

Social Media Use and Its Impact in Offline Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract. Social media functions as a medium for information dissemination and networking while also impacting interpersonal communication in real life. The phenomenon of social media use contributes to individual perceptions and has implications for offline interpersonal communication patterns. This study aims to describe the role of social media use and its impact in offline interpersonal communication based on usage intensity, ease of communication, interaction quality, relationship closeness, and the impact on face-to-face communication. A descriptive qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing data collection methods that included a literature review and non-participant observation. The findings indicate that instant messaging platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram) tend to foster strong ties through in-depth dialogue and practical coordination. Visual and entertainment-oriented platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) result in weak ties because they encourage superficial and performative interactions aimed at digital identity curation. In offline interpersonal communication, social media acts as a double-edged sword. It facilitates the initiation of physical meetings, but excessive use triggers phubbing behavior which degrades the quality, empathy, and non-verbal cues associated with face-to-face interaction. The study concludes that the effectiveness of social media in supporting offline interpersonal communication depends heavily on self-control and an individual's ability to balance their online and offline presence.

Keywords: *Face-to-Face Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Social Media, Offline Communication, Social Interaction.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Innovations in communication during the digital age have fundamentally transformed the framework of social interaction within global society (Maulida & Winanta, 2021). Humans, being intrinsically social creatures, have moved beyond the dependence on traditional physical environment for communication including exchange messages, ideas, and emotions (Fajriah & Ningsih, 2024). The advent of the internet, followed by the explosion of social media platforms, has redefined the spatial and temporal boundaries of communication. Social media has transformed into a new public sphere where individuals build closeness, affirm their identities, and maintain extensive social networks (Herman, 2024).

Interpersonal communication, once dependent on in-person interactions, has experienced considerable digital transformation. Through various innovative features, social media offers technical ease, allowing individuals to initiate conversations without the social anxiety often associated with direct interaction (Sari, 2017). Geographical barriers have been bridged, enabling the maintenance of long-distance relationships with adaptive emotional intensity through text, stickers, and video calls. This convenient digital ecosystem has indirectly shifted societal perspectives regarding the importance of physical presence in relationships (Suhairi et al., 2023).

However, this shift in interaction patterns toward the digital realm does not eliminate the fundamental human need for offline communication. Face-to-face interaction remains crucial, serving as the ultimate foundation for validating emotional closeness and conveying complete messages (Tania et al., 2021). Within the framework of Indonesian culture, the value of physical togetherness is strongly reflected in the concept of *paguyuban*. It is the traditions

of gathering to promote a feeling of kinship that once relied heavily on face-to-face (offline) physical presence, but has been significantly digitalized. Hence, the current interpersonal relations are characterized by a duality where the ease of interaction through online social media affects the conduct of real-life face-to-face interactions (Olifia et al., 2024).

Empirical studies indicate a troubling social contradiction arising from the overutilization of digital media. In-person conversations are often interrupted by electronics and incessant social media alerts, which detract from the concentration on face-to-face communication (Syahputra, 2024). The practice of disregarding a conversational partner in favor of a mobile device, known as phubbing, has become prevalent in in-person discussions. The fundamental nature of face-to-face interpersonal contact, which should be meaningful, frequently appears empty, shallow, and lacking authentic emotional awareness (Mustofa et al., 2023).

The various social media platforms used by the public possess distinct characteristics, algorithms, and user demographics that influence in-person communication in different ways. Private instant messaging platforms tend to be used primarily for practical coordination, such as planning physical meetups or for maintaining personal intimacy (Permadi & Gifari, 2022). In contrast, visual-centric and open-content platforms often encourage users to focus on curating their digital identities even while physically present in real-world settings. These differing characteristics drive variations in how individuals behave, respond, and balance their offline relationship dynamics (Hasan et al., 2023).

A lack of control over the intensity of social media engagement results in significant distortions in communication. Traditional non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, natural vocal intonation, and micro-expressions during face-to-face interaction, are displaced by the visual stimuli of device screens. This creates a significant challenge regarding the diminished quality of in-person interpersonal communication. Gaining a deep understanding of how these digital media operate and influence physical spaces is crucial for maintaining social balance within the community (Ridho, 2022). Based on this background, this study focuses on how social media platforms and their roles in influencing offline interpersonal communication. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research aims to map how the specific characteristics of each platform shape distinct patterns of offline interpersonal communication. This framework aims to delineate explicit guidelines for effective social media use, ensuring that technology enhances genuine relational intimacy instead of hindering face-to-face connections.

B. METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of social media and its impact in offline interpersonal communication (Rukin, 2019). This approach was chosen to allow the researcher to authentically describe the phenomena, interaction traits, and shifts in face-to-face communication patterns influenced by digital technology use. Data collection involved two primary techniques: a literature review and non-participant observation. The literature review was used to gather, examine, and synthesize data from various scholarly journals, books, and academic documents relevant to the dynamics of online-offline communication. Meanwhile, observation was conducted directly in public spaces to observe the behaviors, gestures, and physical interaction patterns of social media users during face-to-face encounters.

The data analysis process was conducted in an interactive and continuous manner, adhering to qualitative analysis techniques that encompass data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on comparing the characteristics of several social media platforms popular among the public. This comparison was assessed qualitatively based on five key indicators: platform usage intensity, the ease of communication offered, the

quality of resulting interactions, the closeness of personal relationships formed, and the tangible impact on offline interpersonal communication. Through source and data triangulation, all gathered information was synchronized to derive objective and comprehensive conclusions regarding the effect of social media comparison on offline interpersonal communication.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Characteristics Social Media Platforms in Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication nowadays is closely tied to the influence of the foundational technical framework. Each social media platform that becomes popular possesses unique algorithms, user interfaces, and technical attributes (Zubek et al., 2022). These distinctions immediately shape distinctive digital ecosystems, eventually influencing how people perceive connections, transmit messages and build emotional closeness.

Based on literature reviews and in-depth observations, private instant messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp and Telegram, dominate the landscape of daily usage. The defining characteristic of this type of social media is its emphasis on direct, private, and text- or voice-oriented interpersonal communication. These platforms do not require users to constantly produce public content. It emphasizes the effective transmission of information among individuals or within small groups of acquaintances in the real world (Shabani & Keshavarz, 2022).

The ease of communication offered by instant messaging platforms is exceptionally high due to their hybrid nature, combining synchronous and asynchronous communication. Individuals have choice to respond to messages instantly or delay their replies without losing the conversational context. This convenience mitigates psychological barriers, such as the social anxiety often associated with face-to-face interaction. Features like read receipts (blue ticks) and online status indicators also provide senders with a sense of psychological reassurance regarding the continuity of the interaction (Birnholtz, 2010).

Interactions facilitated by instant messaging platforms tend to maintain a relatively stable level of emotional depth. This is attributed to the focused nature of the communication, which is largely free from the distractions of external content or intrusive advertisements. Private chat spaces allow individuals to freely explore topics that are more sensitive, personal, and profound (Trepte, 2020). These spaces serve as secure digital channels for sharing stories, offering emotional support, and resolving conflicts, all without the pressure of public judgment.

The relationships nurtured through these platforms typically involve strong ties, such as those between family members, romantic partners, or close friends. This type of social media acts as a tool for relationship maintenance, ensuring that communication continues despite the busyness of daily life (O'Hara, 2014). Due to functionalities such as video conferencing and the immediate sharing of multimedia files, physical distance is no longer a considerable obstacle to maintaining the intimacy of emotional connections established in the physical realm.

Transitioning to visually-oriented, open public platforms such as Instagram results in a significant alteration in the nature of engagement. Instagram prioritizes visual aesthetics, photo curation, and short-form videos (reels) as its main forms of interaction (Rogers, 2021). The platform is far more dynamic and accessible. Interaction occurs not only among friends but also involve acquaintances or casual followers (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016).

The motivation for using these visual platforms is no longer solely focused on interpersonal message exchange but rather on fulfilling the need for social recognition and self-presentation. Users tend to focus on curating the best aspects of their lives for display on their feeds. This behavior creates a performative communication dynamic, where messages are often

carefully crafted to cultivate a specific self-image for a broader audience (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Chiu & Yuan, 2021).

Although these visual platforms are proficient in the broader dissemination of information, the interpersonal communication within them tends to be superficial. Interactions are often reduced into simplistic digital icon, such as hitting the 'like' button, reacting quickly to a 'story' with an emoji, or posting brief comments. This form of communication preserves a person's social vitality while reducing the profundity of meaning in interpersonal exchanges (Sutikno et al., 2016).

The quality of interaction resulting from such symbolic communication patterns is generally superficial. Relationships formed often fall into the trap of pseudo-partnerships, where individuals feel a sense of closeness to others' lives due to frequent exposure to their posts, despite never engaging in genuine, deep conversations. The bonds established are more visual-cognitive than emotional-psychological, making them prone to creating perceptual biases regarding the true nature of the relationship.

The relational closeness dominating these visual platforms is categorized as weak ties. While these platforms are highly effective for expanding social networks, building professional connections, and monitoring emerging social trends, it lacks the capacity to provide an intimate space for fostering long-term relationship commitments (Chiu & Yuan, 2021). Relationships relying heavily on interactions within these platforms tend to be fragile due to the lack of substantial emotional investment between individuals.

Meanwhile, short-form video entertainment platforms like TikTok shift the characteristics of interpersonal communication toward greater fragmentation. Interactions on these platforms are heavily driven by recommendation algorithms, known as For You Page (FYP), based on interests rather than personal friendship networks. Interpersonal communication within this context is typically triggered by shared audio trends or video challenges, rendering the interactions highly situational and short-lived (Klug et al., 2021).

The ease of communication on TikTok stems from the platform's ability to facilitate creative responses to others' content via duet or stitch features. However, these features tend to foster a series of one-way responses rather than intimate, reciprocal dialogue. The quality of interpersonal interaction remains low because user attention is rapidly diverted by the constant stream of subsequent content served by the platform's algorithm (Isnaini, 2024).

Relationships initiated through these short-form video platforms are almost entirely based on fleeting digital interests and rarely evolve into solid personal connections in the real world. The communication established is limited to appreciating the creativity or entertainment value of the content presented. This suggests that in the realm of interpersonal communication, such platforms serve primarily as vehicles for entertainment-oriented diversion rather than as tools for cultivating relationships (Söğüt, 2022).

The fundamental differences between these platforms reveal a stratification of roles adopted by individuals in managing their social lives. Whether consciously or not, individuals have compartmentalized the functions of these platforms to address distinct emotional needs. WhatsApp serves as a stronghold for preserving the core of personal relationships. Instagram acts as a showcase for displaying one's social presence, and TikTok is utilized as an entertainment outlet free from the burdens of social attachment.

The technical characteristics of each social media platform inherently shape the structure of intimacy, usage intensity, and message quality in online interpersonal communication. Understanding these differing characteristics provides a crucial foundation to analyze how these varied forms of digital social capital transform when confronted with the realities of offline, face-to-face communication in subsequent discussions.

Table 1. Social Media Platform Characteristics in Interpersonal Communication

Comparison Indicators	WhatsApp/Telegram (Instant Messaging)	Instagram (Visual-Based)	TikTok (Short Video-Based)
Nature of Interaction Space	Private, closed, and personal.	Public/Semi-public, open, and performative.	Public, highly open, and interest-algorithm driven.
Usage Intensity	Very High (Used constantly throughout the day).	High (Used periodically to monitor timelines/stories).	High (Dominated by passive content consumption duration).
Ease of Communication	Highly Practical (Flexible between synchronous and asynchronous).	Practical (Focused on quick reactions to visual content).	Fragmented (Easier to respond via content replication than direct text).
Quality of Interaction	Deep (Focused on substantive and emotional dialogue).	Superficial (Dominated by digital symbols like likes & emoticons).	Very Low (One-way interaction and short-lived duration).
Relationship Closeness	Strong Ties (Family, romantic partners, close friends).	Weak Ties (Broad network, followers, acquaintances).	Transient Ties (Strangers sharing temporary content interests).
Primary Focus/Motive	Relationship retention and practical coordination.	Self-presentation, digital identity curation, and recognition.	Entertainment consumption, creative expression, and trend-seeking.

Sources: Data processing results

2. The Impact of Social Media Use on the Offline Interpersonal Communication

The role of social media in offline interpersonal communication cannot be viewed in black-and-white terms. It must be seen as a dynamic, double-edged sword. On one hand, digital platforms act as facilitators that bridge physical meetings by streamlining the coordination of time and space. On the other hand, the cumulative intensity of device usage brought into face-to-face settings transforms into a major source of distraction, reducing the essence of intimacy in real-world social interactions. This duality of roles underlies the complex shifts in interpersonal communication behavior observed in modern society.

As a facilitator, social media has proven to make a significant positive contribution to initiating offline gatherings. Features such as live location sharing, group chats, and easy access to information about meeting venues make planning physical interactions far more efficient. Social media also serves as a medium for accumulating social capital, allowing individuals to maintain low-effort communication with their networks of friends (Liu, 2016). When face-to-face meetings finally occur, information previously monitored via digital timelines often helps break the ice and provides instant conversation starters.

Although social media aids in the commencement of meetings, it frequently skews the nature of the interactions that occur in physical environments. Even when individuals share the same physical space, the allure of their device screens is frequently stronger than the physical presence of their conversation partners. This phenomenon creates a scene where a group of

people sitting together at a table, yet each individual is engrossed in their own screen. What should be a space for intimate exchange transforms into a collection of simultaneous, digitally isolated experiences

The phenomenon of ignoring a conversation partner in favor of interacting with a device is known academically as phubbing (phone-snubbing). Phubbing has been assimilated as a habitual behavior sometimes regarded as commonplace, notwithstanding its mentally detrimental effects (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). When one partner participates in phubbing, the ignored individual experiences a diminished sense of being valued, a subtle form of social rejection, and reduced comfort in communication. These psychological barriers gradually create an emotional divide, rendering the flow of offline interpersonal communication stiff and obstructed.

The most tangible consequence of widespread phubbing and digital dependency is a drastic decline in the quality of face-to-face interactions. Ideal face-to-face communication requires the full engagement of the senses to grasp a message in its entirety. When an individual's attention is divided by social media notifications, their cognitive capacity for active listening diminishes significantly (Schmidt et al., 2022). Responses from those distracted by their devices tend to be sluggish, disjointed, or limited to brief murmurs that signal a lack of focus.

This fragmentation of attention caused by digital stimuli leads to a loss of sensitivity toward traditional nonverbal cues. In interpersonal communication theory, nonverbal signals such as sustained eye contact, changes in vocal intonation, hand gestures, and micro-expressions play great role in successful message delivery than verbal (Croes, 2020). When a person's attention is often directed toward a smartphone screen, these nuanced emotional signals remain overlooked. A true sympathetic bond does not completely flourish in face-to-face interactions.

The loss of nonverbal cues and empathetic depth ultimately renders face-to-face communication superficial (Chotpitayasunondh & Douglas, 2016). Offline conversations tend to revolve around light, repetitive, and mechanical topics. Individuals lose the capacity or desire to engage in discussions requiring deep reflection, emotional problem-solving, or the building of serious interpersonal commitments. Physical gatherings originally intended to foster emotional closeness, often devolve into bland social routines devoid of substantive meaning.

Specific platform characteristics further exacerbate this degradation of offline interpersonal communication. Users of visual-centric platforms like Instagram often become trapped in a performative need to curate real-life moments for digital content. Instead of enjoying the interaction with their companions, individuals are frequently preoccupied with photographing food, recording the atmosphere, or repeatedly taking selfies to upload to their social media stories. This act of curating one's digital identity within the physical realm consumes time that should otherwise be dedicated to intimate storytelling.

Such performative behavior gives rise to a new form of alienation known as pseudo-existence in the physical world. Individuals may feel they have engaged in high-quality social interaction simply because they shared a physical space and posted the moment online. In reality, however, the communication occurring during content creation is often minimal, dominated instead by anxiety regarding the judgment of digital followers or the "Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)". This illustrates how digital reality has colonized and dictated human behavior within physical reality.

Individuals with high levels of self-control can significantly mitigate the negative impacts of social media. These individuals are capable of enforcing firm digital boundaries during face-to-face interactions, such as turning their devices face-down, activating silent

mode, or agreeing to a no-device rule for the duration of the meeting. In such cases, the richness of face-to-face communication, defined by depth, empathy and responsiveness, can best be kept in the physical sphere, when digital technology is effectively demoted to being a basic instrument for initial coordination.

The dynamic is driven by the individual's technological literacy abilities and psychological maturity in managing the borders between the online and offline worlds (Papaioannou, 2011). Social media does not inherently undermine face-to-face communication rather the damage stems from a human inability to manage addiction to the instant gratification offered by platform algorithms. When individuals use social media with a clear sense of purpose, the technology remains a servant to real-world relationships rather than a master controlling their human interactions.

D. CONCLUSION

Each social media platform possesses unique technical characteristics and social functions that shape the stratification of interpersonal communication patterns. Private instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram serve as effective digital spaces for maintaining long-term relationships and nurturing strong ties through in-depth dialogue and practical coordination. Visual- and entertainment-oriented platforms such as Instagram and TikTok tend to foster performative and superficial communication, dominated by the curation of digital identities, the pursuit of social recognition, and network expansion via weak ties. These platform-specific characteristics constitute the initial social capital for individuals before engaging in direct and real-world interaction. The impact of social media on the offline interpersonal communication is conditional and dualistic. On one hand, social media acts as a positive facilitator, easing the initiation of physical meetings and alleviating initial awkwardness. On the other hand, excessive device usage in physical settings triggers phubbing, a phenomenon that drastically diminishes the quality of face-to-face interactions. It reduces sensitivity to nonverbal cues, and emotional depth between individuals. The effectiveness of digital technology in supporting real-world relationships hinges heavily on self-control, usage patterns, and an individual's ability to balance online presence with a commitment to being fully present during offline interactions.

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