

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STUDY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way individuals communicate and interact in everyday life. Social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, and YouTube have become dominant channels through which university students exchange information, build relationships, and express their identities. This study aims to examine the influence of social media use on the communication behavior of university students in Indonesia, with a particular focus on the dimensions of interpersonal communication, language use, and self-disclosure in digital environments. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach through a comprehensive literature review, this research synthesizes findings from various academic journals, institutional reports, and empirical studies. The results indicate that while social media has enhanced the frequency and reach of student communication, it has simultaneously contributed to shifts in communication norms, reduced face-to-face interaction depth, and promoted selective self-presentation. This study concludes that a balanced and critical approach to social media use is essential to maintaining healthy communication behaviors among the younger generation, in alignment with the goal of producing communicatively competent human resources for Indonesia Emas 2045.

Keywords: Social Media, Communication Behavior, University Students, Digital Era, Interpersonal Communication



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INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The emergence of social media as a dominant communication platform has drastically altered the landscape of human interaction in the 21st century. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and YouTube have penetrated all age groups, but their most profound impact is arguably felt among the younger generation, particularly university students. According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII, 2023), internet penetration in Indonesia has reached 78.19%, with the 13-18 and 19-34 age groups representing the largest user demographics.

Communication, as the foundation of social life, has evolved in parallel with technological progress. Traditionally defined as a process of conveying meaning between individuals, communication today encompasses a broad spectrum of digital interactions – from text messages and emoji exchanges to live streaming and short-form video content. These new modalities challenge conventional theories of communication and necessitate a re-examination of how communication behavior is shaped by digital environments.

University students, as the primary agents of social change and future professional communicators, occupy a central position in this discourse. Their daily engagement with social media not only reflects broader societal trends but also shapes their professional and

interpersonal communication competencies. Understanding the nature of this influence is therefore essential for educators, policymakers, and communication practitioners alike.

1.2. Research Questions

- a) How does social media use influence the interpersonal communication behavior of university students?
- b) What patterns of self-disclosure and language use emerge from social media interactions among university students?

1.3. Objectives and Contributions

1.3.1. Objectives

- a) To analyze the influence of social media use on the interpersonal communication behavior of university students.
- b) To identify patterns of language use and self-disclosure in digital communication environments.

1.3.2. Contributions

- a) Contributions to Academia/Future Research. This study provides a conceptual framework for understanding social-media-driven communication shifts among young adults in Indonesia, contributing to the literature on digital communication and media studies.
- b) Contributions to Policy and Program Implementation. The findings offer evidence-based insights for curriculum development in communication science programs and for the design of digital literacy initiatives targeting university students.
- c) Societal and Beneficiary Contributions. By increasing awareness of social media's effects on communication behavior, this study encourages students to develop critical media consumption habits and healthier digital communication practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Communication Behavior

Communication behavior refers to the patterns, habits, and styles individuals employ when transmitting and receiving messages. According to DeVito (2016), human communication is purposeful, adaptive, and deeply embedded in social context. In the digital age, communication behavior has expanded to include asynchronous messaging, non-verbal cues conveyed through visual content, and algorithmically mediated interactions.

Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) suggests that interpersonal relationships develop through progressive self-disclosure, moving from superficial to intimate levels of exchange. In the context of social media, however, this process is often accelerated and paradoxically more selective – users choose what to reveal and what to conceal, constructing curated digital identities rather than authentic representations of self.

2.1.2. Social Media

Social media refers to web-based platforms that enable users to create, share, and engage with user-generated content within virtual social networks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Major platforms used in Indonesia include WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter/X. Each platform facilitates distinct communication patterns: WhatsApp for private messaging, Instagram for visual self-presentation, TikTok for short-form video expression, and Twitter/X for real-time public discourse.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) provides a relevant framework for understanding why university students engage with social media. Students use social media to fulfill specific needs including information seeking, social interaction, entertainment, and identity expression. These motivations directly shape the form and frequency of their communication behavior.

2.2. Review of Empirical Literature

A study by Putri, W. S. R., Nurwati, N., & Budiarti, M. (2016) published in the journal *Prosiding Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat* found that social media significantly influences students' social behavior, including communication patterns. The study noted both positive effects – such as broader social networking and faster information sharing – and negative effects, including reduced face-to-face communication quality.

Research by Nasrullah (2015) in *Media Sosial: Perspektif Komunikasi, Budaya, dan Sosioteknologi* argues that social media has created a new communication culture characterized by hyperpersonal interaction, where mediated messages are often perceived as more intimate than face-to-face exchanges. This phenomenon is particularly evident among young adults who have grown up in a digital-native environment.

Furthermore, Syaibani (2022) conducted a study on TikTok's influence on student communication behavior at Indonesian universities. The findings revealed that exposure to short-form video content has shortened students' attention spans in conventional communication settings while simultaneously enhancing their visual communication and content creation skills.

Based on the reviewed studies, there is a consensus that social media simultaneously enriches and complicates university students' communication behaviors. It expands access and expression while creating new forms of miscommunication, dependency, and identity distortion. Therefore, understanding the nuanced dynamics of this relationship is critical for the communication science discipline.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research and essay writing is a descriptive qualitative method with a literature study approach. According to Creswell (2014), a literature study is a compilation of written materials from journals, books, and other sources that present theories and information from the past and present, and arrange the literature into topics and documents as needed.

The type of research conducted is a literature review study method that focuses on writing results related to the influence of social media on communication behavior. Through this

method, the author collected various secondary data sources from scientific journals, academic articles, official government reports, and publications from national and international institutions discussing the use of social media among university students in Indonesia.

The data and information obtained were then analyzed descriptively to identify patterns of influence between social media use and changes in communication behavior among university students. The analysis focused on three key dimensions: interpersonal communication, language use and transformation, and self-disclosure patterns in digital environments.

This approach was chosen because it allows the author to examine the phenomenon comprehensively through various existing findings, producing an analysis that clearly shows the urgency of promoting digital communication literacy among Indonesian university students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Social Media and Interpersonal Communication

4.1.1. Frequency and Reach of Communication

One of the most consistent findings across the reviewed literature is that social media dramatically increases the frequency of communication among university students. A student who may have limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction can maintain hundreds of active communication relationships through digital platforms. This expanded reach represents a significant positive development, particularly for students in remote areas or those participating in distance learning programs.

However, increased frequency does not necessarily translate to communication quality. Rosen et al. (2013) found that students who reported higher social media use also reported lower quality in their face-to-face interactions, suggesting a displacement effect where digital communication substitutes rather than supplements traditional interaction.

4.1.2. Language Transformation in Digital Communication

Social media has significantly transformed the language patterns of university students. The emergence of internet slang, abbreviations, and emoji as communicative tools represents a new linguistic register that exists alongside — and increasingly intrudes upon — formal communication contexts. Terms such as 'BTW' (by the way), 'FOMO' (fear of missing out), and Indonesian social media slang like 'gabut,' 'kepo,' and 'julid' have entered everyday student discourse.

While this linguistic creativity reflects social media's role as a space for language innovation, it also poses challenges for professional and academic communication. Students who predominantly communicate through abbreviated, informal digital text may struggle to adapt to formal written or oral communication standards required in academic and professional settings.

4.1.3. Self-Disclosure and Identity Construction

Social media platforms encourage selective self-disclosure — the strategic sharing of personal information to manage one's public image. Instagram's culture of curated aesthetics and TikTok's performative communication style exemplify environments where authenticity is often

subordinated to audience perception. Students tend to present idealized versions of themselves, emphasizing positive life events while concealing struggles or failures.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical theory is particularly applicable here: social media platforms function as a 'front stage' where individuals perform for an audience, carefully managing impressions. This selective self-disclosure can create discrepancies between digital and real-world identities, potentially contributing to issues of authenticity and psychological well-being among young communicators.

4.2. Social Media and Communication Competence

Despite the challenges identified above, social media also serves as a training ground for new communication competencies. Students who actively produce content – whether through vlogs, podcasts, written posts, or short videos – develop practical skills in visual communication, audience analysis, message framing, and multimedia storytelling. These competencies are increasingly valued in contemporary media and communication industries.

Moreover, social media facilitates participatory communication, enabling students to engage in public discourse, advocacy, and civic participation. Platforms like Twitter/X and YouTube have democratized access to information and given voice to student perspectives on social, political, and cultural issues. This dimension of social media use aligns with the communicative empowerment goals of communication science education.

CONCLUSION

The pervasive use of social media among Indonesian university students has produced a complex and multifaceted impact on communication behavior. On one hand, social media has expanded the reach, frequency, and creative dimensions of student communication, fostering new competencies in digital and visual communication. On the other hand, it has contributed to shifts in communication norms, a decline in face-to-face interaction quality, language informalization, and the construction of selective digital identities.

The success of communication science education in addressing these challenges depends on the integration of digital media literacy into academic curricula, the promotion of critical media consumption, and the cultivation of adaptive communication skills that function effectively in both digital and conventional contexts. Social media, when used mindfully, holds the potential to become a powerful tool for communication development rather than a force that undermines it.

Thus, the influence of social media on university students' communication behavior is neither wholly negative nor positive – it is a dynamic force that demands informed engagement, critical awareness, and proactive communication education. Strengthening these aspects will be essential for producing communicatively competent graduates who can navigate the demands of Indonesia's digital future and contribute meaningfully to the realization of Indonesia Emas 2045.

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