

Open Relationships, Open Minds: Information Experiences of Individuals in Open Relationships

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Abstract

The visibility and acceptance of diverse relationship structures, particularly open relationships within consensual non-monogamy (CNM), have increased in recent years. Despite this shift, CNM remains under-researched and continues to face distinct social, emotional, and logistical challenges. This study explores the information experiences of individuals in open relationships in the Philippines, focusing on how they seek, share, and manage information, and how it influences their life decisions. Using a multi-method ethnographic approach, including semi-structured interviews and netnographic observations from Reddit, the study identifies four key themes: information needs, resources, challenges, and information management practices. The findings underscore the importance of contextualized, accessible information in addressing these challenges and supporting individuals in CNM relationships. The study highlights the need to consider broader social, cultural, and structural factors in designing inclusive support systems, and emphasizes the value of fostering open dialogue and nonjudgmental spaces.

Keywords: Open relationships; Consensual non-monogamy; Information experiences; Ethnographic research

INTRODUCTION

Rapid shifts in information access and communication have significantly transformed how individuals engage with previously taboo topics. This democratization of information has increased the visibility and normalization of once-stigmatized relationship models, including open relationships. Open relationships refer to consensual non-monogamous arrangements in which partners mutually agree to allow romantic or sexual involvement with others outside their primary partnership (Séguin et al., 2017).

The growing visibility of these relationship models, particularly in urban and online spaces, has sparked the researcher's interest in examining their historical emergence, cultural development, and patterns of public awareness. In the Philippine context—a predominantly conservative society—questions remain about the origins and local emergence of open relationships, the uneven distribution of information about these

relationship models, and the factors influencing varying levels of awareness and familiarity among individuals.

Despite increasing public discourse, academic scholarship on open relationships from an information studies perspective remains limited. Existing research has predominantly examined the psychological, relational, and sociological dimensions of consensual non-monogamy, with comparatively little attention given to how individuals in such relationships seek, share, evaluate, and manage information in their daily lives.

Addressing this gap, the present study explores the information experiences of individuals in open relationships, focusing on how they seek, share, and manage information related to their relational practices and decision-making. By examining these experiences within the context of the Philippines, this study contributes to the limited body of literature on the information practices of individuals in consensual non-

monogamous relationships. It promotes a broader scholarly understanding of marginalized relationship experiences.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A comprehensive understanding of open relationships requires examination through historical, cultural, psychological, and sociological perspectives. These lenses provide insight into the emergence of consensual non-monogamous relationship structures, their varying social perceptions, and the personal and societal factors influencing their practice.

Conceptualizing Open Relationships and Consensual Non-Monogamy

Open relationships are situated within the broader framework of consensual non-monogamy (CNM), which refers to relational arrangements in which individuals engage in sexual, emotional, or romantic relationships with multiple partners with the awareness and consent of all involved parties (Conley et al., 2013, as cited in Astle et al., 2024). Within CNM, three commonly recognized categories are polyamory, open relationships, and swinging. Polyamory refers to relationship arrangements in which individuals consensually engage in multiple emotional, romantic, or sexual relationships (Moors et al., 2021; Rubel & Bogaert, 2015, as cited in Astle et al., 2024). Swinging typically involves committed partners jointly engaging in sexual activities with others, often through partner swapping or group sexual encounters. In contrast, open relationships generally permit one or both partners to engage in sexual relationships outside the primary partnership while maintaining romantic exclusivity within the central relationship (Conley et al., 2017; Rubel & Bogaert, 2015, as cited in Astle et al., 2024).

These distinctions highlight that differences among CNM configurations primarily arise from the specific relational agreements participants establish. However, recent scholarship suggests that existing categorizations do not fully capture the diversity of consensually non-monogamous arrangements, with emerging classifications such as mixed relationships and hybrid relational structures further expanding the conceptual landscape of CNM (Astle et al., 2024).

Demographic Patterns in Consensual Non-Monogamy

Research suggests that individuals engaged in CNM relationships exhibit demographic patterns that differ from those in monogamous relationships. Studies have found that people in polyamorous and other consensually non-monogamous relationships are more

likely to identify as bisexual, pansexual, or with other non-heteronormative sexual orientations (Balzarini et al., 2018). Prior research has also documented a relatively high prevalence of consensual non-monogamy among gay men, particularly in the form of open relationships and swinging arrangements (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, as cited in Balzarini et al., 2018). These findings suggest that non-monogamous relationship structures may intersect with broader patterns of sexual identity exploration and fluidity.

Religious affiliation likewise appears to vary between monogamous and consensually non-monogamous populations, with individuals in CNM relationships less likely to identify as Christian compared to those in monogamous partnerships (Balzarini et al., 2018). Collectively, these demographic differences indicate that participation in CNM may be associated with broader openness to alternative social and relational norms.

Motivations for Engaging in Open Relationships

Existing studies identify multiple motivations for engaging in consensually non-monogamous relationships. Individuals may pursue CNM arrangements to meet diverse emotional and sexual needs that they perceive cannot be fulfilled within a single-partner structure. Research suggests that CNM participants often report greater openness toward casual sexual experiences, increased opportunities for personal growth, and the ability to form multiple meaningful relational bonds (Rodrigues, 2024). Furthermore, studies indicate that individuals transitioning into non-monogamous relationship structures may experience increased sexual satisfaction over time, alongside high levels of relational commitment and overall life satisfaction (Rodrigues, 2024). These findings challenge common assumptions that non-monogamy is inherently associated with relational instability or dissatisfaction.

Historical Emergence of Open Relationships

The historical development of open relationships is closely linked to broader social transformations surrounding sexuality and relational norms. Scholars trace the emergence of consensual non-monogamy in contemporary Western discourse to the sexual revolution of the twentieth century, which challenged traditional Victorian values surrounding marriage, sexuality, and gender roles (Sprague, 2019). During the Victorian era, dominant social norms promoted female chastity and marital monogamy while simultaneously tolerating sexual double standards for men. However, social reform movements beginning in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries increasingly contested these norms, advocating for women's rights,

sexual liberation, and alternative family structures (Williams, 2002, as cited in Sprague, 2019).

These ideological shifts intensified through the World Wars and the broader social movements of the 1960s, which further normalized public discourse surrounding sexuality and non-traditional relationships (Sprague, 2019). Within this context, alternative relationship models—including open relationships—gained greater visibility and legitimacy.

A pivotal moment in the popularization of open relationships came with the publication of *Open Marriage* by Nena and George O'Neill, released in 1972, which introduced the concept of non-exclusive intimate partnerships to mainstream audiences and framed such arrangements as viable alternatives to traditional monogamy (O'Neill & O'Neill, 1972b). The publication contributed significantly to public discourse by increasing awareness and legitimizing conversations surrounding alternative relational structures.

Information Dissemination and Awareness of Open Relationships

The historical and contemporary visibility of open relationships underscores the role of information dissemination in shaping awareness and public understanding of non-traditional relationship models. Publications, media representations, and digital platforms have served as key channels for circulating, contesting, and normalizing knowledge of open relationships. However, access to such information remains uneven, particularly within culturally conservative societies where discussions of sexuality and non-monogamy may remain stigmatized or suppressed.

Despite increasing public awareness of open relationships, research examining how individuals access, interpret, and utilize information related to consensual non-monogamy remains limited. Existing scholarship has largely focused on the psychological, relational, and demographic dimensions of CNM, with comparatively little attention devoted to the information practices of individuals engaged in these relationships. This gap is particularly evident in the Philippine context, where traditional cultural and religious values may shape both information accessibility and the social acceptability of alternative relationship models.

Accordingly, further examination of the information experiences of individuals in open relationships is necessary to understand how awareness, knowledge acquisition, and information-sharing practices influence the formation, maintenance, and social navigation of

consensually non-monogamous relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Bruce et al.'s (2014) Information Experience Theory, which conceptualizes information experience as the complex ways individuals engage with, interpret, and use information in everyday life. Rather than focusing solely on information-seeking behaviors, the framework emphasizes how individuals make meaning from information through their lived experiences and interactions with diverse informational environments.

Information Experience Theory is particularly relevant to this study because it enables examination of how individuals in open relationships engage with information related to their relational practices, interpret available discourses surrounding consensual non-monogamy, and construct meaning from these interactions in ways that influence their attitudes and decisions.

The study also draws on the concept of informed learning, which situates learning at the intersection of information use and reflective engagement (Hughes, 2014).

The discussion underscores that informed learning exists at the intersection of information and learning experiences, integrating the two through reflection and continuous engagement with information. According to Hughes (2014), informed learning focuses on how individuals experience learning through their use of information and is particularly useful for examining learning processes in everyday contexts.

As illustrated in Figure 2, information experiences are embedded within social and relational contexts and lead to informed learning, transformation, and ongoing meaning-making that reshape participants' understanding of open relationships. Through this lens, participants' encounters with information about open relationships are understood not merely as acts of information acquisition, but as socially situated experiences through which learning shapes their understanding, relational perspectives, and meanings.

Together, these frameworks provide a lens for examining the information experiences of individuals in open relationships, particularly in culturally conservative contexts where social context, relational dynamics, stigma, and limited public discourse shape access to and interpretation of relationship-related information

Figure 1. *Informed Learning: Intersection of information use and learning experiences (Hughes, 2014).*

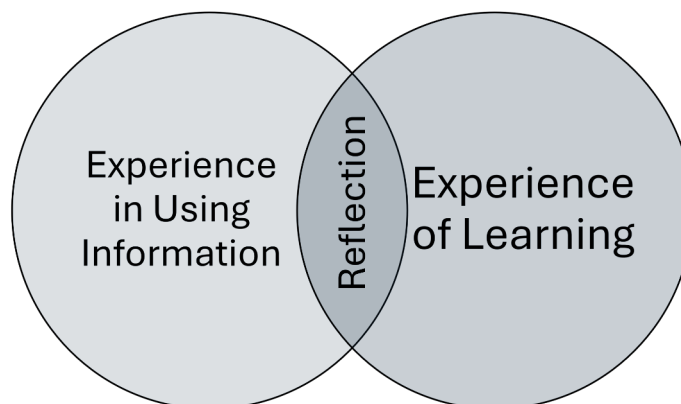
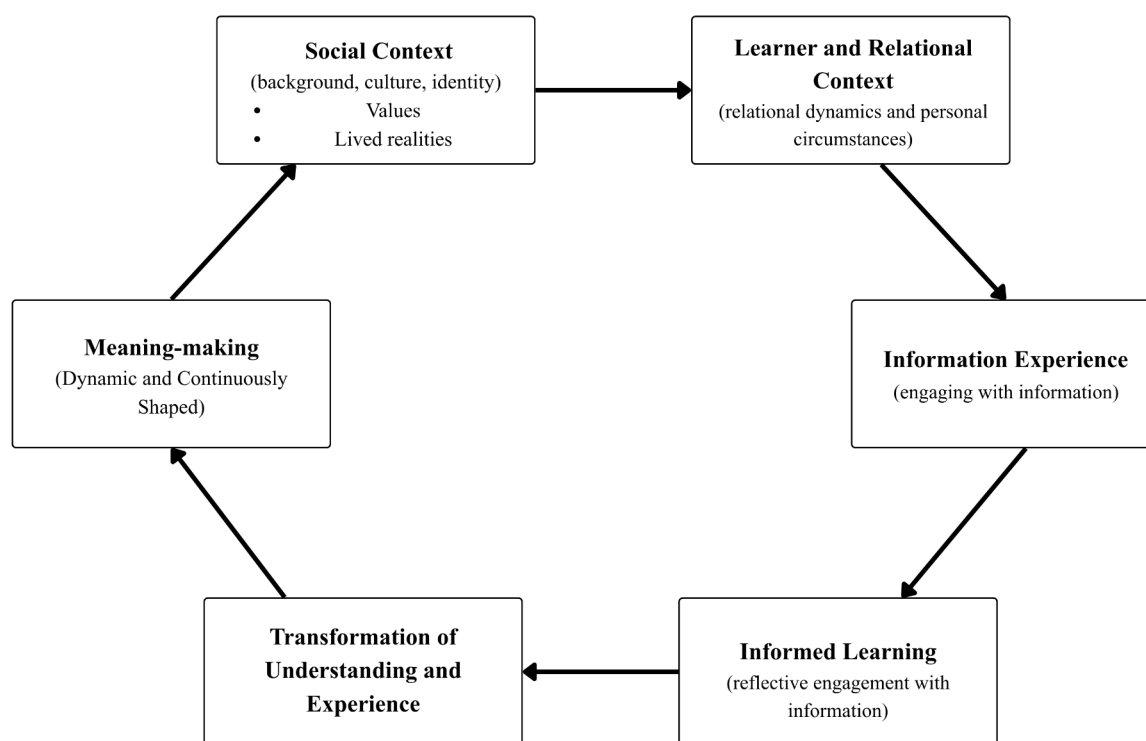


Figure 2. *Framework for Understanding Information Experience in Social and Relational Contexts*



METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design combining interviews and ethnographic methods to explore lived experiences in context. In particular, it draws on the mixed-method approach of Pool et al. (2010), which, in the context of HIV microbicide trials, demonstrates how integrating interview and ethnographic data enhances the interpretation of sensitive self-reported accounts by identifying inconsistencies and situating participants' responses within broader social contexts.

Given the sensitive and stigmatized nature of consensual non-monogamy (CNM), participants often engage with online communities for information, support, and interaction. For this reason, the study extends ethnography into netnography (Kozinets, 2010), which enables the systematic analysis of naturally occurring online discourse alongside interview data. Kozinets (2010) conceptualizes netnography as an approach that recognizes how contemporary interactions with information and communication technologies are embedded in everyday social life.

This study also draws methodological insight from Godbold (2012), whose netnographic research adopts an ethnomethodological perspective to examine how individuals construct shared understandings of “normality” within online health communities. Rather than focusing solely on cultural description, her work emphasizes meaning as actively produced through interaction. Similarly, the present study examines how individuals in open relationships make sense of their experiences through engagement with online discussions, particularly in contexts where consensual non-monogamy remains socially contested.

Together, these methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of both participants’ lived narratives and their digital information practices.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit individuals with direct experience in open relationships, based on criteria aligned with the study’s objectives. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, snowball sampling was also used. This recruitment method involves existing participants or mutual contacts identifying and referring individuals who meet the study criteria. In this study, a mutual contact helped establish initial access to one participant. According to Browne (2005), snowball sampling is particularly appropriate for studies involving hidden or hard-to-reach populations, especially when the topic is sensitive or the number of potential participants is limited.

Two individuals were selected based on the following criteria: (1) at least 18 years of age, (2) current or recent involvement in an open relationship within the past two years, and (3) a minimum of six months’ experience in such arrangements. They were also required to demonstrate willingness to discuss their experiences and engagement with online communities related to open relationships.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and netnographic observation. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions exploring how participants navigate open relationships, including the types of information they seek, the sources and communities they rely on, and their practices of privacy and disclosure. Participants were also encouraged to reflect on challenges encountered in seeking and sharing information within broader social and cultural contexts, as well as the personal and relational implications of these experiences. Interviews were conducted with informed consent and audio-recorded for transcription

and analysis.

For the netnographic component, publicly accessible discussions from Reddit were used, selected because the platform actively engages with topics on open relationships. Threads were included if they contained at least five responses and were posted within the past three years. Data focused on how individuals articulate information needs, share experiences, and negotiate meaning within online environments.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) open coding approach. To enhance analytical rigor, method triangulation was employed by integrating interview data with netnographic data from Reddit, as well as relevant published and unpublished materials on open relationships. This enabled a more comprehensive and contextually grounded interpretation of participants’ information experiences. Consistent with Pool et al. (2010), triangulation in qualitative research strengthens interpretation by drawing on multiple contextual sources of evidence. Convergence across data sources is therefore understood as enhancing analytical depth and interpretive richness.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly observed throughout the study. Interview participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality; pseudonyms were used in reporting. Participation was voluntary, and individuals were free to withdraw at any stage.

For netnographic data, only publicly available content was analyzed. User identities were anonymized, and care was taken to avoid including identifiable information and to minimize the risk of reverse identification. Where necessary, content was paraphrased to further protect user privacy, particularly given the sensitive nature of discussions surrounding open relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data from interviews and from netnography were analyzed thematically, with findings organized into key themes reflecting participants’ information needs, practices, and challenges.

Two participants contributed in-depth insights based on their experiences in open relationships. Participant 1 had approximately six months of experience and was initially introduced to the concept through academic and media sources, which prompted further exploration and mutual agreement with a partner. Participant 2

became aware of open relationships earlier through social and community exposure, particularly within LGBTQIA+ spaces, and later transitioned from a long-term monogamous relationship to a consensually non-monogamous arrangement. Both participants emphasized the role of information, communication, and negotiated boundaries in shaping their experiences.

To complement the interview data, netnographic observations were conducted on Reddit, a platform participants identified as a key source of information and community engagement. Two communities—Swingers Philippines and Alas Juicy—were selected due to their active discussions related to non-monogamous relationships. Rather than serving solely as informational spaces, these communities function as environments where individuals share experiences, seek advice, and negotiate understanding of open relationships within a semi-anonymous setting.

Integrating interview and netnographic data provided a broader perspective on how individuals navigate information related to open relationships across both personal and digital contexts.

Theme 1. Information Needs of Individuals in Open Relationships

This theme addresses the study's objective of examining the information needs of individuals in open relationships. Findings are organized into five subthemes: (1) information-seeking motivation, (2) defining open relationships and expanding perspectives through real-life examples, (3) practical guidance and strategies, (4) safety and accessibility, and (5) communities and connections. These subthemes reflect the types of information individuals seek, the contexts in which these needs emerge, and the motivations underlying their information-seeking behaviors. Collectively, they illustrate how information practices are embedded in participants' everyday experiences and decision-making processes.

Theme 1.1. Information-Seeking Motivation

The first subtheme, information-seeking motivation, highlights differing drivers behind participants' engagement with information. Participant 1 demonstrated primarily extrinsic motivations, such as curiosity and exposure to new ideas. Their interest in open relationships was initially sparked by academic discussion, prompting further exploration: *"When it started, I became curious about what a philosopher said about relationships... I read an article and did some research."* This reflects how external stimuli can initiate information-seeking and shape understanding.

In contrast, Participant 2 exhibited intrinsic motivation, grounded in personal reflection and self-awareness. As the participant explained, *"I didn't enter the relationship after researching how to do this... It's more about my internal desires."* In this case, information serves less as a starting point and more as support for pre-existing decisions.

These contrasting motivations result in different patterns of information use. While Participant 1 actively explored external sources to build understanding, Participant 2 relied on internal motivations and used information selectively to support personal choices. Despite these differences, both participants emphasized the importance of access to reliable, judgment-free information environments.

This finding aligns with Informed Learning Theory (Bruce, 2008, as cited in Bruce et al., 2014), which posits that learning occurs through meaningful engagement with information in context. As the model suggests, reflection lies at the intersection of information use and learning, where individuals transform information into insight. Through reflection, participants connect what they encounter with their values, emotions, and aspirations, enabling deeper understanding. This supports the theory's core premise: learning is a reflective and personal process shaped by how individuals use information to construct meaning, develop identity, and make informed decisions.

Theme 1.2. Defining Open Relationships, Expanding Perspectives, and Real-Life Examples

A key finding of this study is that individuals in open relationships actively construct their understanding of non-monogamy through engagement with definitions, diverse perspectives, and real-life examples. Rather than relying on fixed or institutionalized meanings, participants approach open relationships as fluid and interpretive, requiring continuous sense-making.

Participant 1's reflection on the relationship of Jean-Paul Sartre illustrates how exposure to alternative relational models can challenge dominant norms and expand conceptual frameworks. Sartre's long-term partnership, characterized by emotional commitment without adherence to traditional marriage, served as a powerful reference point. The participant's response suggests that such examples function not merely as information sources but as interpretive tools that legitimize nontraditional arrangements. By recognizing that individuals may have needs beyond a single partner while maintaining a strong primary bond, the participant reexamines conventional assumptions about exclusivity and commitment.

This highlights the role of real-life examples as experiential knowledge that bridges abstract concepts and lived realities. Participants do not passively consume information; instead, they selectively engage with narratives that resonate with their personal contexts. The emphasis on identifying “successful” open relationships further indicates a search for models that demonstrate viability, stability, and emotional coherence. In this sense, information-seeking is both evaluative and aspirational, aimed at reducing uncertainty and validating relational choices.

Insights from Reddit discussions further reinforce this process. Online threads frequently focus on defining terms, comparing forms of consensual non-monogamy (CNM), and evaluating their advantages and limitations. While labels such as swinging, polyamory, and open relationships help establish expectations, both interview and netnographic findings suggest that individuals ultimately prioritize negotiated boundaries over rigid classifications.

Personal motivations also emerge as central to shaping relational structures. Distinctions in emotional involvement, commitment, and exclusivity require ongoing negotiation, reflecting the flexible and context-dependent nature of these relationships. While open relationships in some countries are often defined primarily as sexual involvement outside the primary partnership without emotional attachment, this study reveals that, in the Philippine context, open relationships may also include emotional connections. This finding highlights a broader and more flexible understanding of open relationships, emphasizing that their meaning is shaped by cultural context, personal values, and negotiated boundaries.

Overall, these findings suggest that defining open relationships is a dynamic and reflexive process. Individuals construct meaning by integrating information, community discourse, and personal experience, continuously aligning relational practices with their values and social context.

Theme 1.3. Practical Guidance and Strategies

Another major information need centered on practical guidance for initiating and maintaining open relationships. Participants sought strategies for communicating with partners, negotiating boundaries, and navigating interactions with additional partners. Participant 2 particularly emphasized the need for actionable advice when transitioning from monogamy, including how to introduce the concept to a partner, disclose relationship status, and discuss health

precautions.

Netnographic findings reinforced these concerns, with discussions frequently emphasizing boundary-setting, communication practices, and adaptability. Participants consistently framed successful open relationships as depending on continuous dialogue, mutual respect, and personalized strategies.

Theme 1.4. Safety and Accessibility

Safety emerged as a foundational information need, particularly regarding sexual health, risk management, and access to reliable support systems. Participants identified accurate health information and accessible services such as STD testing as essential to maintaining ethical and sustainable open relationships.

Participants framed safety practices not only as protective measures but also as relational responsibilities tied to trust, accountability, and mutual care. These findings suggest that safety extends beyond prevention and functions as a core practice in maintaining transparency and informed decision-making.

Theme 1.5. Communities and Connections

The final subtheme highlights the importance of communities and networks where individuals can seek information, share experiences, and find validation. Participants emphasized that connecting with others reduced feelings of isolation and reinforced the understanding that open relationships are neither unique nor inherently abnormal.

Netnographic findings further demonstrated that online platforms functioned as spaces for community-building, anonymous exploration, and experiential exchange. These environments shaped not only access to information but also participants' perceptions, expectations, and relational understanding.

Theme 2. Trusted Information Resources

Another significant theme was the range of trusted information resources individuals relied upon to address their needs. These included digital platforms, online resources, and traditional resources. In contexts where stigma and social judgment may shape information behavior, participants often prioritized accessibility, discretion, and anonymity.

2.1 Digital Platforms as Information Sources

Findings indicate that individuals in open relationships frequently rely on digital platforms as primary information resources. These platforms provide

accessible and interactive spaces where users can obtain advice, compare experiences, and explore relationship structures in personalized ways. Their significance lies in facilitating information access, exposure to diverse perspectives, and practical decision-making.

2.1.1 Dating Applications

Dating applications serve both informational and relational functions. For some participants, these platforms provide opportunities to openly explore relationship preferences and identify others with similar relational orientations. One participant noted that platforms such as Omegle previously enabled discussions about nontraditional relationship structures in ways that felt accessible and discreet.

Other participants emphasized the practical utility of dating apps in filtering potential partners. Features on platforms such as Bumble allow users to identify individuals with compatible relationship preferences, supporting expectation-setting and informed partner selection.

2.1.2 Anonymous Platforms

Anonymity emerged as a critical feature in accessing sensitive or stigmatized information. Platforms such as Reddit provide environments where users can discuss open relationships, seek guidance, and explore perspectives without revealing their identities. This is particularly relevant in contexts where nontraditional relationships may be socially marginalized.

However, trust in anonymous platforms is not absolute. While anonymity can facilitate openness, some participants expressed concerns regarding misinformation and limited accountability. This tension highlights the dual function of anonymous platforms as accessible information spaces that also require critical evaluation.

2.2 Online Resources

Online resources emerged as a significant category of trusted information resources, particularly because of their accessibility, immediacy, and breadth. Interview findings indicate that participants primarily relied on online articles, while netnographic observations revealed that Reddit users frequently recommended podcasts. Together, these findings suggest that individuals draw on multiple forms of digital media to meet diverse informational needs, ranging from foundational knowledge to deeper relational understanding.

Online articles were identified as a primary resource for

fulfilling a broad range of information needs, including definitions, real-life examples, safety guidelines, strategies, and accessibility. Participants viewed articles as convenient and comprehensive tools for obtaining immediate information. As Participant 1 noted, “But when it comes to reading, I think most of us get our information from articles.” The prominence of online articles reflects their value as accessible and adaptable resources. This accessibility allows individuals to independently seek information on demand, making online articles particularly valuable for those navigating open relationships in contexts where formal guidance may be limited. Beyond convenience, these findings suggest that online articles function as foundational learning tools, enabling users to build conceptual understanding and practical awareness.

Podcasts were frequently recommended resources within Reddit discussions, particularly for expanding understanding, clarifying misconceptions, and exploring open relationships in greater depth. Unlike static informational sources, podcasts function as both educational and dialogic tools, encouraging reflection, shared learning, and relational communication. Recommendations such as listening with a partner suggest that podcasts support not only individual learning but also collaborative engagement with complex relationship dynamics. Their frequent circulation within Reddit discussions further highlights how online communities facilitate resource-sharing and continuous learning through curated recommendations and experiential exchange.

2.3 Traditional Resources: Books

Despite the prominence of digital resources, traditional print resources—particularly books—remain highly valued as trusted and authoritative sources of information. Both interview and Reddit findings indicate that books continue to play a significant role in shaping individuals’ understanding of open relationships.

Participants and Reddit users frequently referenced influential books such as *Open Marriage* (O’Neill & O’Neill, 1972a), *Polysecure* (Fern, 2020), *The Ethical Slut* (first edition by Easton and Liszt, 1997), and *More Than Two* (first edition by Veaux & Rickert, 2014) as valuable resources for guidance, reflection, and relational insight. These works were often framed not merely as informational texts but as transformative resources that helped individuals avoid mistakes, deepen understanding, and navigate relational complexities more thoughtfully.

Notably, Reddit discussions frequently included requests for book recommendations as well as personal reflections, analyses, and evaluations of these texts. This suggests that books function not only as static sources of knowledge but also as catalysts for discourse and interpretive engagement.

The continued reliance on books, despite the accessibility of digital media, indicates that individuals often associate print resources with depth, credibility, and structured learning. These findings suggest that traditional resources continue to complement digital platforms by offering more comprehensive and reflective forms of engagement, reinforcing their enduring relevance in understanding open relationships.

Theme 3. Information-Related Challenges

Building on the identified information needs and resources, the study also examined challenges encountered in accessing and evaluating information. Analysis revealed three primary issues: the lack of trusted resources, the persistence of misconceptions and stigma, and related privacy concerns. These challenges are interconnected and shaped by broader social and cultural conditions.

3.1 Lack of Trusted Resources

A major information-related challenge identified in this study is the limited availability of credible and trustworthy resources. Participants described difficulty locating reliable information, particularly within digital environments where anonymity often complicates credibility assessment. Although online platforms provide broad access to diverse perspectives, they also expose users to misinformation, fabricated narratives, and unverifiable experiences.

Participants emphasized that the challenge is not merely access to information, but access to information that is both accurate and trustworthy. Anonymous or informal platforms may offer visibility and community, yet the absence of accountability can undermine confidence in the information provided. This issue becomes especially significant for open relationships, where formal, culturally relevant, and socially accepted resources remain limited.

The lack of safe, inclusive spaces for discussion further intensified the shortage of trusted resources. Consequently, individuals—particularly those navigating stigmatized or marginalized identities—may encounter structural barriers that restrict access to dependable knowledge. This environment reinforces cycles of misinformation, uncertainty, and exclusion,

complicating informed decision-making.

3.2 Misconceptions and Stigma in Information Sharing

Misconceptions and stigma emerged as significant barriers to both accessing and sharing information. Participants consistently reported that open relationships are frequently misunderstood and commonly associated with infidelity, instability, or moral failure. These dominant assumptions create social environments where individuals are often required to explain, defend, or legitimize their relationship structures.

This burden of constant explanation positions information-sharing as emotionally demanding labor. Participants described the repeated need to correct misconceptions, educate others, and challenge stereotypes, often in the face of judgment or dismissal. Such experiences indicate that information-sharing is not a neutral act but one shaped by broader cultural stigma.

More critically, misinformation can produce tangible risks. Misunderstandings about the boundaries of open relationships may lead others to misinterpret consent, availability, or relational norms, potentially compromising personal safety. Thus, stigma functions not only as a social obstacle but also as a factor that can heighten vulnerability.

Netnographic findings reinforce these patterns, revealing that online discussions often reproduce judgmental narratives, including the conflation of open relationships with cheating or the misuse of ethical non-monogamy to justify dishonesty. These narratives obscure the core principles of consent, communication, and mutual agreement, further perpetuating stigma and limiting informed discourse.

3.3 Privacy Challenges

Privacy concerns represent another critical information-related challenge, particularly within cultural contexts where nontraditional relationships remain socially stigmatized. Participants described navigating constant tension between openness and self-protection, carefully managing what information to disclose, to whom, and under what circumstances.

The pressure to explain one's relationship status often stems from a desire to prevent misunderstanding or accusations of infidelity. However, disclosure also carries risks, particularly in tightly connected social environments where personal information may quickly circulate beyond intended audiences. This creates

ongoing uncertainty regarding trust, confidentiality, and social consequences.

As a result, participants often engage in selective disclosure practices, balancing transparency with caution to preserve privacy and personal boundaries. These behaviors reflect the broader concept of felt stigma, wherein anticipated judgment shapes communication choices and self-presentation.

While privacy management serves as a protective strategy, it can also be emotionally burdensome. The need to continuously evaluate social risk underscores how stigma extends beyond external judgment, influencing everyday information behavior and interpersonal decision-making.

The findings suggest that these information-related challenges are not isolated issues, but interconnected barriers shaped by broader social, cultural, and informational conditions. Limited access to credible resources contributes to misinformation, misinformation reinforces stigma, and stigma intensifies privacy concerns—collectively creating a cycle that constrains open information exchange.

This dynamic aligns with Wilson's (1999) Model of Information Behavior, which emphasizes how social, psychological, and environmental factors function as intervening variables that shape information access and use. Similarly, contextual approaches to information behavior highlight the importance of understanding how cultural norms and societal structures influence individuals' capacity to seek, interpret, and share information.

Within the Philippine context, traditional and religious norms surrounding relationships further intensify these barriers. Cultural expectations that prioritize monogamy may restrict access to safe, affirming, and culturally relevant resources for individuals in open relationships. Therefore, improving information access requires not only increasing resource availability but also addressing the broader structural and cultural conditions that shape information behavior.

Theme 4. Information Management

This theme examines how participants manage relationship-related information in open relationships, focusing on how they share, filter, and protect information. It highlights information management as the process of organizing and using information effectively. It shows its importance in understanding lived experiences in consensual non-monogamy, with

implications for developing more inclusive and responsive information services.

4.1 Strategic Information Sharing: Filtering and Disclosure

Participants engaged in deliberate and highly selective disclosure practices to protect privacy while fostering meaningful connections. Information sharing was typically gradual, with personal details withheld until trust, compatibility, and perceived safety were established. Rather than treating disclosure as a single decision, participants described it as a continuous process shaped by interaction quality and evolving trust.

Digital platforms played a key role in enabling this form of staged disclosure. Dating applications allowed participants to initially filter potential partners based on indicated preferences, while messaging transitions (e.g., moving from dating apps to private platforms) supported more controlled and secure communication. In some cases, anonymity or partial identity concealment was used strategically to reduce exposure while still enabling relational exploration. These practices illustrate how participants actively structure information flow across platforms to manage risk and maintain agency.

It aligns with broader patterns of disclosure decision-making, where individuals weigh trust, perceived risk, and anticipated responses before revealing personal information.

4.2 Cultural Sensitivities and Strategic Communication

Cultural norms, professional identity, and anticipated social judgment also shaped information management. Participants emphasized that communication strategies varied depending on audience context, particularly in environments where open relationships are likely to be misunderstood or morally evaluated.

In response, participants often simplified explanations, reframed open relationships in more socially acceptable terms, or selectively disclosed information to reduce stigma and misinterpretation. This adaptive communication reflects an awareness that meaning is not only conveyed but also socially interpreted. As such, managing information becomes a negotiation between authenticity and social intelligibility.

Professional identity further intensified these dynamics. Participants working in or aspiring toward professions associated with moral or public accountability expressed heightened caution in disclosure. This demonstrates how information management is not only interpersonal but also institutional, as individuals anticipate how

personal disclosures may affect credibility, reputation, or professional standing.

4.3 Information Management as Coping and Advocacy

Beyond privacy control, information management functioned as both a coping mechanism and a subtle form of advocacy. Participants used selective disclosure, boundary-setting, and narrative framing not only to avoid harm but also to maintain emotional stability in environments where misunderstanding and judgment are common.

At the same time, participants occasionally engaged in active meaning-making by guiding others toward more informed perspectives. This included correcting misconceptions, offering context, and reframing open relationships in ways that emphasize consent, communication, and mutual agreement. In this sense, information management extends beyond individual protection and becomes a way of influencing how knowledge about non-monogamy circulates within social networks.

This highlights information management as a socially embedded practice. It allows individuals to navigate stigma while also contributing, even indirectly, to broader shifts in awareness and understanding. Rather than passively receiving information norms, participants actively negotiate identity and meaning within constrained social contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study began with an interest in the imbalance in how open relationships are understood and discussed in the Philippine context. It shifted the focus from psychological interpretations to the information experiences of individuals in open relationships—how they seek, interpret, share, and manage information in everyday life.

Findings show that information experiences are contextual, dynamic, and deeply personal, shaped by participants' social backgrounds, values, and lived realities. Rather than passively consuming information, participants actively engaged in continuous sense-making, filtering information through personal beliefs, emotions, and social expectations. From initial exposure and interpretation to reflection and application in decision-making, meaning is constructed through ongoing interaction with information. This aligns with Informed Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through meaningful, contextual engagement with information.

A key finding is the role of interactive and anonymous digital platforms as important spaces for information experiences. Platforms such as Reddit serve as alternative knowledge spaces where individuals can safely explore sensitive topics, validate experiences, and access diverse perspectives. In the Philippine context, where discussions of non-monogamy remain limited, these platforms become significant informal information sources. However, they also expose users to misinformation, highlighting the importance of critically evaluating information.

The study also highlights how stigma, religious norms, and family expectations shape how participants access, interpret, and share information. As a result, their practices involve not only information-seeking but also self-protection, selective disclosure, and identity management within broader cultural and relational contexts. Dominant monogamous norms and social stigma continue to limit safe opportunities for discussion and access to reliable information regarding non-monogamous relationships in the Philippines.

Overall, the study shows that the lived realities of individuals in open relationships are fundamentally shaped by information experiences, where meaning is continuously negotiated through engagement with digital platforms, communities, and personal reflection. These experiences help explain the limited and imbalanced public understanding of open relationships in the Philippines, influenced by stigma, restricted discourse, and limited access to reliable information.

Addressing this gap requires more inclusive and supportive information environments. Future research should involve more diverse participants to better capture the complexity of these experiences and further examine how digital platforms shape information behavior in stigmatized contexts, particularly given the study's limited sample and the contextual constraints of Reddit-based netnographic data. Culturally grounded studies are also needed to examine how Filipino values, religious beliefs, and social norms influence these information experiences. In doing so, the study underscores the important role of the information field and information professionals in fostering safe, inclusive, and accessible information environments for individuals navigating stigmatized experiences such as open relationships.

In practice, librarians, educators, and counselors should develop inclusive and context-sensitive information resources. Libraries and educational institutions can serve as safe, inclusive spaces by providing anonymous access to reliable information, curating diverse,

nonjudgmental collections, protecting user privacy, and fostering respectful dialogue through inclusive programs and services. Librarians can further support users by promoting information literacy and creating environments where individuals feel safe seeking information without fear of stigma or discrimination. Collaboration among mental health professionals, educators, and advocacy groups is also essential in supporting the informational, emotional, and social dimensions of these experiences.

In sum, the study highlights how information experiences shape meaning-making, identity formation, and relational decision-making among individuals in open relationships within the Philippine context.

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