

# TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL INTERACTION PATTERNS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN TEGAL: A COMPARISON OF OFFLINE AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the transformation of the characteristics and patterns of social interaction among adolescents in Tegal City during the transition from offline to online spaces. The main issue raised is the concern that screen mediation may erode the emotional depth and quality of social interactions. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a comparative study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with informants aged 15–18 years. Analysis was conducted using the Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory framework to examine the adaptation of social cues in the digital world. The results indicate that despite high social media usage duration (>3–4 hours/day), the intensity of substantive communication does not change drastically because adolescents compensate for nonverbal cues through visual symbols such as emojis and stickers. The novelty of this study lies in revealing the formation of hybrid interaction patterns, where local identity (Tegalan Javanese) remains present as a tool for building emotional closeness across both mediums. This study concludes that the digital world functions as a means of relationship maintenance, while physical meetings remain the primary authority in building emotional depth and trust.

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## 1. Introduction

Advances in information and communication technology have fundamentally transformed the way people interact, with social media now serving as the epicenter of this social transformation. As noted by (Suparto, 2021), the times are becoming increasingly advanced, and current information technology has brought about various behavioral changes among the public. The increasing sophistication of technology enables individuals to do many things independently without needing help from others (Lestari & Edy, 2023). The phenomenon of social interaction transformation among adolescents in Indonesia is supported by data on massive internet penetration. According to a report by (APJII, 2025), the adolescent age group classified as Generation Z and Generation Alpha now dominates the national internet user profile, contributing 25.54% and 23.19%, respectively. Meanwhile, according to a report from We Are Social (2025), as of February 2025, 143 million Indonesians (50.2% of the total population) had a social media account, with the average user spending 3 hours and 8 minutes

daily on social media while accessing 7.9 different platforms each month. This transition to the digital space has complex implications that have sparked debate regarding the quality of interpersonal relationships. On one hand, technology expands information networks and facilitates personal development; on the other hand, it has the potential to create emotional distance from individuals in one's immediate surroundings (Ayub & Sulaeman, 2021). This situation is exacerbated by the prevalence of negative social comparisons on social media, which often trigger fluctuations in adolescents' psychological state and mental well-being (Alansari et al., 2026; Tierney et al., 2026).

The urgency of this study stems from a review of various prior studies indicating a research gap regarding adolescents' communication adaptation strategies at the local level. Hanafi, Fitria, and Triristina (2025) explain that the use of the TikTok app has shifted social interaction through mechanisms of self-validation; however, that study still emphasizes the phenomenological aspects of individual identity rather than technical transformations in interpersonal messaging. This aligns with the argument by Arganata and Hamka (2025), who highlight an increase in communication frequency among Generation Z, yet this is accompanied by a decline in face-to-face speaking skills due to reliance on digital symbols such as emojis and memes. Furthermore, Marwanda, Suryani, and Amalia (2025) emphasize that social media has significantly altered students' communication behavior patterns in school, but they have not provided an in-depth explanation of how adolescents balance these disruptions when required to be physically present in a real-world environment. On the other hand, although Rizqi and Rahmawati (2024) successfully demonstrated a link between interaction patterns and self-confidence, their psychological focus left a gap in the comparative analysis of the characteristics of offline and online communication themselves. Geographical disparities were also identified in Rakhmaniar's (2024) study, which quantitatively demonstrated the positive influence of social media on communication skills in major cities, yet did not address the qualitative dimension regarding the role of local identity in satellite cities. Finally, the analysis by Aulia (2024), which notes that adolescent interactions are still influenced by imitation, reinforces that the social environment is highly influential, yet it has not explored how hybrid transformation enables adolescents to nimbly shift their identities between the digital and real worlds.

Based on this literature review, the research gap in this study lies in the limited analysis of how adolescents compensate for the loss of physical cues through hybrid communication strategies that incorporate elements of local identity. There is a lack of discussion regarding the role of Tegal Javanese (Ngapak) in Tegal City as an instrument for building emotional closeness amidst the limitations of digital cues (Fajriah & Ningsih, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the transformation of adolescent communication characteristics through the lens of Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory. This study is expected to make a tangible contribution to the study of hybrid communication and relationship maintenance strategies in an increasingly complex digital era.

## 2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a comparative study method to examine changes in adolescents' interaction patterns in both offline and online settings. This method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how communication behaviors adapt, as observed through the natural perspectives of the research participants.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the following inclusion criteria: adolescents aged 15–18 who reside and attend school in Tegal City, parents, and academics. Based on these criteria, this study involved 18 informants, comprising 4 male adolescents and 4 female adolescents, 8 parents, and 2 academics, to ensure a diversity of gender perspectives regarding patterns of digital interaction.

Given that the participants fall into the adolescent age group (minors under certain regulations), this study adhered to strict ethical standards. Prior to data collection, the researcher conducted an informed consent procedure consisting of two stages: 1) Parental consent, in which the researcher sought permission from the school to interview its students; 2) Participant consent, in which the researcher explained the purpose of the study, guaranteed the anonymity of participants' identities (use of initials), and affirmed the informants' right to withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences. Data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed securely for academic purposes only.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This study found that the transformation of social interactions among adolescents in Tegal City does not follow a pattern of displacement, but rather a complementary hybrid pattern. The main findings regarding the differences in characteristics between the two mediums are summarized in the following table:

**Table 1. A Comparison of the Characteristics of In-Person and Online Interactions Among Adolescents in Tegal City**

DIMENSIONS OF COMPARISON	OFFLINE INTERACTION (FACE-TO-FACE)	ONLINE INTERACTION (SOCIAL MEDIA)
Communication Signals	Rich in Expression: Tone, facial expressions, and natural gestures.	Minimal Cues: Relies on text and visuals.
Signal Compensation	Not required (natural).	High: Use of emojis and stickers.
Emotional Depth	High; feeling more genuinely "heard."	Limited; mostly for casual conversation.
Conflict Resolution	Immediately; for emotional certainty.	Tends to be avoided or postponed.
Language & Identity	Consistently using the Tegal dialect (Ngapak)	Hybrid: A cross between Indonesian and Tegal.

As shown in Table 1, there are striking differences in how adolescents manage conflict and emotions. Although daily time spent on social media is very high—averaging more than 3 to 4 hours—this does not automatically diminish the frequency of in-person interactions. This phenomenon suggests that for adolescents in Tegal, social media functions more as a space for self-expression and relationship maintenance than as a complete substitute for physical interaction.

The lack of cues in online communication, which often leads to emotional misperceptions, is addressed by adolescents through creative cognitive adaptation. In line with the propositions of Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory, adolescents compensate for the absence of nonverbal cues by integrating visual symbols such as emojis and stickers to bring “life” back into conversations. This demonstrates that adolescents are not passive in the face of technological limitations; rather, they actively modify their communication methods to ensure emotional depth is maintained even when they are not physically present.

A unique finding in this study is the persistence of local identity through the use of the Tegalana Javanese dialect (Ngapak) in the digital realm. The use of this dialect serves as a communication strategy to maintain group authenticity and solidarity amidst the tide of digital globalization. Adolescents negotiate their identities with agility; they use formal language in broader contexts, yet revert to their “Ngapak” identity in the private spaces of social media to foster a more intimate sense of “social presence.”

To ensure the objectivity and validity of the findings, this study employed a source triangulation technique by comparing the perspectives of three different groups of informants. This process aimed to verify whether the changes in interaction patterns perceived by adolescents align with the observations of parents at home and teachers in the school setting.

**Table 2. Triangulation Data Synchronization Table**

BEHAVIORAL DIMENSIONS	INTERVIEW FINDINGS (ADOLESCENTS)	COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES (PARENTS & TEACHERS)	ANALYTICAL CONCLUSIONS
Intensity & Frequency	Teenagers claim they still need in-person meetings to maintain their close relationships, even though they are active on social media.	Parents confirm that even though it’s hard to get their children to put down their phones at home, the kids’ desire to go out and meet friends remains strong on the weekends.	Social media serves as a tool for maintaining relationships, but in-person meetings remain the primary social draw.
Digital Compensation	Teens consciously use emojis and stickers to emphasize their feelings and minimize misunderstandings in chat rooms.	The teacher observed that during oral discussions, students were still able to express their emotions effectively, but often referred to digital content as a conversation starter.	A cognitive adaptation occurs in which adolescents are able to integrate digital modalities into their oral communication skills.

Local Identity (Ngapak)	The recognition that the Tegalana dialect is a key tool for creating a warm and relaxed atmosphere on social media.	The teacher noted that in informal conversations at school, students consistently use Tegalana Javanese, demonstrating that local identity has not been eroded by global digital culture.	Tegalana Javanese serves as a symbol of group solidarity that transcends both physical and virtual boundaries.
Digital Distractions (Phubbing)	Complaints have emerged about friends not paying enough attention when hanging out due to distractions from phone notifications.	Parents and teachers have observed a decline in focus or “distractions” among teenagers due to heavy social media use.	The phenomenon of phubbing poses a real challenge in hybrid interaction patterns and can threaten the depth of emotional connection if left unmanaged.

The data in Table 2 above indicate consistency (coherence) between the adolescents' self-reports and the facts observed by those around them. This reinforces the argument that adolescents in Tegal City do not experience social isolation, but are instead practicing a new form of social competence that enables them to balance two worlds simultaneously.

More broadly, the findings of this study confirm the emergence of a new hybrid form of social competence among adolescents in Tegal City. Based on the results of data triangulation in Table 2, a consistency was found between the adolescents' self-reports and the objective observations of parents and teachers. This indicates that adolescents are not merely using technology but are engaging in complex cognitive adaptation to simultaneously balance two distinct communicative realities.

Triangulated data reveals that although adolescents spend a significant amount of time in digital spaces (more than 3–4 hours a day), the desire for in-person gatherings remains high, especially on weekends. This validates the finding that, in studies of contemporary youth, social media is no longer viewed as a replacement for real-world interaction, but rather as a tool for relationship maintenance that sustains connections before they are reaffirmed through face-to-face meetings. The consistent use of the Tegalana Javanese dialect (Ngapak) across both mediums—as confirmed by teachers at school—indicates that local identity acts as an emotional anchor. Within a hybrid communication framework, the local language serves as a symbol of solidarity that mitigates the rigidity of digital mediums, allowing teenagers to remain psychologically “close” even when physically separated.

Field data analysis reveals the phenomenon of “phubbing,” which is acknowledged by adolescents and criticized by those around them. The implication for youth studies is the need for digital literacy that focuses not only on technical skills but also on the ethics of social presence, so that the use of devices does not undermine the emotional depth of in-person interactions. In line with the propositions of SIP Theory, although adolescents are adept at compensating for nonverbal cues through emojis and stickers, triangulated data confirms that

when it comes to trust and conflict resolution, physical meetings still hold the highest authority. Adolescents consciously choose face-to-face communication as the most trustworthy medium to avoid the ambiguities that often arise in text-based communication

Theoretically, these findings expand the field of communication studies by demonstrating that today's adolescents possess the cognitive flexibility to move between media without losing the essence of their social identity. This transformation gives rise to patterns of interaction in which the digital realm serves to maintain the flow of information, while physical spaces remain the center of inner development and meaningful social connections.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the comprehensive comparative analysis conducted, this study has revealed that the transformation of social interactions among adolescents in Tegal City does not lead to the breakdown of social relationships, but rather to the formation of complementary hybrid symbiotic patterns. In this dynamic, the digital space plays a central role as a means of continuously maintaining relationships, while face-to-face interaction retains the highest authority as the center for building trust and fostering genuine emotional depth. Conceptually, these findings enrich the application of Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory by demonstrating that adolescents possess adaptive intelligence in navigating the limitations of digital media through the manipulation of visual symbols. Furthermore, the persistent use of the Tegalalan Javanese language in the cyber realm proves that local cultural identity can function as an emotional anchor that transcends the technical boundaries of screen-based communication.

Although this study provides an in-depth analysis, the researchers acknowledge that it has limitations, particularly regarding its geographical scope, which is focused on the urban area of Tegal City; thus, patterns among adolescents in rural areas or other cities may exhibit different characteristics. Furthermore, the reliance on qualitative methods means this study is not yet capable of capturing macro-level correlations to represent the broader adolescent population in Indonesia, compounded by the age restriction of the informants, which means the dynamics of early adulthood are not fully represented. Therefore, future research is recommended to integrate mixed-methods approaches to statistically measure the impact of digital technology on adolescent empathy, as well as to explore emerging technologies such as Virtual Reality, which may reshape the landscape of hybrid communication in the future. It is also important to begin examining digital ethics education programs to minimize negative impacts such as phubbing behavior, ensuring that adolescents' social competencies are accompanied by respect for others' physical presence.

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