



Me and My Secrets: A Phenomenological Study of Communication Privacy Management of Atheists in the Indonesian Context Regarding Their Identity

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Abstract

Being an Atheist is always an unpopular choice in the middle of high religious context society. The stigma and pressure from religious groups forced Atheists in Indonesia to hide their identity in public generally and when taking care of the affairs of state administration. This research utilized Communication Privacy Management and Dramaturgy Theory alongside the phenomenology perspective to reveal how Atheists in Indonesia live their "beliefs" in their not-so-friendly environment. The results showed that they generally presented themselves as religious in front of their family by pretending to practice religious rituals, contributing to their special personal branding for the families. Meanwhile, in other social environments, such as friendship, they could be freer to present themselves as they were, although they still had to manage private information about their Atheist identity.

Keywords: Atheism, Communication Privacy Management, Dramaturgy, Family.

Introduction

In simple terms, Dawkins opines that an atheist sees God as just a delusion. On that basis, it can be stated that an atheist does not believe in God (Dawkins, 2006). In social life, calling oneself an atheist has always been unpopular. In addition, Cliteur also states that an atheist is feared and hated (Cliteur, 2009). Furthermore, he conveys the thoughts of the Theologian Robert Flint, who, more than a century ago, wrote that Atheists would eventually become the dominant corruption and disaster for a country.

Skeptical views are also found in research conducted by Wright and Nichols. They found that if an atheist and a Christian

were compared and committed the same moral and immoral acts, the atheist would be rated more negatively (Wright and Nichols, 2014). This tendency occurs because atheists are generally stereotyped as people whose lives lack meaning and do not have a moral compass or reference. The subject of moral judgment itself is seen as a term that brings a certain dose of hostility to religion and ultimately influences people's understanding of the moral behavior of atheists.

Within the scope of Indonesia, the country has Pancasila as the nation's ideology, in which the first principle reads "Belief in the One and Only God." Schäfer writes that the state's constitution dictates or

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prescribes monotheism to the people or the belief that there is one God (Schäfer, 2016). The interpretation of the first principle might differ from one interpreter to another, but what is certain is that the principle is a view or philosophy that the Indonesian people (should) believe in the existence of God.

Although it has a spiritual aspect, Pancasila also has another aspect, namely the humanistic value (Dewantara, 2017). This value is contained in the second principle: "Just and civilized humanity." Talking about humanity cannot be separated from the protection human rights, in which, according to Suseno, freedom of religion is one of the most important aspects of human rights (Suseno, 2019).

However, Suseno states that a person cannot be forced to have a religion because freedom of religion should also contain the freedom not to have a religion. Thus, forcing people to show confessional attitudes towards God, albeit their disbeliefs, is an attempt to violate this freedom (Suseno, 2019).

This unfavorable situation for atheists in Indonesia has made online forums, and group chats a place to gather and express themselves about life and their views on non-religious matters (Schäfer, 2016). Several online forums on Facebook related to atheism in Indonesia, including Indonesian Atheist (IA) and Anda Bertanya Ateis Menjawab (You Ask Atheists Answer—ABAM). The difference is that IA is only specifically for Atheists, while ABAM is open to all religious and non-religious people. Interestingly, forums such as ABAM provide an opportunity for atheists to explain their position without having to become targets of preaching as some other minority groups, for

example, the punk community (Abdurahman & Saputra, 2021) and postmillennial netizens (Qadaruddin & Bakri, 2022).

There are several stories about the "demands" toward atheists that cause them to pretend or cover up their true identity. For example, Luna Atmowijoyo, who is a woman, lives a double life as an atheist and, pretending, as a Muslim. After going through a long process, she finally became an atheist. Once a committed member of an Islamic party in Indonesia when she was a student, Atmowijoyo felt at that time she was more religiously fundamentalist than her parents. Now she has to pretend she is still a Muslim by, for example, wearing a headscarf to prevent his father from knowing the change she has made in her life. She also went into hiding because she was worried about imprisonment threats and persecution from hardline groups ("Kehidupan Ganda Kaum," 2018). A similar situation happened to a former Catholic who reportedly had to keep his atheist identity hidden. This strategy was intended to protect his safety. This graphic designer who grew up in a Catholic environment stated that the worst fear that might happen to him just because he is an atheist in Indonesia is that he could be killed ("Kehidupan Ganda Kaum," 2018).

According to Saputra, even during Ramadan which requires abled Muslims to fast from dawn to dusk, those who do not adhere to the Islamic belief tend to participate in the religious rituals with their families (Saputra, 2020). Like robots, the ritual is only carried out as a mere formality and a sign of respect to parents. As well as respecting his parents. Saputra also stated that his bedroom

was a place for him to hide and pretend to be carrying out rituals of worship or fasting. He even stored food in the room to eat during the day time when everyone else was fasting (Saputra, 2020).

An example of a criminal case related to atheism in Indonesia occurred to Alexander An. Based on Schäfer, Alexander An is an atheist in Dharmasraya, West Sumatra, who was jailed for comments deemed insulting to Islam on the social media platform Facebook (Schäfer, 2016). He was later accused of blasphemy, the propagation of atheism, and the spreading of religious enmity. Muslim organizations, such as Forum Umat Islam (Islamic Community Forum—FUI), also insist that a year's prison sentence will not be sufficient because, according to them, "he deserves the death penalty, even if he decides to repent. What he is doing is intolerable. It is important to prevent this group spreading atheism in this country" (Schäfer, 2016, p. 256). Given this situation, many atheists opt to keep their privacy tight.

As the phenomena relates to Communication Privacy Management (CPM), literature review shows that most research on CPM highlights the dilemma experienced by individuals in disclosing their private information. This dilemma occurs in various social backgrounds. Wilbur highlights how anxious a war veteran is to reveal his private information if asked if he has ever shot someone while on duty (Wilbur, 2018). Many CPM studies have also uncovered cases of those with sexual phenomena (Goldberg et al., 2018) and HIV patients (Greene & Faulkner, 2002), in which informants presented a very serious dilemma when they wanted to tell their parents about their condition.

Furthermore, Njotorahardjo studied the communication privacy management of a former mistress (Njotorahardjo, 2014). In contrast to the three previous studies, in which informants preferred to disclose themselves to their families, this study shows that the informant kept the information away from his families. He preferred to open it to friends, ex-girlfriends, and his church community. Meanwhile, Greene and Faulkner research shows how differences in place and culture can influence how people manage information and to whom they open up (Greene & Faulkner, 2002). Furthermore, according to its development, research on CPM has now also penetrated the internet and shown that sharing private information without control on social media can harm the individual concerned (Putri et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2016).

In terms of the religious phenomenon, Cliteur stated that public interest is high in discussing theistic concepts and the opposite conception, namely atheism. However, their interest in atheism has no place in public and creates antagonism to discuss this issue publicly (Cliteur, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising, in the case of the United States, that atheists are not only discriminated against from their social environment, but also from their families (Zimmerman et al., 2015).

Regarding the atheist phenomenon in Indonesia, Schäfer (2016) discusses the case of Alexander An. As explained above, An is an atheist from Indonesia who was imprisoned because he was considered to have committed religious blasphemy on Facebook (Schäfer, 2016). This study analyzed the phenomenon of atheism using a dramaturgical perspective. The dramaturgical research generally focuses on the front stage and backstage of

a self-presentation. Dramaturgy can be used alone, such as research on sports from the perspective of the actors (Dumitriu, 2014), or combined with other approaches, such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Dell, 2016).

Based on the explanation above, atheists in Indonesia are a marginal group who cannot freely show their identity. Therefore, this research focused on how atheists in Indonesia negotiated their identities in the Indonesian society that adheres to Eastern values and high religiosity. Using the theories of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) and Dramaturgy, with a phenomenological perspective, this research sought to reveal the conscious experience of adherents of Atheism in Indonesia in carrying out their "beliefs" in their social environment.

Method

The method employed in this study is a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is utilized in this research because this research attempted to uncover the conscious experience that adherents of atheism have had in the Indonesian context, especially in managing communication privacy regarding their atheist identity in their social environment, such as family and other social circles. The main goal of phenomenology is to study how and what phenomena are experienced in consciousness, thought, and action (Teherani et al., 2015). In addition, this research also attempted to understand how humans constructed important meanings and concepts within the framework of intersubjectivity because our understanding of the world is shaped by our relationships with other people (Kuswarno, 2009).

The research data was collected through in-depth interviews. Interviews themselves are an appropriate method for researchers to understand the constructs that informants use as the basis for their opinions and beliefs about certain situations, products, or problems (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Based on this explanation, the personal closeness between the interviewer (in this case, the researcher) and the informant is highly emphasized. It aims to obtain accurate and in-depth data. In other words, the researchers employed this data collection technique to obtain in-depth data from informants. The depth of the data is needed to explain the phenomena being studied holistically. In addition to building personal closeness, the researchers also conducted interviews with informants more than once. The researchers re-confirmed the existing answers to obtain broader, in-depth answers in the following interview sessions.

The informant selection technique is snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a sampling technique for data sources in a network (Neuman, 2014). The selection of informants in this technique is multistage, which starts with one or several people and spreads based on the informant's network.

As an illustration, the researcher has planned A to be the first person as a data source. This initial informant should be someone who can "open the door" to get to know the whole field broadly and sometimes become the gatekeeper of a community. A then suggested the researcher make B and C informants. If the data obtained still needs to be improved, the researcher increases the number of informants by interviewing F and G based on recommendations from B and C. This technique is continued until the data obtained is considered saturated. The

researchers utilized this technique to make it easier for them to gain access to individuals who have had the potential to become the next informants. Considering that atheists are generally closed and do not easily open up to strangers, the researcher needed a recommendation from an informant who would confirm to potential informants in his/her network that the researchers were persons who could be trusted to maintain the confidentiality of information from the informants.

This study selected five informants: Ilham, Roni, Iman, RA, and Mawar. Roni and Mawar are domiciled in Jakarta, while Ilham, Iman, and RA are domiciled in Yogyakarta. The backgrounds of the informants also varied. Roni is a visual artist, Iman and RA are graduate students, Ilham is an undergraduate student about to graduate, and Mawar is a public relations consultant. The five informants were selected using the following criteria: defining themselves as atheists, Indonesian citizens, carrying out privacy management activities for their atheist identity, and not openly disclosing this identity to the public at large.

The data, then, were analyzed using Van Kaam's data analysis technique which includes the stages of Horizontalizing, Thematic Portrayal, Individual Textural Description, Individual Structural Description, Composite Description, and Synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Horizontalizing is when researchers attempt to complete data from various sources and other points of view obtained from research informants. In this study, the researchers completed the data by conducting interviews with several atheist informants, comparing and aligning one informant's statements with another to obtain comprehensive data.

Thematic Portrayal is the stage of gathering horizons that have been grouped into appropriate themes. There are three thematic portrayals in this study, such as: The experience of being an atheist in Indonesia, the experience of disclosing private information, and the experience of presenting oneself in social life. Further, Individual Textural Description is the stage of making textual explanations and descriptions. The textual description in this study describes the conscious experience experienced by the informant in this study, an atheist in the Indonesian context, about the thematic portrayal made.

Individual Structural Description is a stage in which the researcher describes how the individual experienced the experience. In this stage, it will be explained how the structure of the informant's experience is formed, including how the informant's thoughts and feelings about his experience are connected.

Composite Description is the stage of combining textual and structural descriptions. In this phase, the researcher combines textual and structural explanations from the previous stage. The meaning of the individual experience as a whole is obtained from this combination. Finally, Synthesis is the stage where the researcher describes the meaning and essence of the experiences of the informants involved in this research.

Results

In order to be able to look at it more holistically, the findings in this study will be described in three major themes: Experience of Becoming an Atheist in Indonesia, Experience of Disclosing Private Information,

and Experience of Presenting Yourself in Social Life.

The Experience of Being an Atheist in Indonesia

Questioning religion and God is the entry point for all informants to become atheists. Skepticism of God eventually gave birth to critical questions. The informants sought answers to these questions by reading books, participating in online discussions, and asking others. Roni, one of the informants in this study, stated:

"Yes, because I am curious, because I read, huh... at first... from questions about my religion... About Sunni Shia... so... like eeee... there is politics behind the Sunni-Shias themselves, who is Hasan [and] Hussein, then Husein was slaughtered in Padang Karbala. It is just like that in Islam. How about in other places? In the end, finding out, finding out, that is how it turned out like this."

RA also experienced the same thing. His journey to become an Atheist was not simple. He even defines the process as something complex.

"Oh, that is complex, like not just a month and two months or a day and two. At first, I eee... came across astronomy and science. What is up? The astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about the history of astronomy, the universe, the big bang, and so on. I knew that from watching Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey, 13 episodes. On National Geographic, it is a channel. That was the beginning. Then it has developed, no, not only on science, but philosophy, too. Well, this philosophy was originally a general philosophy of rationalism, then philosophy from ancient Greek to contemporary history. So what is specific is the philosophy of Marx. Materialism made me, even more, what... yes, that was earlier. Haha. Heading there."

Ilham also experienced this complexity. He defined his process of becoming an atheist as taking place in stages. This spiritual turmoil

made Ilham seek knowledge about religion. Reading a book also multiplied other views. Combined with joining a group on Facebook, he enriched his views

"Eeeee.. Atheist huh... I am trying to remember the exact time. The problem is what it looks like... my belief in the absence of God has gradually increased. I did not suddenly testify that there is no God at all. No. But little by little. So yes, if asked when in college, maybe it [happened] in semester three or semester four, 2015-2016."

Mawar, the only female informant in this study, also experienced this spiritual turmoil. She even asked religious leaders to find answers to the turmoil she felt. However, she felt that she did not find a suitable answer.

"Read and read, ask questions to people who know about religion. Like ustadz, I've also told you why it's like this and like that, but there has never been a satisfying answer. Then it is like asking my friends who are from other religions. What is it like, anyway? Maybe eee.... what... my search cannot be stated to be correct either because my source might not be credible. It is just... what is it... They all embraced religion for the same reason. That is it."

The debate and insults between religious communities on social media also turned out to be a door for another informant, Iman, to become an atheist. After seeing this phenomenon, he then found out more about religion. On the internet, he read a lot about the history of religion, and he found similarities between one religion and another. He also observed the phenomenon of religion. From his observations, he found that in one religion, there can be many sects, in which the sects can clash. He also thought that if there were disputes within one religion, similar things could also happen or even have a stronger effect between different religions.

The process of searching and observing it ultimately made him skeptical.

"Well, it is simple. (Year) 2011, Facebook was still hot, right? I am on Facebook, and I found one of my friends.... I'm in college, uh I'm in high school in a Catholic high school. At my place. In Kediri. My friends there were not only Catholics and Protestants, but also Muslim. So basically, on Facebook, I met a friend. He is Muslim. Do you know if we like a page, it can be seen on the profile, right? We like nothing. I just casually see it. What I found was a religious debate. Jesus is not God or anything. That is my first knowledge. Previously I had never thought like that. When I opened the contents, they berated and debated each other. What about each other? Moreover, I remember that I did not become a person who.... Finally, come eeeee.... Backbiting, yes. I remember making an account... what kind of account do you make? Anonymous account. Yes, I just stated, 'Hey, you cannot do this like this like that'. However, from there, I... was shaken in faith because it attacks the foundations of faith. Bring Bible verses, bring this, bring this. Yes, like that."

Furthermore, being an atheist in Indonesia is a challenge in itself. Indonesian people, mostly religious, make them unsure that these thoughts and life choices will be accepted. There were also concerns among the informants that they would experience discrimination or acts of violence. Mawar, for example, views being an atheist in Indonesia as dangerous.

"It is dangerous. How about that... The majority of our people are not privileged people. They tend to be middle to lower economy. So what is moving at the grass root are Islamic teachings that have been around for a long time. So they are conventional, traditional, and if they know about this, they will immediately defend themselves. It is not like they are trying to understand because they have never been taught that way. They must be closed. Just like other religions recognized by the country, they can be enemies. What is not religious? Atheists teach the same [things] as communists. What does that

have to do with what I mean? That is what they do not know."

Several informants had received acts of discrimination by being shunned from the association. Their friends suddenly drifted apart just because they knew their atheistic identity. They have not committed any wrongdoing or crime to their circle of friends. RA, for example, was once gossiped about by his friends on campus just because he was suspected of being an atheist from the writings he often made. Every time he was asked directly by his friends whether he was an atheist, RA often argued that it was just a rumor. Despite this, he admitted that he enjoyed the discourse.

"In my opinion, if a broader discourse is drawn, atheists have become a minority too, in which the idea of atheism is already being stigmatized... not civilized, and so on. That also makes me... uneasy too. In recent years, conservatives have risen, those who do not have a religion are getting rid of that. It is as if, what the heck is this, 'what is this discourse?'... I even enjoy it like that. Even I enjoy it. It's like I've found that what other people sometimes think...if people are religious, maybe most of it...a problem with being intolerant with self-righteousness. Yes, I am tired of that, like already lazy like that. Moreover, maybe that is my escape. Feel so free."

In the end, most informants felt that being an atheist in Indonesia was the same as being the minority of minorities. The perceived discriminatory treatment may be greater than that of an established minority group. They feel compelled to cover up their atheist identity, unable to freely express oneself. As experienced by Ilham, he cannot freely express his opinion or views in public.

"Emmm.... People are still not ready to accept this kind of open-mindedness. Until now, atheists have been considered a disgrace to society. Considered as an infidel, heretical, that is all. Apart from

hiding myself... eeee..... sometimes this is what... I find views that do not make sense to me. I want to refute it, but if I argue, my identity will be found out.... hahaha. So as much as possible, I refrain from unnecessary arguments."

Regarding the perception that being an atheist in Indonesia is the same as being the minority of minorities, Iman, who has a Christian background, did not feel any different feelings or personal perceptions when he was still a believer and when he left the religion. This decision is because the religion he professed before was a minority religion. He saw well that when he was still a believer, and now he no longer has a religion, society still labels him as an infidel.

"The minority of minorities, in this way. However, I feel that there is not any difference, you know... Yes, being a Christian is considered an infidel. Being an atheist is an infidel, all in all. Yes, it is the same anyway. So yeah, I do not feel this way."

Moreover, currently, the conservative group is growing. This development makes the Atheist group feel even more marginalized. The ideas of atheism are clearly at odds with those of conservative groups.

Another challenge of being an atheist in Indonesia is the lack of recognition from the state. The Atheists still state their religion on their National Identity Card (Kartu Tanda Penduduk—KTP), but they feel this is not a serious problem. In fact, by listing their religion, they get administrative convenience. Meanwhile, it was feared that leaving the religion column blank would cause problems, so in this matter, they chose to be pragmatic. Roni also sees this decision as something that does not harm him at all.

"Yes, you just have to follow the religion you were born with. No need to fuss too. No need to be blamed. After all, there is no loss

for me to be administratively registered as a follower of a certain religion."

The informants in this study also did not care about labels, whether labelled skeptic, agnostic, or atheist. Although they are atheists because they no longer believe in the existence of God, labels are not important to them. They want to be seen as human, not from what they believe in.

Experience in Opening Private Information

In general, informants kept their private information about their atheist identity close to their families. They do not need to reveal it to their family, especially if this is seen as contrary to what the family teaches, as stated by Mawar below.

"Very closed. [On] social life, and religion, I am very closed off from my family... Because..... I do not know. It is not the same as what they taught us when I eeee... what.... when I was growing up."

Ilham supported this view. He felt there was no point in disclosing his private information to his family. Therefore, hiding this private information was the best move.

"If opening up benefits me, I would've opened up long ago. However, if opening up makes life more difficult, why doing it? Just hide it."

Problems can be in the form of parental disappointment, acts of violence, or being expelled from the family. They did not want those "punishments" to happen, so closing all of these secrets was the best decision. Moreover, most of the families of the informants have a fairly strong religious background. Roni, for example, stated he could be in a dangerous situation if his family discovered his atheist identity.

"Nothing (open to family). Eee... tend to be more dangerous. Yes, if the family is different."

Another reason is that they perceive their own family as needing to be more open-minded and have the same knowledge or understanding. Iman saw this difference in the knowledge could create problems. These problems worried him, so he chose to prevent them from occurring.

"Yes, that was yes. If I considered my parents as friends, they certainly are not open-minded. Not in a position with the same knowledge as me. So that is a problem. It is different. Maybe if I get parents with conditions in which their literacy level is high, for example, they are very open-minded, maybe this could happen. Because, yes, [the knowledge gap] is big... There is also a disappointment, yes. Because there are internal family factors... the point is... even if I have to tell a story later, wow, I am no longer like this. I am really worried to really hurt them, disappoint them."

In contrast to Iman, RA did not hesitate to share his thoughts on religion and divinity topics with his parents. He also did not directly state that he was an atheist. He felt that although he could open up to his family about being an atheist, it could cause problems. According to RA, his parents were not highly educated, so they were worried and would possibly have wrong perception about him. He did not want that to happen either.

"In terms of thinking, it is already open. But to refer to the term atheist, I have never talked about it. Because of the parents' low education, they may be afraid of misperceptions or the terms are quite foreign. I am also avoiding it if it becomes a problem if I state it openly."

While in the presence of their parents they tend to cover up private information regarding their atheist identity, the informants behaved differently when in their circle of friends. Informants such as Roni, Iman, and Ilham generally disclosed information about

their atheist identity to close friends they trusted. Ilham stated:

"There is nothing to my knowledge if it is blatant like that. The problem is that the family group never discusses the issue of atheism or anything like that. I only discuss it with close friends or my partner, though."

Meanwhile, RA and Mawar were more open than the other three informants. RA, for example, did not hesitate to invite discussions and convey his sceptical thoughts about God to his friends on campus. Even so, he still chose with whom he had discussion.

"Eee... first of all, I usually analyze the person first, in any case, like the political identity of the organization. So, I just opened it with the idea. Usually, I provoke it first like "Do you believe in ghosts?" for example. Yes, small examples. "Why do people believe in ghosts? Have you ever felt like you have not met a ghost?" Alternatively, I often do something that does not make sense. For example, the lock is moving by itself, or the curtain is moving by itself. So, after I did the analysis and thought we matched in perception, I just opened up. With more context, maybe about that theology, religion, and so on. Because not everyone, huh... accepts that idea."

Like RA, Mawar did not hesitate to show that she did not believe in God. She even dared to refuse an invitation to worship from his friends. The difference between RA and Mawar is that RA tended to play it safe by only using the term "skeptic," while Mawar was bolder in stating that she did not believe in God.

"There must be (those who suspect that I am an atheist). There must be... Usually, they do not directly ask, 'You are an atheist, right?' No. Usually, they comment, like, "Oh, but you are a Muslim, you are in an Islamic school." I'll definitely tell you along the way, I'll definitely tell you about my friends and others. In the end, they will know like "Oh, you're Muslim, but why don't you worship anymore? Why?"

That's it. 'Because I do not believe in your God'. That is it, anyway. Make it simple for them."

The responses the informants received when disclosing private information about their atheist identity to their friends varied. Some accepted, some were shocked, and some eventually asked to debate. Some wanted to invite repentance. Roni once argued with his friend when he revealed that he was an atheist.

"Yes, it is like countering our argument. For example, we state that God does not exist. Well, for them, there is. Then, yes, we have argued with each other. That is it. However, they still accept each other. Mature, yes. However, one of them also still does not believe if I do not believe it."

When disclosing private information, the informants in this study had certain criteria. This criteria were made to determine whether someone is eligible to know their private information or not. This criteria were important because they wanted to make sure they were accepted after making the opening. There was also a security factor, ensuring they would not receive action or treatment that harmed them after disclosing their private information, as revealed by Ilham below.

"You see... they have to be open-minded. If not open-minded.... most likely they will tell other people and ask other people to straighten out our views. We are wrong and must be straightened out. It is even worse to be able to tell the parents... how?"

Just like Ilham, open-mindedness was also the standard set by Roni. According to this criterion, Roni would not voluntarily reveal his private information to anyone. He also admitted that he had no experience opening himself up voluntarily to someone because the person needed to meet his

criteria. Compared to opening up voluntarily, Roni admitted that he preferred to cover up his private information.

"As long as he/she is open-minded, he is safe. One of the criteria of open-mindedness to me is to be not a religious fanatic."

The level of knowledge was also one of the factors that could be used as criteria by informants. Iman, for example, stated that he would disclose private information related to his atheist identity to other people if he considered that person to have one frequency as his, specifically, one frequency in the level of standard knowledge.

"Eeeeeee Yes, you could state it is not open, huh? So I stated that to someone who really, at least I know what kind of knowledge he has, right? He... he.... not one frequency, yes, for example like that. Because if that is possible, yes, it is hard too, if you talk to people who really are [not in the same frequency].... It is like we are going up the stairs while he is still [not moving] still on the stairs, and I immediately shouted. Yes, like that. Because the knowledge is too imbalanced."

As opposed to the other informants, Mawar was the informant with the least stringent criteria. The criterion she had was the duration of friendship, which should be minimum of one year. Even so, she would not automatically state that she was an atheist. She only revealed this when asked.

"The criteria [are] to have been friends for a long time, yes. At least a year, and then if she asks, I answer. I have never had a friend wearing a niqab. Usually, one started wearing niqab after befriending me. Suddenly she was wearing a veil. That is the only thing like that, I will only state something if she asks. Furthermore, what for?"

Thus, the criteria for conducive conditions for informants to disclose private information were that the person must be

open-minded, trustworthy, have the same level of knowledge or understanding, not a religious fanatic, and have been friends for a quiet some time. They would disclose private information regarding their atheist identity if that person met the criteria they have determined. Otherwise, the private information would not be shared.

The existence of those criteria was also seen as a guarantee that the private information related to the identity of the Atheists that they have shared would not be easily leaked. Fulfilling these criteria made Roni feel confident that those who had access to that private information would take care of it even without his asking them.

"But, right, I have my own standards for trusting people, so they won't state anything. Without me asking them not to."

In general, they disclosed this private information to bait the other person first. They would ask questions or statements that sparked skeptical discussions about religion or God. From there, the discussion was created. In the discussion, the other person would ask questions about their beliefs, which they could express as Roni mentioned below.

"No. Not outspoken or frontal like that. It is more like throwing questions or critical statements about God or religion. Then he finally wondered, "Do you believe it or not?" Finally, I tell him."

Different from the other informants, Mawar did not start the discussion first. She would only reveal this when asked. If not asked, she will close all of it. Meanwhile, Ilham's method was also different from the other informants regarding how to convey it. He only dared to reveal private information about his atheist identity through chat media.

He felt comfortable that way and felt the opposite if the information had to be conveyed directly or face to face.

"Yes, via chat. If you do not dare to state it directly, chat with everyone. No one talks directly. I'm not even comfortable when discussing problems like that directly. It is better to chat."

In addition to the criteria, the disclosure of informants' private information was also influenced by cost-benefit considerations. If it is felt that disclosing private information regarding his atheist identity would be detrimental to their wellbeing, the informants would stop the meeting. On the other hand, if disclosing the information would give them an advantage, they would definitely do so.

All informants who have partners disclosed their atheistic identity to their partners. Almost all of their partners were surprised to be told they were atheists. Only Mawar's partner was not surprised because he was just like her. Roni, for example, stated that his partner got depressed when he stated he was an atheist.

"Depression, yes. Frustrated. Feeling devastated. Yes, that is a shock. It is so shocking, for sure. Yes, I come from a religious family. If you are asked about religious knowledge, you will understand. Then she stated, "Well, what have you been doing all this time?" It's like you have a close friend, then suddenly he tells you he's gay although at first you thought he was straight. You are probably surprised. It is like that."

Ilham's partner also showed a similar reaction. He stated that his partner was shocked when he disclosed the private information about his atheist identity although, in the end, the partner was willing to accept. Ilham also stated that disclosing

this information to his partner was important. Because this was related to the plan of living together in the future.

"Startled. Really shocked. Well... my partner is one of these people, right? I am not too worried about what ideology, what, what kind of deity. The people are just like that. Yes... pray, pray. So that is it... when I even asked about atheism, she did not know. "Do you know what an atheist is?" she stated. "That's communist, right?" "Why is it communist? It is different." So I explained first. Furthermore, she started to understand. Then she didn't tell me if I was an atheist. Would you accept or not? She was surprised. The reply took quite a while... hahahaha. The problem is that it's a relationship with a partner. In the future, it will be more complex like that. The problem is combining two families as well. Then there will be offspring. So it is more serious with the couple, anyway. So you have to... you have to be able to accept it from the start. I had to make sure."

Interestingly, the move they made in disclosing information to partners violated the criteria they tried to uphold. Although they did not meet the criteria because the spouse was a closest friend, there is special treatment or exception regarding granting access to this private information, as conveyed by Iman below.

"My girlfriend does not have the same understanding as me. You could state she is still conservative. So she, yes, still believes very much. If there is no God, well, she will be dizzy later. So it is different. I do not know how I got to be with her. hehehe. But I often..... I often tell her."

The closeness and special relationship established with their partners made the informants feel safe in disclosing the private information about their atheist identity to them. This closeness and special relationship was considered as a guarantee that the private information regarding their atheist identity would be safely kept.

Experience Presenting Atheism in Social Life

Concealing private information about their atheist identity would be quite impactful for the informants. The informants had to pretend to worship in front of their families. Although they did the worship ritual, it was not driven by their conscience. Roni stated that this was only to please the family.

"If in the family, follow. Yes, when you pray, you pray... Yes, it is just to please their hearts."

It was the same with Ilham. Apart from hiding his private identity from his family, he also performed worship rites to avoid suspicion from the public. This strategy indirectly became demanding for him.

"Yes, this must... what should I do, yes... mingle with society. So do not look like that, okay, if we do not have a religion but follow rituals, such as Friday prayers for Muslims. So yes, this does not raise suspicion in the community. Friday prayers, then pray five times a day, apart from praying, in the village, if there is a tahlilan, I will join. Yasinan at the mosque I occasionally join."

Iman, the only informant with a Christian background, also made a similar statement. He still had to go to the church weekly to hide his atheistic identity from his family. If he was not with his family, he did not do these activities.

"Oh yes. Yes, that is right, that is more precise. Pretending, yes. Because.... Why can I say pretending? Because when I am not at home, I also do not do anything, including not to go the church on Sunday. I do not even pray."

RA was the only informant with more freedom than the other informants for not having to pray in front of his family. This attitude was driven by the fact that his family was very democratic and loved freedom.

Interestingly, RA still continued to fast like a Muslim although it was based on his way to celebrate Ramadan.

"My family doesn't know the definition of an atheist. However, I do not do the rituals. It is okay and I don't get scolded because in my family the culture is indeed democratic. It is up to you to do whatever you want. Furthermore, for religious rituals such as fasting, I do it to celebrate. That is cool, too, right? Not because it is a belief or anything. Just to celebrate."

Meanwhile, females have a few privileges compared to males in religious rituals. Mawar, for example, could avoid being demanded to perform religious services in front of her parents because she could claim she was menstruating.

"Well, luckily, I am a girl. So I can dodge the demand. When told to pray, I stated, I am on my period. Thankfully."

Further, informants must be able to compromise with demands to carry out worship rites although it was not what they wanted. The factor that caused them to compromise is family. They had to compromise because they did not want to disappoint their families and avoided the possibility of conflict if their atheistic identity was known.

Conversely, in a friendly environment, the informants appeared as they were and could be freer in behaving without having the need to pretend. Even so, the informants felt they needed to make adjustments. They had to first make observations about the social environment. If they felt they could appear as they were, then they would do so. If not, they would hide the private information. Ilham, for example, felt that he had to consider the topic of discussion before sharing it with others.

"If... eeee... with people whom I do not know, well, I do not discuss it in extremes. It is just general stuff. Do not share views that are considered controversial because

people can be suspicious. They will tell other people. [It's] dangerous."

Iman also did the same. In presenting himself in a social circle, Iman tended to avoid discussing religion or anything that led to topics related to atheism. This attitude also allowed him to appear looser in a social circle. For him, there is no need to change his identity, for example in front of his parents by continuing to carry out worship rituals.

"I have not seen that yet, have I? Because there have not been any moments that require me to change my identity. I am ninety-five percent the same person. I might look different only when talking about religious issues... I do not see there is any difference about me [compared to others] anyway."

Roni also felt the freedom to appear more as he was in a social environment. In a social environment outside his family, Roni felt no pressure to appear religious. Albeit in such social environment, he did not immediately showed himself as someone not religious or showed himself openly as an atheist.

"Different. In front of the family, it is more like... well... when it's time to be religious, be religious. But in everyday life, it is normal to show nothing. Showing others you are religious or not religious is okay. It's normal."

Because he could appear as he was in that social environment without the need to pretend as he did in front of his family, Roni also saw the difference between those who know his atheistic identity and those who do not know in the context of the topic of discussion. Roni was more able to have in-depth discussion on religious topics with those who have been given access to his private information. This activity also included throwing jokes on religious topics. Nevertheless, in general, he tended to avoid discussing the topic because, according to

him, one's religiosity is a personal matter.

"Just the same. The only difference is I can identify those who know and do not know that can be invited to discuss in more depth. What is the point of talking about religion anyway? Friendship, right? Friendship is not about religion. That is a personal matter. Personal matters are personal."

In the online realm, several of the informants have also joined groups on the internet related to atheism. In the end, however, they chose to leave because they felt uncomfortable. For example, RA viewed the group's questions as less important.

"As for specifically about atheism, I used to join. Lots of questions, sometimes questions that are irrelevant, [such as] what is life. What is it? I was so discouraged that I left. Now, my interest is on leftist thoughts, like Nietzsche's."

The informants also used anonymous accounts to join groups discussing atheism. It was intended to protect the images in their accounts, given that the account, according to Ilham, was connected with family, friends, and lecturers on campus.

"Oh, that is dangerous. On Facebook, there are friends, family, and lecturers too. It's dangerous [to use real identity] anyway."

The use of anonymous accounts was not to spread the notion of atheism, but only as a tool for conducting critical discussion in which they felt safe. Iman stated that,

"I have an anonymous account like that. I have an anonymous account, but it's not to express myself as an atheist or not, but more to go around on Twitter, for example, to debate on social, economic issues that need to be discussed openly. But it's not related to this [atheism issue]. I do not care about it, anyway."

The informants' statements above show similarities between their self-presentation in "real" life and "cyberspace." The similarity is that they did not show themselves as atheists. Moreover, they were connected with their families and other relations on the internet. While there, they did not show themselves or build a digital persona as a religious person.

Summaries of data analyses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sumaries of finding in thematic portrayal

Thematic Portrayal	Finding
Experience of being an Atheist in Indonesia	The informants felt that being an atheist in Indonesia was the same as being the minority of minorities. They could not freely express or disclose their identities haphazardly or openly because they could face consequences, such as being shunned by friends, being discriminated against, being subjected to acts of violence, and upsetting their families.
Experience in disclosing private information	The informants disclosed private information regarding their atheist identity only in their friends' social circles. The opening was only for those who met certain criteria previously made by the informants. These criteria comprised being open-minded, having the same level of knowledge, not being fanatical about religion, and being friends for a long time. Meanwhile, in front of their families, they completely shut down private information about their atheist identity to avoid conflict and family's disappointment.

Meanwhile, despite applying criteria to anyone with whom they might open up, this did not apply to their romantic partners. The factor of special relationships and speculation about the future invalidated those criteria. The informants felt that romantic partners should know the truth about themselves in spite of the partners' not meeting the previously set criteria for disclosing private information.

Experience presenting oneself in social life

In front of their families, the informants presented themselves as religious people by carrying out worship rites. However, this was done out obligation to meet family expectation rather than faith and to cover up their atheistic identity.

Meanwhile, in a social environment outside the family, especially among close friends, they felt they could be freer to be who they were without having to pretend to worship. However, this did not necessarily make them show their atheist identity openly. They still sorted out who the private information would be shared with.

In social media, they were also not vocal in communicating their atheist identity. This was because they were also connected with family and colleagues on the platform. Several informants admitted to having anonymous accounts to join groups related to atheism or discuss sensitive and critical topics. The anonymous accounts were created to protect the image attached to their personal accounts.

Discussion

CPM theory, through its principles, explains quite well the steps the informants took in disclosing private information, for example, how the informants considered private information as important as stated in the principle of Private Information Ownership (Petronio, 2010). On that basis, they also exercised control over their private information, as discussed in the next principle, namely Private Information Control (Petronio, 2010).

Each informant in this study controlled different information. Several exercised control very tightly, but the others were more lenient. The thicker the wall was, the more difficult it was to access private information, and vice versa. This boundary has implications for a situation in which as long as someone

still has boundary walls, they still put up a guardrail for other people they do not want. The thickness or difficulty of the barrier to access will differ for each private information owner. The wall will be torn down if they no longer regard it as a private matter. In this condition, no more walls limit and protect private information from the outside world, like a building that is no longer locked so that everyone is free to enter it.

The informants' power to determine the thickness of the boundary walls is also related to the third CPM principle, namely the Private Information Rules (Petronio, 2010). This principle talks about how individuals determine when, how, to whom, and in what way they disclose private information. The informants carried out this third principle by establishing criteria as standards or

determinants. If someone meets these criteria, then access to private information is also given.

Apart from the criteria, the informants also conducted a cost-benefit analysis by considering the pros and cons of disclosing private information. If it was felt that it would bring more losses, they would keep the information closed. This follows a claim that before disclosing private information, a person will consider the possible benefits and risks he/she might get after disclosing that information (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

Data analysis also uncovered differences in how the principle of Private Information Co-ownership and Guardianship were applied. Petronio (2010) highlights the need to agree with the owner and co-owner of the shared private information. However, the findings of this study indicated that most of the informants did not make any agreements.

Further, they did not emphasize to the co-owners of their private information not to divulge what has been conveyed because trust has been established. The trust was born because the co-owners met the criteria that had been made before. Although some informants had received unpleasant responses when disclosing their private information, such as being shunned from the association or given a negative stigma, the informants did not consider the criteria wrong or not strong enough. The error occurred due to the inability to analyze the co-owners' private information. Previously, the co-owner of the private information was considered to meet the criteria, but this consideration needed to be corrected.

As previously explained, the criteria were built on trust and security. The feeling

of security was important for the informants because they did not want the private information about their atheist identity to fall into the wrong hands. If this happened, they worried that they would receive discriminatory actions from other people and experience unpleasantness. This worry is the point of the fifth principle, namely Private Information Boundary Turbulence.

Apart from meeting the five principles, the informants had their own way of disclosing private information. Several chose to throw questions and statements until a discussion occurred; then, they could reveal their atheist identity. Another only stated it when asked. The others were only comfortable disclosing their private information via chat messages and did not feel comfortable or dared to do it face-to-face.

Based on these findings, everyone had their way of disclosing private information. This method varied and was based on each individual's comfort and safety factors. As Petronio (2002) argued, disclosing private information is a difficult and dilemmatic matter, then finding a comfortable way to disclose it can alleviate this difficulty. The feeling of comfort can smooth the opening of something previously only buried alone.

The efforts of the informants to manage their private information required them to also play a role in front of a certain social environment. Generally, the social environment where the role was performed was their family. Almost all of the informants in this study did not want their families to know that they were atheists. Goffman (1956) has the assumption that in social life, an individual is like an actor who plays a role according to the context of a particular situation and audience. If an actor plays a role

on stage intending to entertain his audience, then the informants in this study played a role on stage to form a specific identity in the minds of their families. The identity was still religiosity related as they still wanted to be seen as religious by their families. This example highlights the fact that to construct an individual identity, impression management is the key to making it successful (Dumitriu, 2014). Moreover, good impression management will determine the success or failure of the role (Goffman, 1956; Brown, 2005).

The impression management carried out by the informants in this study was reasonable. Generally, they did not talk about atheism, criticism of religion, or things that could raise suspicion in front of their families. In addition, they performed worship rituals in front of their families, such as praying or going to church. Using the concept of front stage and backstage (Goffman, 1956), impression management carried out by informants in front of their families was in the realm of the front stage. They wanted to satisfy their family according to the values expected of their family. Most informants had families with strong religious backgrounds instilled since childhood. The informants believed that their actions to abandon the values would make their family disappointed. Like an actor who wants to satisfy his audience through his role, the informants also wanted to satisfy their family with the giving the impression that they still upheld the values their family had instilled.

In addition to not disappoint the family, the informants also aimed to protect their private information. They did not want their families to know the identity of the atheism. According to them, concerns were born if

private information was known, such as disappointing parents, being subjected to violence, and being exiled from the family. In order to succeed in this role, the informants inevitably had to perform rituals of worship in front of their families.

Goffman also introduced the term cynical, or when an individual does not have full confidence in what he is doing. Thus, what the informants did in this study was only a form of mere pretense (Goffman, 1956). All this was done to gain acceptance because religious values prevailed in that community. In order to be accepted, the informants had to act according to the upheld values in their community. Role playing like this can overcome social problems that individuals face in their social life, for example, to a person who adheres to values that are different from those upheld in the surrounding community (Pinch, 2010).

Based on the above, it can be stated that self-protection can be a person's motive for playing a role on the front stage. If a social environment is considered safe for the informants to appear as they were, then they would not play a special role. Therefore, their backstage was the social environment outside the family because, in that environment, they no longer need to play the roles they played in front of the family. They tended to be freer to present themselves as they were.

The appearance of the role on stage also ultimately forms personal branding, which is indirectly related to the concepts introduced by Goffman (Khedner, 2014). Based on this statement, what is displayed in the front stage area is ultimately an individual effort to brand himself. Furthermore, when doing personal branding, someone will highlight himself more than others so that differentiation

is created (Taskiran, 2019). Uniquely, the informants in this study wanted to avoid creating differentiation. Instead, they wanted to be seen as the same as most people, that is, as individuals who embrace religion.

The differentiation was actually created when they appeared as they were as an atheist. This difference distinguished them from the majority of religious people. Even if talking in the family sphere, being an atheist would make them completely different because of being the only atheist in the family. However, the informants insisted on avoiding this differentiation.

Khedner revealed three stages in carrying out personal branding (Khedner, 2014). The first stage is building identity by building differentiation. As previously explained, the informants in this study did not build differentiation. They wanted to mingle amid a majority population of uniform religions and did not want to stand out as atheists. If differentiation occurred, they feared it would jeopardize their efforts to protect their Atheist identity.

The second stage is developing the brand's positioning by actively communicating about brand identity through managed behavior, communication, and playing symbols. The positioning in this case is the message that they were religious. This positioning was built through the game of ritual symbols of worship in front of the family. They did not expect rewards in their act of worship. However, they aimed that the expected positioning could be well constructed in the minds of their family. Thus, their family would not know that they were atheists.

The final stage evaluates whether the brand image has met personal or professional

targets. Based on the findings, the informants admitted that their families had no suspicions about their atheist identity. Therefore, it can be stated that the personal brand building in front of their families was successful. Likewise, with the role they played in the front stage area. They could be accepted in the family environment by playing these communication symbols.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the findings above, several points of conclusion can be made. First, the informants felt that being an atheist in Indonesia had a greater chance to be discriminated against more than the followers of minority religions. The discrimination made atheists strict in protecting their private information and only opening it to others only if the persons met certain criteria. In practice, the exception to the implementation of such criteria was made for their romantic partners as the latter were considered as the closest person. However, other closest people, such as immediate family, are generally completely closed off.

Second, the management of private information impacted how they presented themselves in everyday life. In front of their families, they pretended to worship as a form of compromise to avoid exposing their atheistic identity. This role play ultimately became their branding in front of the family. They instilled a positioning message that they were still religious through these fake worship rituals. Furthermore, it was found intriguing that the informants deliberately eliminated differentiation in their personal branding process. They only wanted to be seen as ordinary, religious people. Meanwhile, in their

circle of friends, they tended to appear as they were without pretending to be religious or hiding their true identity.

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