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Why an Open Diary Might Not Be the Best for You

By Nazima Versay Kudus

Introduction: The Evolution of Personal Journaling

The journey of written communication spans thousands of years, beginning with the earliest records in Mesopotamia around 3200 B.C. The pictograms, inscribed on clay tablets by city administrators, were used to document business transactions (AGS records management, 2023). Later, the invention of alphabets and tools like paper revolutionised communication, leading to enduring records such as diaries.

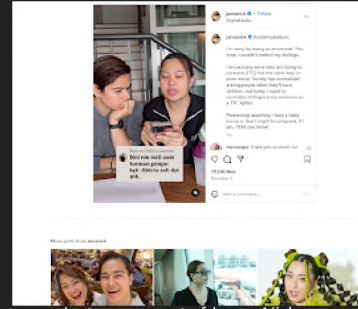
Historically, diaries served as private reflections, as seen in notable examples like Ibnu Banna's 11th-century writings in the Middle East and The Kagero Diary from Japan, which captured the court life of the Heian period (794–1185). By the 19th century, publishing diaries posthumously became a common practice, providing unique insights into significant individuals' lives (The origins of diary and planner writing, 2014).

In modern times, journaling has transitioned into the digital space, allowing users to merge self-expression with connectivity. Platforms like Quora have users like Jack Mason discussing the benefits of journaling, highlighting its ability to improve mental focus, enhance emotional awareness and reduce mental clutter or "noise" (Why is journaling essential?. n.d.)

When Sharing Becomes a Double-Edged Sword

A recent example of the complexities of open journaling is Malaysian actress Janna Nick, who shared her pregnancy journey on social media. While her posts were intended to provide a glimpse into her personal life and seek encouragement, they received backlash. Some netizens left hurtful comments, accusing her husband, Dini Schatzmann, of having excessive feminine hormones.

Janna, deeply affected, revealed that despite slowing her career and undergoing IVF treatments, she has not yet achieved success in her family-building journey. Though her intentions may have been innocent, to seek validation and support, the posts were misinterpreted by some which highlight the risks of oversharing personal struggles online.



Instagram post of Janna Nick

The Allure and Risks of Online Diaries

Advocates for open diaries, like OpenDiary.com (n.d.), argue that digital journaling offers many benefits. It provides users with a platform to document their lives, celebrate achievements, discuss challenges and engage in self-discovery. By allowing entries to be shared anonymously, it claims to create a safe space for expression and connection. Diary Circles further foster community support by enabling users to share experiences on topics like parenting, mindfulness, and mental health.

However, the downside of oversharing is significant. As Cantu (2018) warns, social media is not a diary. While it is an integral part of modern life, sharing personal information online can lead to privacy breaches, foster dependency on validation from strangers, and even endanger children by exposing their lives publicly. Cantu suggests setting boundaries between private and public life, taking breaks from social media, and embracing face-to-face communication as healthier alternatives.

Navigating the Challenges of Open Expression

Even seemingly innocent posts can be misinterpreted or exaggerated, with honest expressions manipulated by strangers or framed as humorous or cheeky anecdotes. These misinterpretations can lead to anxiety, misunderstandings, and a cascade of other problems. To mitigate these risks (especially those that can affect mentally), it is crucial to confide in trustworthy individuals such as friends, family, or professional counselors who can provide genuine support. Additionally, incorporating daily prayers, dzikir (remembrance of God), self-reflection, and gratitude practices can help maintain emotional strength and peace of mind.

Conclusion

While the digital age has made journaling more accessible, it has also blurred the lines between private and public life. Striking a balance between openness and discretion is key to avoiding the pitfalls of oversharing while still reaping the benefits of self-expression and connection. By turning to trusted confidants and grounding practices, individuals can navigate the challenges of modern journaling with grace and resilience.

Reference:

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