

## Communication Patterns of Deaf Families on TikTok: The Relationship of CODA and the Representation of Deaf Culture

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to examine the communication patterns between Deaf parents and their hearing children (CODA) as represented in TikTok video content, with a particular focus on the account *@jennifernatalie\_*. Employing Klaus Krippendorff's qualitative content analysis approach and guided by the Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP) theory by Koerner & Fitzpatrick, this research identifies forms of multimodal communication, family communication patterns, and the presence of social inclusivity within parenting practices of persons with disabilities. It also explores how digital interactions function as spaces for articulating values of social inclusion. The findings reveal a dominant presence of pluralistic and consensual communication patterns, alongside the extensive use of multimodal communication. The analysis further highlights key values of inclusivity, such as emotional well-being, access to information, and equitable participation. TikTok is shown to be a representative medium for constructing positive narratives about families with disabilities.

**KEYWORDS:** Family Communication Patterns, Disability Parenting, CODA, Multimodality, Social Inclusion, TikTok

### I. INTRODUCTION

Family communication is a fundamental element in the formation of relationships and emotional development within the household environment. Interactions between parents and children, as well as among other family members, function not only as a means of information exchange but also as a medium for identity formation, the negotiation of social roles, and the reinforcement of family values. In families with members who have disabilities—particularly Deaf parents—communication dynamics become more complex due to the use of modalities that differ from those of the hearing majority. Deaf parents often face a range of social, cultural, and structural barriers that restrict their full participation as individuals capable of parenting and making decisions within the family. Previous literature indicates that parents with disabilities are frequently positioned as individuals in need of assistance, rather than as autonomous and competent caregivers (Knight, 2018). The relationship between Deaf parents and their hearing children, known as CODA (Children of Deaf Adults), illustrates a unique communication situation. CODA children grow up navigating two cultural worlds: Deaf culture, which emphasizes visual expression and sign language, and the dominant hearing culture that prevails socially and institutionally. In practice, communication patterns within these families are shaped not only by linguistic factors but also by the broader social structures that accompany the parents' disability status. Several studies have shown that in social interactions, CODA children are often positioned as interpreters for their parents, which can lead to psychological burdens and imbalances in family roles (Setyaningsih, Utari, & Satyawan, 2024).

On the other hand, the development of digital technology and the rise of social media have revolutionized how individuals and families represent themselves and build communication. Platforms like TikTok—with its short-form audiovisual videos and inclusive interactive features—enable Deaf individuals to express messages more freely using sign language, facial expressions, and other visual elements. TikTok functions not only as a space for entertainment but also as a venue for identity construction, cultural representation, and advocacy for social inclusion. This aligns with the concept of user-generated content, which empowers users—especially those from marginalized or minority groups—to present their authentic perspectives. In this context, the TikTok account of Jennifer Natalie (*@jennifernatalie\_*) serves as a representative case of disabled parenting in the digital sphere. Jennifer Natalie is a Deaf mother who has been actively producing content since 2019. Through her account, she shares various aspects of her life, including her parenting of a hearing child, family dynamics, sign language education, and campaigns for Deaf culture awareness. These contents reflect an effort toward identity affirmation and a positive, empowered representation of Deaf families in the broader digital public sphere. Given her substantial following and consistent content production, this account is a suitable subject for examining the communication patterns established between Deaf parents and hearing children in the digital age. Despite the increased visibility of Deaf families on social media, academic studies that deeply analyze communication patterns in digital

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content remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Previous research has primarily focused on face-to-face communication or linguistic aspects alone, without considering the social and digital media dimensions that influence and reflect family communication patterns. Herein lies the significance of using Krippendorff's (2018) qualitative content analysis, which allows for the interpretation of meaning through symbols, expressions, and interactions within digital contexts. Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize frequency, the qualitative method centers on how messages are constructed, interpreted, and contextualized.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of Family Communication Patterns (FCP), developed by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2006), offers a conceptual approach for understanding family communication dynamics based on two main dimensions: conversation orientation (the degree of openness in discussing various topics) and conformity orientation (the emphasis on uniformity in attitudes and values). Through this lens, the communication patterns in Jennifer Natalie's TikTok content can be analyzed to determine whether the interactions are more aligned with consensual, pluralistic, protective, or laissez-faire styles. This analysis aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Deaf-hearing family communication patterns are constructed and represented in digital media. This study is also closely related to the issue of social inclusion. Referring to the inclusive development framework for persons with disabilities developed by The SMERU Research Institute (2020), there are five main indicators: (1) access to services, (2) well-being and autonomy, (3) self-awareness and self-acceptance, (4) participation in social and family life, and (5) equitable environments and policies. These indicators can be observed through TikTok content that showcases how Deaf mothers like Jennifer Natalie fulfill their parenting roles, manage emotions, educate children, and build social interactions in digital spaces. Thus, this research is not only relevant to the fields of family communication and digital media studies, but it also contributes to the discourse on disability empowerment and inclusive practices in the digital society. Based on this background, the research seeks to answer the following central question: How are communication patterns between Deaf parents and hearing children represented on the TikTok account @jennifernatalie\_? The primary focus is on the emerging interaction patterns in the video content, the communication modalities employed, and how values of inclusivity and disability empowerment are visually and narratively represented on social media platforms.

## II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis methodology as outlined by Klaus Krippendorff. The research object consists of 60 curated videos selected from three main playlists on the TikTok account @jennifernatalie\_: "Doa Joshua," "Mom & Son," and "Bahasa Isyarat" (Sign Language).

The categories of analysis include: 1) communication patterns based on the Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP) theory, 2) values of social inclusion as informed by the SMERU framework, and; 3) communication modalities, encompassing verbal, nonverbal, and signed forms of expression.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Family Communication Patterns

Family communication patterns refer to a system shaped by two primary orientations in interactions among family members: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. According to Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2006), conversation orientation reflects the extent to which families encourage openness, verbal participation, and the free exchange of ideas among members, regardless of age or authority status. In contrast, conformity orientation refers to the degree to which families emphasize shared values, beliefs, and expectations, as well as adherence to familial authority. These orientations form the basis for four distinct family types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire.

### Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities

In the context of Deaf mothers and hearing children, disabled parenting highlights the practice of multimodal communication, the use of sign language, and the capacity to build cohesive emotional bonds with hearing children (CODA). Multimodal disabled parenting refers to a caregiving approach employed by parents with disabilities—especially Deaf parents—who communicate through multiple simultaneous modes. In Deaf-hearing families, communication occurs not only through spoken or written language but also through hand gestures (sign language), facial expressions, body movements, touch, written text, and visual symbols. This multimodal strategy reflects both adaptation and agency in overcoming communicative and cultural boundaries within the family.

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### IV. FINDINGS

#### A. Variations in Family Communication Patterns in CODA Families: A Theoretical Analysis Based on the Family Communication Patterns Theory

Based on the coding of 60 videos, the most dominant communication patterns identified were pluralistic and consensual. A total of 37 videos (61.6%) reflected the pluralistic pattern, characterized by a high level of conversation orientation and a low level of conformity orientation. This aligns with Koerner and Fitzpatrick's (2006) Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP), which suggests that pluralistic families tend to foster open discussion, encourage active participation, and value diverse perspectives among family members. In the context of CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) families, the presence of a pluralistic pattern indicates that sensory barriers—particularly parental deafness—do not hinder family interaction. Instead, these challenges often catalyze more open and participatory communication. This reflects an adaptive and dialogic process, where CODA children are granted space to express ideas, opinions, and personal emotions in a supportive environment. Communication within this pattern is not only honest and transparent but also moderated to avoid conflict escalation, thus fostering a positive atmosphere conducive to long-term relational growth and stability. In addition to the pluralistic pattern, the protective pattern was identified in 4 videos (6.6%). This pattern is marked by low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation. Under the FCP framework, the protective pattern reflects a hierarchical and authoritative communication style, often unidirectional, with the parent assuming a dominant role while the child remains relatively passive. Although not dominant in this CODA family dynamic, its presence remains analytically significant. The protective pattern becomes relevant particularly in situations requiring explicit guidance from parents, such as decision-making or conflict resolution. In such contexts, parental authority functions as a stabilizing force, guiding the family toward order and coherence. Therefore, the protective pattern can be interpreted as a situational and contingent strategy rather than a fixed communication model. Overall, these findings demonstrate that communication dynamics in CODA families are not homogeneous, but rather reflect diverse communication strategies tailored to context, needs, and familial values. The dominant presence of the pluralistic pattern complemented by protective strategies suggests a flexible communication structure in families navigating sensory diversity.

#### B. Multimodal Communication in CODA Families: Cultural Adaptation and Interactional Complexity

Most of the analyzed videos (47 out of 60, or 78.3%) demonstrated the use of multimodal communication, which combines verbal, nonverbal, signed (BISINDO), facial, bodily, and visual-textual elements. This approach aligns with the theory of multimodality developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (in Rasha, 2024), which posits that communication extends beyond verbal modes to include visual, gestural, and auditory forms. They argue that employing multiple communication modes simultaneously enriches meaning, clarifies messages, and enhances communication effectiveness. In the case of Jennifer Natalie and her son, Joshua, the dominance of multimodal communication reflects a high degree of adaptability and flexibility in choosing the most appropriate mode for each context. For example, verbal communication is often used for abstract or conceptual discussions, while sign language is more common in emotional or educational settings. This strategic selection of communication modes reflects a sensitivity to context and the dynamic needs of family members.

Multimodal communication is a defining feature of CODA families, who naturally integrate hearing and Deaf cultures. CODA children often develop high levels of communicative competence in both verbal and signed languages and can switch between them fluidly. However, it is important to note that not all Deaf individuals possess equal verbal communication abilities. In Jennifer's case, her clear and articulate speech was not innate but the result of early communication intervention, support from her mother, and intensive speech therapy. This highlights the critical role of external factors such as early intervention, a supportive family environment, and access to adequate therapy in shaping the communication abilities of Deaf individuals. Additionally, the study found spontaneous gestural communication that did not strictly conform to formal BISINDO. These gestures were personal, contextual, and often emerged from the intersubjective sensitivity among family members. While effective in the immediate context, these gestures have limited universality within the broader Deaf community. This phenomenon underscores the complexity of multimodal communication in CODA families, where mode selection is influenced by personal preferences, lived experiences, and unique family communication cultures. Thus, multimodal communication in CODA families reflects not only adaptive strategies for sensory diversity but also how communicative processes are shaped by the interplay of personal, cultural, and structural factors. This study highlights the importance of a holistic understanding of communication dynamics within sensory-diverse families, especially in the digital era where multimodal expression is increasingly prevalent.

#### C. Practices of Inclusion and Digital Advocacy in CODA Families on TikTok

The presence of Joshua's family on TikTok is not merely a documentation of daily life but a representation of how social media has evolved into a platform for education, social advocacy, and the construction of inclusive identities. Within digital family communication studies, this represents how digital spaces can broaden the meaning of family communication, making it more

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reflective and strategic. One of the clearest manifestations of inclusivity is Joshua's use of Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO) as a CODA. His use of BISINDO functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbol of acceptance and pride in Deaf cultural identity. In the context of inclusive identity (SMERU, 2020), such practices affirm respect for diversity and the integration of Deaf culture into everyday family life. Joshua emerges not only as a mediator between hearing and Deaf cultures but also as a proactive and confident figure who often leads interactions. His active role demonstrates that inclusion in his family is not merely a theoretical concept but a lived value embodied in daily interactions.

Their TikTok videos go beyond sharing personal experiences—they construct collective narratives that educate and challenge stigma against the Deaf community. The family's responses to audience comments are educational, fostering open discussions about BISINDO, ethical interaction with Deaf individuals, and the importance of patience in confronting social prejudice. Communication, therefore, extends beyond the family to the public sphere, influencing broader social discourse. Viewers do not remain passive consumers but become active participants in shaping meaning in these digital interactions. Many express appreciations for the family's consistent and proud use of BISINDO, particularly by Joshua. This representation facilitates collective awareness and inspires other families to adopt similar inclusive practices.

These findings also expand the application of Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP). Although originally developed for typical family configurations, the pluralistic and consensual patterns observed in this family demonstrate that FCP remains relevant in the context of sensory-diverse families. Their openness to differences, consistency in expressing values, and participatory communication style present a model of progressive and inclusive family interaction. By leveraging the unique affordances of social media—such as short-form video, algorithmic distribution, and interactive comment sections—Joshua's family successfully bridges domestic life and public discourse. They demonstrate that platforms like TikTok can serve as powerful tools for authentic representation, building social empathy, and transforming public perceptions of the disability community.

### V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that communication within CODA (Children of Deaf Adults) families is fundamentally adaptive, multimodal, and context-dependent. Through the application of the Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP), analysis reveals that pluralistic and consensual communication patterns dominate, reflecting a strong orientation toward dialogue, openness, and respect for diversity within the family unit. The use of multimodal communication—encompassing verbal language, sign language, facial expressions, body movement, and visual text—proves to be an effective strategy for enhancing message clarity, emotional resonance, and cultural sensitivity. These modes are not used arbitrarily but are carefully adapted to suit the needs of each communicative context, reflecting the dynamic nature of interaction in sensory-diverse families. Furthermore, the study highlights the strategic role of TikTok as a platform for digital advocacy and social inclusion. The content shared by Joshua's family not only documents everyday experiences but also serves to educate the public about Deaf culture, promote the use of BISINDO (Indonesian Sign Language), and challenge prevailing stigmas. Through this, the family actively participates in constructing a collective narrative that contributes to wider social awareness and acceptance. These findings expand the theoretical scope of FCP beyond conventional family configurations and underscore the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives in exploring family communication, disability, and the transformative role of digital technologies. Social media platforms such as TikTok are shown to be powerful tools for bridging domestic realities with broader public discourse, fostering

### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for future research, policy development, and practical implementation:

1. **Promote Early Language and Communication Interventions,** The communicative fluency of Deaf parents like Jennifer was shown to be the result of early intervention and sustained family support. Therefore, government and educational institutions should ensure access to early language acquisition programs and speech therapy for Deaf children and their families, especially in underrepresented communities.
2. **Utilize Social Media Platforms for Advocacy and Inclusion,** Social media platforms such as TikTok have proven to be effective tools for raising awareness about Deaf culture and inclusive parenting. Families, educators, and advocacy groups should be encouraged and trained to use these platforms strategically for sharing knowledge, combating stigma, and promoting cultural representation.
3. **Expand Research on Non-conventional Family Structures,** Scholars and researchers are encouraged to further explore communication dynamics in non-traditional family settings, particularly those involving disability and cultural hybridity. Interdisciplinary approaches—combining communication studies, disability studies, digital media, and family sociology—are essential to capturing the complexity and richness of these family experiences.

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