research on online emotional expression and mental health communication. Studies by Naslund et al., (2020) and Pretorius et al., (2019) confirm that social media functions as a space for emotional support, identity exploration, and peer connection among individuals experiencing psychological distress. The main similarity lies in the understanding that digital self-disclosure is not merely expressive but relational, helping users seek validation, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Similar to earlier work, this study finds that emotional narratives shared online can foster perceived social support and reduce feelings of isolation. Emotional disclosure under hashtags therefore acts as a mediating space between personal distress and collective understanding.

However, this study also differs from much of the earlier sadfishing research in analytical focus, methodology, and contextual scope. Previous studies (e.g., Ceballos et al., 2024; Petrofes et al., 2024) often approach sadfishing as a maladaptive or attention-seeking behavior measured through surveys or behavioral indicators. In

contrast, this research uses a qualitative phenomenological approach, emphasizing subjective meanings and lived experiences of TikTok creators. Rather than judging motives, the study explores how individuals interpret their own emotional disclosures and how these are shaped by platform visibility and audience response.

Another key difference lies in the contextual focus. Prior research typically examines sadfishing across platforms or general mental health discourse, whereas this study concentrates specifically on the #Bipolar hashtag on TikTok as a condition-based community. This allows analysis of how illness identity, stigma negotiation, and algorithmic amplification intersect. The study also differs by integrating platform affordances as a core analytical factor, showing that algorithmic visibility transforms private coping into public performance. Thus, this research expands existing scholarship by reframing sadfishing from a motivational label into an interpretive and communicative process co-constructed by creators, audiences, and platform systems. Its contribution lies in demonstrating that digital vulnerability is negotiated within visibility economies, where emotional expression, identity, and community support are dynamically intertwined.

The novelty of this research lies in reframing sadfishing from a motivational label to an interpretive communicative frame. It introduces a feedback-loop model explaining how emotional disclosure, identity formation, and audience validation become structurally interlinked. By situating self-disclosure within algorithmic visibility systems, the study demonstrates that emotional communication online is shaped not only by relational dynamics but also by platform infrastructures. This extends Social Penetration Theory into algorithmic environments, showing that personal layers can be revealed before large, undefined audiences rather than through reciprocal intimacy.

The contribution of this research is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it advances communication scholarship by conceptualizing digital vulnerability as co-constructed within visibility economies. Practically, it encourages more nuanced approaches to mental health communication online, suggesting that emotionally expressive posts should not be dismissed as manipulation but understood as potential coping practices shaped by digital systems. The findings inform platform governance, mental health advocacy, and

digital literacy initiatives by highlighting the need for supportive moderation and contextual framing of sensitive content.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small number of participants restricts generalizability, and the study is platform-specific to TikTok. Algorithmic influence was inferred from patterns of circulation rather than measured directly. Self-reported data may reflect participants' interpretations rather than objective behavioral motivations. Cultural context may also shape how emotional disclosure is perceived, limiting transferability across regions.

Overall, this discussion reinforces that sadfishing within the #Bipolar TikTok community is best understood as a negotiated communicative

practice shaped by emotional need, identity work, audience interpretation, and platform structures, not merely as attention-seeking behavior.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study investigates "sadfishing" within the #bipolar hashtag on TikTok, shifting the focus from public dismissal of the behavior as manipulative to an exploration of lived experience. Using a qualitative phenomenological method, the research achieves its objective by demonstrating that emotional disclosure in this context is a complex, using a qualitative phenomenological method, the research achieves its objective by demonstrating that emotional disclosure in this context is a complex, negotiated communicative practice rather than a linear result of distress or simple attention-seeking.

The findings reveal that creators use the hashtag to contextualize their emotional states within a clinical identity framework, where meaning is co-constructed through the interaction between creator intent, TikTok's algorithmic amplification, and fragmented audience responses. The primary novelty of this research lies in its conceptual shift, reframing sadfishing from an "individual motivational label" to a "negotiated interpretive frame," highlighting how digital vulnerability is structurally mediated by platform affordances. Unlike prior studies that often label sadfishing as purely maladaptive, this research finds that within diagnosis-specific communities. These disclosures serve as legitimate coping mechanisms and tools for identity stabilization. While TikTok's engagement-driven algorithm can commodify distress by turning private vulnerability into public viral content, the #bipolar community provides a vital space for peer validation and affective solidarity. However, this environment creates

a significant tension where disclosures are met with a spectrum of responses from deep empathy to skepticism, suggesting that "sadfishing" is often an external label used to delegitimize genuine psychological distress. This underscores the study's conclusion that digital vulnerability is a relational process where platform norms and audience literacy play a decisive role in defining the authenticity of an emotion. Theoretically, this research contributes to communication scholarship by extending Social Penetration Theory into algorithmic environments, showing how personal layers are disclosed to undefined audiences through "visibility regimes" rather than traditional reciprocal intimacy. Practically, the findings inform platform governance and mental health advocacy by emphasizing the need for supportive moderation and contextual resources instead of dismissive labeling.

It highlights that fostering digital resilience and strengthening collaboration between platform designers and mental health professionals is crucial. By implementing strategies centered on algorithmic transparency, TikTok can be transformed from a space that risks the romanticization of illness into a tool that genuinely supports mental health literacy and recovery for the bipolar community globally.

## Reference

- Adha, A. Z., Kurnia, G. M., Qomaruddin, M. B., & Widati, S. (2025). Potential and Challenges of TikTok as a Media for Mental Health Education for the Young Generation: Literature Review. *Media Gizi Kesmas*, 14(1), 176–193. <https://doi.org/10.20473/mgk.v14i1.2025.176-193>
- Afrilia, C. (2024). Dampak Media Sosial Terhadap Kesehatan Mental Remaja Tantangan dan Solusi. *Circle Archive*, 1(4). <https://circle-archive.com/index.php/carc/article/view/62>
- Andalibi, N. (2020). Disclosure, Privacy, and Stigma on Social Media. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, 27(3), 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3386600>
- Armstrong, S., Osuch, E., Wammes, M., Chevalier, O., Kieffer, S., Meddaoui, M., & Rice, L. (2025). Self-diagnosis in the Age of Social Media: A Pilot Study of Youth Entering Mental Health Treatment For Mood and Anxiety Disorders. *Acta Psychologica*, 256. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105015>

- Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII). (2025). *Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia - Survei*. <https://survei.apjii.or.id/survei/group/11>
- Berryman, C., Ferguson, C. J., & Negy, C. (2017). Social Media Use and Mental Health among Young Adults. *Psychiatric Quarterly* 2017 89:2, 89(2), 307–314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-017-9535-6>
- Ceballos, N. A., Petrofes, C., Bitney, C., Graham, R., & Howard, K. (2024). Denial, Attention-Seeking, and Posting Online While Intoxicated: Three Key Predictors of Collegiate Sadfishing. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 27(3), 202–207. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0268>
- Com, S., Unlu, Z. C., & Aytas, M. (2025). Sadfishing or Emotional Baiting: The Pursuit of Interaction and Followers Through Emotional Posts on Social Media. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 9(4), 1725–1732. <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v9i4.6355>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. David. (2023). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- DataReportal. (2025, November 5). *Digital 2026: Indonesia*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-indonesia>
- Fitriyani, N., Sadono, T. P., Fridha, M., & Palupi, T. (2025). Toxic Masculinity in the Sadfishing Phenomenon within the #LakiLakiTidakBercerita Hashtag: A Netnographic Study of TikTok Content from the Account @bimbluess. *CONVERSE Journal Communication Science*, 2(1), 11–11. <https://doi.org/10.47134/converse.v2i1.4248>
- Gholve, S. S. (2025). Data Privacy while using Social Media Platforms. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Modern Science and Technology*, 4(10), 27–33. <https://doi.org/10.59828/ijrmst.v4i10.385>
- Hudon, A., Perry, K., Plate, A. S., Doucet, A., Ducharme, L., Djona, O., Testart Aguirre, C., & Evoy, G. (2025). Navigating the Maze of Social Media Disinformation on Psychiatric Illness and Charting Paths to Reliable Information for Mental Health Professionals: Observational Study of TikTok Videos. *Journal of*

*Medical Internet Research*, 27(1), e64225.  
<https://doi.org/10.2196/64225>

Kemp, S. (2025, November 5). *Digital 2026: Indonesia — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights*. Datareportal.  
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-indonesia>

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical Guidance to Qualitative Research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and Publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, 24(1), 120–124.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092>

Maares, P., Banjac, S., & Hanusch, F. (2021). The Labour of Visual Authenticity on Social Media: Exploring Producers' and Audiences' Perceptions on Instagram. *Poetics*, 84, 101502.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2020.101502>

Mertens, D. M. (2020). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Naslund, J. A., Bondre, A., Torous, J., & Aschbrenner, K. A. (2020). Social Media and Mental Health: Benefits, Risks, and Opportunities for Research and Practice. *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, 5(3), 245–257. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-020-00134-x>

Patton, M. Q. (2023). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*.

Petrofes, C., Howard, K., Mayberry, A., Bitney, C., & Ceballos, N. (2024). Sad-fishing: Understanding a Maladaptive Social Media Behavior in College Students. *Journal of American College Health*, 72(8), 2352–2356.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2132110>

Pretorius, C., Chambers, D., & Coyle, D. (2019). Young People's Online Help-Seeking and Mental Health Difficulties: Systematic Narrative Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 21(11).  
<https://doi.org/10.2196/13873>

Ramadhani, A. P., Putri, C. E., & Hamzah, R. E. (2022). Trends of the Sadfishing Phenomenon and Disappearance of Self-Privacy on Social Media TikTok. *Journal of Social Political Sciences*, 3(3), 291–303. <https://doi.org/10.52166/jsps.v3i3.121>

- Salsabila, A. A., & Nur, H. (2025). Representasi Diri di Sosial Media: Antara Identitas Nyata dan Identitas Virtual. *PESHUM: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Humaniora*, 4(4), 5601–5620. <https://doi.org/10.56799/peshum.v4i4.9244>
- Shabahang, R., Shim, H., Aruguete, M. S., & Zsila, Á. (2023). Adolescent Sadfishing on Social Media: Anxiety, Depression, Attention Seeking, and Lack Of Perceived Social Support as Potential Contributors. *BMC Psychology* 2023 11:1, 11(1), 378-. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01420-y>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2022). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis 2nd Edition. In *International Political Economy in the 21st Century* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Vagle, M. D. (2025). *Crafting Phenomenological Research* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- We Are Social. (2025). *Digital 2026 Global Overview Report - We Are Social Indonesia*. <https://wearesocial.com/id/blog/2025/10/digital-2026-global-overview-report/>
- Zhu, C., Xu, X., Zhang, W., Chen, J., & Evans, R. (2019). How Health Communication via TikTok Makes a Difference: A Content Analysis of TikTok Accounts Run by Chinese Provincial Health Committees. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2020, Vol. 17, Page 192, 17(1), 192. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17010192>
- Zou, M. L., Li, M. X., & Cho, V. (2020). Depression and Disclosure Behavior via Social Media: A Study of University Students in China. *Heliyon*, 6(2), e03368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2020.e03368>