

Research Article

Interpersonal Communication Among Teenagers Through Memes on Discord Media

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Abstract

This study aims to understand teenagers' interpersonal communication patterns through the use of memes on Discord, identify the motivations behind them, and their impact on social relationships. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis on a community of active teenagers on Discord. Informants were teenagers aged 15-19 years old who were active for at least the last three months. The results showed that memes became an effective communication tool to convey humor, symbols, and strengthen social relationships. Discord provides a flexible space to share memes as a creative medium that reflects teenagers' perspectives and experiences. The effectiveness of communication is influenced by content relevance, creativity, and cultural sensitivity. However, challenges such as lack of context understanding, fear of criticism, and content saturation also arise. Good moderation within the group is important to create a safe space that is balanced between freedom of expression and community norms.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Teens, Memes, Discord.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have made it easier for people to search for and access information through electronic devices such as computers and smartphones. However, this progress has also brought significant impacts—particularly with the rise



of the digital era, where information and messages are easily accessible in digital formats. The internet, as the foundation of the digital age, has given rise to various social media platforms that enable users to interact without limitations of time and space (Nugraha et al., 2015).

One intriguing result of this digital interaction is the meme phenomenon. Memes have grown increasingly popular among social media users, especially teenagers, because they combine elements of creativity, art, messages, and humor into a unique form of internet culture (KBBI Daring, 2024). Memes often contain relevant messages reflecting current societal issues, including political critique, social commentary, or lighthearted humor. As a communication tool, memes have evolved into an effective medium for expressing ideas and opinions, especially among adolescents who are highly active on social media (Dewi, 2019).

One of the most popular platforms among teenagers for sharing memes is Discord, a community-based application that allows communication through text, voice, and video. Discord provides flexible spaces where users can build communities or servers, with memes frequently used as a means of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication, as defined by Burhanudin in Ruffiah & Muhsin (2018), is communication between individuals within a society or organization, using accessible language and media to achieve specific goals. During adolescence, interpersonal communication plays a vital role in helping individuals express themselves and form meaningful relationships. Memes on Discord offer a creative medium for teenagers to interact, share experiences, and discuss sensitive topics in unique ways, reflecting how modern technology is transforming adolescent communication and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Several previous studies have examined aspects of interpersonal communication among adolescents via digital media and meme usage on social platforms. A study by Aesthetika & Rizal (2022) found that Discord is effective as a medium for interpersonal communication in film-lover communities, enabling more intensive interactions among members. Another study by Fitriana & Oemar (2020) revealed that memes function not only as entertainment but also as tools of social and political criticism that can influence public opinion. Additionally, Sufah et al. (2023) highlighted how Discord's features support meme-based communication, making it an ideal platform for understanding the dynamics of digital interaction among teens.

Memes can also reflect users' cultural values, viewpoints, and emotions. For example, memes created by teenagers often depict personal experiences such as academic pressure, peer relationships, or other social issues. Thus, memes serve as an effective tool for understanding the perspectives and challenges faced by adolescents. In this context, studying interpersonal communication through memes on Discord is important to uncover patterns of interaction, motivations for using memes as a communication tool, and their impact on interpersonal relationships.

This research aims to explore the patterns of adolescent interpersonal communication through memes on Discord, identify teenagers' motivations for using memes as a communication medium, and evaluate the impact of meme-based communication on their relationships. By examining this phenomenon, the study is expected to provide insights into how digital technology affects interpersonal communication among adolescents, identify the benefits and challenges of this trend, and offer recommendations for enhancing digital communication quality among young people. Additionally, the study contributes to the literature on digital communication and the role of technology in shaping interpersonal relationships in the modern era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, focusing on inductive analysis based on field data. The goal of this method is to collect and analyze data in order to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. A qualitative approach allows for the exploration of the meanings, perceptions, and subjective experiences of adolescents in using memes as a tool for interpersonal communication on the Discord platform (Setiawan, 2018).

The research was conducted with the researcher serving as the main instrument as well as the data collector. In qualitative research, the researcher's presence in the field is essential, as they play the role of planner, executor, data collector, analyst, and interpreter of findings (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2018). Supporting instruments such as interview guides, observation guidelines, writing tools, and digital voice recorders were used to assist in data collection. The researcher directly entered the field to observe and interview research informants.

The research location was virtual, conducted in active youth communities on Discord, a text-, voice-, and video-based communication platform. The study involved

several popular Discord servers among Indonesian teens. The research was carried out over a one-month period, from January to February 2025, to obtain representative data on patterns of interpersonal communication through memes.

The research informants were adolescents aged 15–19 who actively used Discord and frequently participated in discussions involving memes. Informant selection criteria included at least three months of active participation on Discord servers and regular use of memes in interpersonal interaction. Informants were selected for their in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied, allowing them to provide relevant insights (Soewardikoen, 2019).

The data in this study are qualitative, in the form of words and descriptions. Data collected included interactions between teenagers using memes as a communication tool—such as conversations, the context of meme usage, and how memes influence the meaning of communication. Qualitative data allows for the expression of nuances, humor, sarcasm, or social critique within digital communication. The study also explored communication patterns, such as the frequency and types of memes used in conversations.

Data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through interviews with active teenage Discord users, direct observations on Discord servers, and case studies of specific meme-based interactions. Secondary data came from literature reviews, documentation, books, and journals relevant to interpersonal communication, memes, and the use of social media platforms such as Discord (Sugiyono, 2018).

Data collection techniques included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation was done by joining Discord servers, monitoring conversations, and identifying emerging communication patterns. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10–15 adolescents to explore their experiences using memes in interpersonal communication. Document analysis involved theoretical references, conversation recordings, and images as supporting evidence.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and iteratively until data saturation was reached, following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Moleong, 2017; Abdussamad, 2021). The analysis process included data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was used to categorize and organize relevant information, while data presentation consisted of descriptive

narratives that helped the researcher understand the studied phenomenon. Conclusions were drawn based on valid and consistent evidence, ensuring the research findings were trustworthy and highly credible.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Function of Memes in Interaction

Memes play a vital role as tools for conveying messages indirectly, expressing humor, and building emotional closeness. Informants in this study revealed that memes help ease the atmosphere and make conversations more relaxed. One informant, AR (16 years old), stated, “Memes are like codes, but all my friends get the message without me having to explain it in detail.” In Discord groups, memes function not only as entertainment media but also as effective symbolic language. Memes create a shared understanding that strengthens social bonds within the group. Moreover, memes can bridge cultural differences through symbols that are easily understood by community members. This function aligns with digital communication theory, which emphasizes the importance of symbols in forming interpersonal relationships. According to Mukhtar et al. (2024), memes can function as communication tools in groups that foster emotional closeness and mutual understanding among members. This research also explores meme symbolism as a form of nonverbal communication that is effective in digital group settings.

Dynamics of Meme Usage

The use of memes in Discord groups reveals complex dynamics. In relational contexts, memes often serve as the primary medium for joking and understanding conversational contexts, particularly in closed groups. Internal memes—those understood only by certain group members—reinforce group identity. Additionally, the relevance of a meme to current trends strongly influences how positively it is received by group members. Informants noted that outdated memes often fail to attract attention.

Creativity also plays an important role in meme usage. Some informants actively create their own memes as a form of creative expression, while others mostly share memes from external sources. This creativity helps strengthen an individual’s presence in the group and reflects symbolic interaction processes. Discord facilitates the creation

of digital spaces where group identity is built through symbols like memes. Users who are active and creative in sharing memes often gain more prominent social status within the group.

Using memes on platforms like Discord is not just about sharing funny images or videos; it involves complex social dynamics related to group identity and individual status. Memes function as core tools in interacting within closed groups, and internal memes—understood only by specific members—enhance group cohesion. These memes serve as identity symbols that reflect the level of closeness and mutual understanding among group members, ultimately fostering a strong sense of belonging (Allifiansyah, 2016).

Impact on Interpersonal Relationships

The findings of this study show that effective meme use can significantly strengthen interpersonal relationships within the Discord community. Humorous and relevant memes create a sense of togetherness and often become gateways for discussing more serious topics. As a communication tool, memes act as catalysts for deeper interactions. Discord provides a space for users to reinforce social connections through humor, helping to create a sense of safety and acceptance within the group. Overall, memes meet the basic need for belonging, foster camaraderie, and enhance community cohesion.

One interesting finding is the significant impact of meme use on interpersonal relationships. Humorous and relevant memes serve as triggers for extended interaction, fostering a sense of community and strengthening cohesion. Ko (2023) notes that humor is one of the most effective ways to strengthen social ties. Memes, as a form of visual humor, function as powerful mediums to spark both lighthearted and meaningful conversations.

The Role of Moderation in Meme Communication

Moderation plays an essential role in meme-based communication. Groups with active moderators tend to have rules that prevent the spread of inappropriate content, keeping the group environment positive. Effective moderation creates a balance between freedom of expression and maintaining community norms. Moderators also ensure that shared memes are relevant and not offensive to others. This demonstrates

that good moderation can create a healthy digital environment for sharing memes.

Behind the effective use of memes lies the crucial role of moderation in maintaining communication quality within Discord groups. Hefni (2020) explains that good moderation ensures that memes shared remain within community norms and do not violate social rules or offend other members. Moderation also helps maintain group harmony by ensuring that meme-sharing does not lead to disharmony or interpersonal conflict.

Barriers to Meme Sharing on Discord

Lack of Contextual Understanding

A lack of contextual understanding is one of the primary barriers to meme sharing. Some informants admitted that memes not understood by all group members can lead to communication gaps. Informant LS (17 years old) explained, “If someone doesn’t get the context, instead of being funny, it just becomes awkward.” As a global platform, Discord presents the challenge of diverse cultural references, which often reduce the effectiveness of humor and increase the potential for misunderstandings.

According to Jenkins (2006), understanding context in digital communication is crucial. Memes often rely on specific cultural knowledge, and without the right context, they can lead to misinterpretation or fail to deliver the intended humor. Jenkins also noted that the diversity of contexts in global communities—like those found on Discord—can result in comprehension barriers. This is echoed by LS, who mentioned how lack of contextual understanding can make situations “awkward.”

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural differences and norms among group members also hinder communication. Memes containing dark humor or political satire are often considered inappropriate by some members. Informant FN (18 years old) stated, “In my group, some like dark humor, but others don’t. So I have to be very careful before sharing a meme.” Cultural sensitivity is essential to create an inclusive environment on Discord. Insensitive memes can harm interpersonal relationships within the community.

According to Jiang et al. (2019), humor in digital contexts is highly influenced by cultural differences. Memes that are humorous in one cultural group may be considered offensive in another, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as dark humor

or politics. FN's statement reflects how cultural sensitivity is key to maintaining inclusivity and avoiding damage to interpersonal relationships.

Fear of Criticism

Fear of criticism is another barrier to meme sharing. Four out of seven informants expressed hesitation in sharing memes due to concerns about being perceived as unfunny. Informant ZF (15 years old) stated, "Sometimes I hesitate to share memes because I'm afraid no one will get it or they'll think it's lame." This fear is particularly prevalent among new members who are not yet familiar with the group dynamics. Support from more senior members can help overcome this anxiety.

Fear of public judgment is a significant factor that discourages users from sharing content, including memes. This is especially common among individuals who are new to a community or feel unsure about the group's norms and dynamics (Hanan, 2017).

Technical Barriers

Technical limitations, such as poor internet connectivity or inadequate devices, also reduce user participation. Informants living in areas with limited internet access reported difficulty in finding or uploading high-quality memes. This highlights a digital access gap that affects active participation on Discord.

According to Muhammad et al. (2025), disparities in technology access and infrastructure can limit individual participation in digital communities. Technical issues—such as poor internet connectivity—can hinder users' ability to access or share high-quality memes. This aligns with informants who described difficulties in sourcing or uploading memes due to device or internet limitations, illustrating a broader digital divide.

Meme Content Fatigue

Fatigue from repetitive meme content is another barrier to group interaction. Memes that are shared too frequently or lack innovation are often ignored by group members. Informant DH (19 years old) mentioned, "If it's the same meme over and over, people just stop paying attention." This highlights the need for creative exploration to maintain diversity and interest in digital communication.

Shifman (2014) also emphasized that innovation in memes is crucial for

sustaining interest and interaction in digital communities. DH's remark about boredom with repetitive memes illustrates this phenomenon, showing the importance of creative exploration in maintaining engagement and enthusiasm in digital communication.

CONCLUSION

Memes have proven to be an effective tool for interpersonal communication on the Discord platform, serving as a medium for humor, expression, and strengthening emotional closeness among users. This study found that relevant, creative, and contextually appropriate memes can enhance relationships between group members, foster a sense of community, and encourage more productive discussions. However, several barriers—such as lack of contextual understanding, sensitivity to cultural norms, fear of criticism, technical limitations, and content fatigue—highlight the complexity of interactions within digital communities. Effective moderation plays a crucial role in creating a conducive environment for meme sharing, with moderators acting as key agents in maintaining a balance between freedom of expression and respect for community norms.

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