

Communication Technology in Building the Participation of Purwokerto Youth in Social and Religious Activities

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ABSTRACT: The development of communication technology has brought significant changes to the pattern of youth participation, including in Purwokerto, where social media and instant messaging applications are the main means of supporting social and religious activities. This study aims to understand how communication technology is used by Purwokerto adolescents in building socio-religious participation, as well as the driving and inhibiting factors they face. Using a qualitative approach of case studies, data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and digital documentation analysis. The results show that social media facilitates the rapid dissemination of information, coordination, and mobilization of participation and expands the reach of activities. Adolescents are not only recipients of information, but also content producers and organizers of activities, according to the perspective of mass communication theory and uses and gratifications. This phenomenon is in line with the theory of digital civic participation that emphasizes the role of social media as a new public space for adolescents. However, this study also found challenges in the form of misinformation, information saturation, and digital literacy inequality. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy and communication ethics is an important aspect so that communication technology can function optimally in building adolescents' social and religious participation in a positive and sustainable manner.

KEYWORDS: Communication Technology, Youth Participation, Social Media, Social Activities, Religious

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology in the last two decades has changed the face of social interaction of the younger generation in Indonesia, including youth communities in medium-sized cities such as Purwokerto. Easier access to the internet and social media platforms has made digital communication an integral part of adolescent life; daily activities, learning, and involvement in social and religious activities are now taking place or at least mediated by communication technology (Purboningsih et al., 2023). This change is not only technical from face-to-face but also brings about a substantial transformation in patterns of participation: the way adolescents recognize, mobilize, and shape meaning over social activities and religious rituals. This transformation presents significant opportunities to expand the reach of participation as well as new challenges related to the quality of participation and digital literacy.

At the theoretical level, understanding adolescent participation through the lens of communication technology needs to combine mass communication theory, uses and gratifications theory, and digital civic participation theory. Social media and instant messaging apps provide channels that allow teens to become not only consumers of information, but also content producers, event organizers, and social network facilitators who support collective action. This phenomenon can be seen from the practice of young people who form groups to raise aid, organize social services, or conduct religious recitation and study online, activities that previously required a formal institutional structure can now be driven by their own networks of teenagers (Wahyuningroem & Sirait, 2024). Thus, communication technology serves a dual function: as a technical infrastructure and as a social arena in which collective identities and collective actions are formed.

However, these opportunities do not necessarily guarantee meaningful participation. Research on adolescent digital literacy shows a variation in critical skills in using technology: some adolescents are able to utilize digital platforms to organize social activities and deepen religious understanding, while others are vulnerable to misleading information or superficial religious practices due to a lack of verification skills and media literacy (Setiadi et al., 2023). In the context of Purwokerto, where mobile internet access is relatively good but formal digital literacy programs may not be evenly distributed, this suggests the need for interventions that go beyond the mere provision of access, namely strengthening adolescents' capacity to assess sources, moderate discussions, and develop inclusive and ethical narratives of activities.

The social dimension of youth participation is also changing technology shortens the distance between actors and facilitates collaboration across schools, Islamic boarding schools, and youth organizations. Platforms such as Instagram,

WhatsApp, and YouTube serve as new public spaces where activity announcements, social action documentation, and the dissemination of religious materials can be quickly accessed by youth networks. This speed and visibility provide practical benefits (e.g., faster recruitment of volunteers), but at the same time put pressure on the quality of content and action intentions whether activities are carried out for substantial reasons or simply for the sake of digital "engagement" (Purboningsih et al., 2023). Therefore, evaluation of the effectiveness of adolescent participation must consider both aspects: quantity (how much is involved) and quality (how meaningful the contribution is to the community).

The religious context adds its own complexity. In Indonesia, digital religious practices including online recitation, da'wah through short video content, and religious discussion forums on social media have grown rapidly, especially after the pandemic. Teenagers as a digitally literate generation actively participate in and produce religious content; they also form virtual communities that share religious practices and spiritual reflection (Oktafiani, 2024). The process of learning religion through digital media can enrich insights if the sources are credible, but at the same time it opens up gaps for fragmented interpretations due to the loss of traditional authority and the filtering of communities that are common in face-to-face forums. For Purwokerto adolescents, the integration of technology in religious practices has the potential to expand access to non-formal religious education and strengthen social solidarity networks, as long as it is accompanied by adequate literacy.

The link between social and religious participation is also prominent: many social initiatives are driven by young religious organizations, such as mosque-based social services, campus blood donation programs driven by religious organization administrators, or solidarity movements in times of disaster. Communication technology facilitates the coordination and documentation of these activities, encourages transparency, facilitates fundraising, and increases accountability through digital reporting so that adolescent participation becomes more visible and measurable (Wahyuningroem & Sirait, 2024). However, digital mechanisms can also accelerate the spread of sensational content that shifts the focus of action from a social goal to an image of an individual or group; Therefore, concern for digital ethics and action goals is crucial.

The local cultural aspects of Purwokerto influence how technology is adopted by teenagers. Medium-sized cities like Purwokerto have unique social dynamics: proximity between residents tends to be high, but access to digital capacity building programs may not be equal across the region. This creates a hybrid pattern: some teens are active on national/global digital platforms, while others rely more on local and face-to-face networks. Participatory strengthening strategies must understand these differences—combining digital training with a community approach that values local culture and structure so that digital initiatives are not alienating but empower local youth networks (Setiadi et al., 2023).

Policies and the role of stakeholders are important variables. Local governments, schools, Islamic boarding schools, and youth organizations can facilitate synergy between technology and youth participation through digital literacy programs, assistance in the healthy use of social media, and collaboration platforms for social and religious activities. Such programs need to be designed participatory, involving adolescents as designers rather than just beneficiaries, so that the resulting solutions are relevant to their needs and styles. The experience of empowerment programs in several areas shows that when adolescents are involved in communication design, the level of ownership and sustainability of participation increases significantly (Setiadi et al., 2023; Wahidah, 2022).

The challenge that should not be ignored is the risk of false information, polarization, and the misuse of digital platforms to spread hate speech or extreme religious interpretations. Adolescents as active users of social media are often vulnerable targets of misinformation; Without verification skills, they can engage in narratives that undermine social cohesion. Therefore, digital literacy is not only a technical skill, but also communication ethics and critical assessment of the ability to distinguish sources, understand the context of messages, and weigh the social impact of information dissemination (Wahidah, 2022). In Purwokerto, this kind of prevention effort needs to be combined with a space for intergenerational dialogue so that local and religious values remain a balance.

To realize the positive potential of communication technology in building youth participation, this study needs to identify the drivers and inhibitors at the individual, community, and policy levels. At the individual level: technical ability, motivation, and availability of time. At the community level: family support, the role of religious leaders, and networks of youth organizations. At the policy level: digital infrastructure, literacy programs, and social media regulation. This combination of analysis will help design holistic interventions, such as digital literacy training programs that are integrated into the activities of youth organizations and Islamic boarding schools, or local platforms that connect adolescent socio-religious initiatives with urban resources (Purboningsih et al., 2023; Setiadi et al., 2023). The development of communication technology opens up great opportunities to enrich the social and religious participation of adolescents in Purwokerto provided that there is serious attention to strengthening digital literacy, communication ethics, and community-based program design. When adolescents are empowered not only as users but also as communication designers, technology can be a tool of social transformation that strengthens solidarity, expands access to religious education, and increases collective capacity to act for the common good. This study seeks to examine in depth how communication technology affects the participation patterns of Purwokerto adolescents, so that the resulting policy recommendations and practices can be relevant, safe, and empowering.

II. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth how communication technology plays a role in building the participation of Purwokerto adolescents in social and religious activities. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and meanings built by adolescents in their participatory activities. Qualitatively, researchers can uncover social and religious dynamics that cannot be reduced to numbers, but must be understood through narratives, interactions, and the context of daily life (Creswell & Poth, 2020).

The type of research used is a case study. Purwokerto was chosen as the research location because it has the characteristics of a medium-sized city with a large adolescent population and diverse socio-religious dynamics. Through case studies, researchers can describe the phenomenon in detail and contextually, as well as see the relationship between the use of communication technology and adolescent participation patterns. The case studies in this study are not intended to be broad generalizations, but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of local practices that can be the basis for theoretical and policy development (Yin, 2021).

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with adolescents who were active in social and religious activities, both offline and online. Observation is used to see firsthand the interaction patterns of adolescents in utilizing communication technology, such as the use of social media to organize activities or disseminate religious information. Documentation in the form of social media uploads, digital pamphlets, and recordings of activities will also be analyzed to enrich the data. The combination of these three techniques allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. At the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were sorted according to research themes, such as the form of participation, motivation, the role of technology, and the challenges faced by adolescents. The presentation stage is carried out in the form of a descriptive narrative that connects field findings with a theoretical framework. Meanwhile, conclusions were drawn reflexively by paying attention to the relationship between data and referring to the purpose of the research to explain the role of communication technology in building the participation of Purwokerto adolescents in social and religious activities (Creswell & Poth, 2020; Scott, 2022).

To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses source and method triangulation techniques. Data from interviews will be compared with observation and documentation results, so that stronger validity of findings is obtained. In addition, the researcher also conducted a member check by asking participants to reconfirm the results of the interview so that the interpretation was in accordance with their original experience. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to make an academic and practical contribution in understanding the role of communication technology for adolescents' participation in social and religious activities.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on how communication technology is used by Purwokerto adolescents in building participation in social and religious activities. The results of the study show that social media, instant messaging applications, and other digital platforms are the main instruments in organizing activities, disseminating information, and expanding adolescent involvement in public spaces. Based on field data, adolescents not only use communication technology as a means of entertainment, but also as a medium of active participation to support social solidarity and strengthen their religious identity.

One of the participants, AR (18 years old), who is active in mosque youth activities, said: "If there is a recitation or social service activity, we usually immediately make a digital flyer, which continues to be distributed through WhatsApp and Instagram. From there, friends came to know, even sometimes those who didn't participate at first came because they saw it on social media." This statement shows that communication technology has served as a medium of mass communication that reaches a wider audience, while encouraging participation mobilization.

The results of the observation also show that adolescents are more responsive to information that is packaged visually and attractively. For example, activity invitations created with simple graphic design through the Canva app are more likely to be distributed and responded to by peers. This is in line with the theory of mass communication which states that the media has the power to influence in spreading messages and shaping public opinion (McQuail, 2010). Teenagers not only become recipients of messages, but also content producers who actively distribute information.

Within the framework of the theory of uses and gratifications, the motivation for the use of communication technology by Purwokerto adolescents is divided into several aspects: first, to obtain information about social and religious activities; second, to establish social interaction with the community; and third, to strengthen religious identity and self-existence in the digital space. Another participant, NF (20 years old), said: "I feel more confident if I can post social activities on Instagram, for example when participating in takjil or community service. It makes other friends also enthusiastic because they see firsthand that we really participate in positive activities." This statement reflects that satisfaction is obtained not only in the form of entertainment, but also social recognition and a sense of meaning.

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In addition, the digital participation carried out by Purwokerto teenagers is closely related to the theory of digital civic participation. Teenagers use social media as an alternative space to channel ideas, invite others to join, and discuss social and religious issues. Observations show that the WhatsApp and Telegram groups of the mosque youth community are often an arena for discussion about social activities, ranging from fundraising for disaster victims, to planning study events. As expressed by participant RA (19 years old): "If there is a disaster, for example a flood, we usually make donations through groups. From there we can collect funds and continue to report through Instagram stories so that it is transparent. So, people know what the money is used for."

This phenomenon indicates that communication technology is not only an information tool, but also an instrument of accountability and transparency of social participation. In the framework of digital civic participation theory, what Purwokerto do can be understood as a form of expanding public space where social-religious activities are no longer limited to physical space but are also present in digital space.

The results of the interviews also show that the speed and flexibility of communication technology are important factors that drive participation. For example, one of the participants, IS (22 years old), stated: "In the past, if there was an activity, we had to meet first, wait for everyone to gather. Now all you have to do is create an online group, everyone can immediately give their opinions. So, it's faster and easier to coordinate." This statement shows that communication technology facilitates collective participation through ease of coordination and collaboration.

However, this study also found challenges in the use of communication technology. Some teenagers mentioned that there was saturation due to too much information, as well as obstacles related to hoaxes or misinformation. DN participant (18 years old) said: "Sometimes there is information that is not clear from the source, for example about religious activities. If we don't check first, we can misunderstand." This shows that digital literacy is an important aspect so that participation built through communication technology remains productive and does not cause disinformation.

In addition, observations show that there is an imbalance in participation among adolescents. Teens who are more active on social media tend to have greater influence in organizing activities, while teens who are less digitally literate are more likely to be passive followers. This phenomenon is in line with the findings in the theory of uses and gratifications that the choice of media is highly dependent on the needs and ability of individuals to use it. Thus, the use of communication technology is not always evenly distributed, but is influenced by literacy, access, and personal motivation factors.

Overall, the results of this study show that communication technology has become an important instrument in building the participation of Purwokerto adolescents. Through social media and digital platforms, adolescents can disseminate information, strengthen social interactions, affirm religious identity, and contribute to social activities more broadly. However, this participation also requires good digital literacy so that the use of technology remains positive, transparent, and inclusive.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that communication technology plays a central role in building the participation of Purwokerto youth in social and religious activities. Through social media, instant messaging apps, and other digital platforms, teens are able to organize activities faster, disseminate information widely, and encourage greater engagement. These findings are in line with mass communication theory that emphasizes the role of the media in influencing public opinion and shaping participation patterns. From the perspective of uses and gratifications theory, the use of communication technology by adolescents is not only aimed at obtaining entertainment, but also to meet the needs of information, social interaction, and self-recognition. Participation in social and religious activities gives them a sense of meaning while strengthening their personal and group identity. This is clear from the interview excerpts that show the pride of teenagers when sharing positive activities in the digital space.

Meanwhile, the theory of digital civic participation helps explain how social media has become a new public space that allows adolescents to channel ideas, invite others to join, and rally social solidarity. Activities such as online donations, fundraising, or the publication of religious studies show that adolescent participation is not limited to physical space but also develops in the digital space with the principles of accountability and transparency. However, this study also confirms that there are challenges in the form of information saturation, potential hoaxes, and digital literacy inequality among adolescents. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy is an important aspect so that communication technology can really be used optimally to build positive social and religious participation. In other words, communication technology not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a medium for empowering adolescents in social and religious life in Purwokerto.

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