PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SHAPING OF ADOLESCENT IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The internet and teenagers are two interrelated things in the life of modern society. Data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology shows that the use of the internet among teenagers is mostly used to access social media. This phenomenon is interesting to study because social media is an important space for teenagers to build and express their identity. This study aims to analyze the role of social media in the formation of adolescent identity as well as how adolescents express personal problems in the digital space. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The theoretical frameworks used include Identity Theory, Symbolic Interaction Theory, and Media Ecology Theory. The data was obtained through in-depth interviews with adolescents who actively use social media. The results of the study show that adolescents display diverse identities on social media and tend to express personal problems indirectly or implicitly. Social media plays an important role in the construction of adolescent identity in the digital era.

Keywords: Social Media, Teens, Forming Identities

Introduction

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of people's lives, especially in the pattern of social interaction. Advances in digital technology, especially the internet, have created new spaces that allow individuals to communicate, exchange information, and build social relationships without being bound by the limitations of space and time. The internet no longer functions just as a technical

medium, but has developed into a social and cultural space that shapes the way of thinking, acting, and interacting in daily life.

The internet provides easy access to various information and entertainment from all over the world quickly and efficiently. This condition has led to a change in people's information consumption patterns, where conventional media such as newspapers, radio, and television have begun to shift their roles. People are now increasingly dependent on internet-based media as the main source of information. This phenomenon shows that the internet has become an integral part of the life of modern society and has contributed greatly to shaping contemporary communication practices.

The existence of the internet indirectly gave birth to a new generation known as the *ne(xt)* generation. This generation grows and develops in a digital media culture environment that is interactive and fast-paced. According to Ibrahim (2011), *the ne(xt)* generation has different characteristics compared to the previous generation, including a tendency to be individual, prioritize personal communication, have a high level of technological literacy, and are used to interacting with various forms of digital media from an early age. These characteristics show a change in socialization patterns that are strongly influenced by the development of digital technology.

Along with the development of *the ne(xt)* generation, there has also been a shift in media culture from traditional media to digital media culture. Digital media offers a more flexible, participatory, and open interaction space than conventional media. One form of digital media that is growing rapidly and has a significant influence on people's social lives is social media. Social media allows individuals to interact, build social networks, and express themselves in an open and dynamic virtual space.

In Indonesia, one of the social media that has a high penetration rate is Facebook. Based on data published in the *Kompas* newspaper, the number of Facebook users in Indonesia in 2009 has reached around 11 million people (Ibrahim, 2011). Although the data is historical, this phenomenon shows the beginning of the increasing adoption of social media in Indonesia and is an indicator of changes in people's access patterns to network-based digital technology. Since then, the use of social media has continued to increase and is increasingly embedded in people's daily lives.

The development of social media has not only affected the way people access digital technology, but it has also brought fundamental changes in the way individuals build social relationships and express their identity. Social interaction, which was previously dominated by face-to-face communication, has now shifted to text, image, and video-based communication through social media platforms. Social media allows for rapid and simultaneous interaction without physical presence, thus changing social communication patterns to be increasingly mediated by technology.

Furthermore, social media plays an important role in forming a participatory culture in society, especially among the younger generation. Social media users no longer play the role of passive consumers of information, but are active in producing, disseminating, and commenting on various digital content. This participatory culture has an impact on changing media consumption patterns, the formation of public opinion, and the dynamics of social and cultural life. Social media has become a new space for people to voice their aspirations, build social solidarity, and respond to various social issues that are developing.

However, the development of social media also presents various complex social problems. The rapid and massive flow of information is often not balanced with people's digital literacy skills. As a result, the spread of false information, hate speech, and disinformation has become a phenomenon that is difficult to avoid. In addition, social media algorithms tend to form an *echo chamber* that reinforces polarization of opinions and reduces the space for healthy dialogue between individuals and social groups. The popularity culture that develops through social media, such as seeking recognition through the number of *likes*, *followers*, and *shares*, also has the potential to affect the mental health of individuals, especially the younger generation. Social interaction patterns that are oriented towards self-image and social recognition can form superficial social relationships and shift substantive social values. This condition shows that social media does not only have a positive impact. but it also poses serious challenges in the social life of the community. Therefore, social media needs to be understood not only as a means of communication, but also as a social institution that has a great influence on the structure and dynamics of society. An in-depth academic study is needed to understand how social media shapes patterns of social interaction, participatory culture, and its implications for social life in the digital era. Research on social media is important to identify opportunities and challenges that arise, as well as formulate strategies to improve people's digital literacy. Based on this description, this research is relevant and important to be carried out to analyze the role of social media in shaping social and cultural interactions of people in the digital era. The results of the research are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of sociology and communication studies, as well as practical contributions in efforts to build a wiser, critical, and responsible use of social media.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study aims to deeply understand the meaning of individual *lived experiences* in using social media, especially Facebook. The phenomenological analysis in this study refers to the steps proposed by Von Eckartsberg as cited in Moustakas (1994, pp. 15–16), which emphasizes the systematic and reflective exploration of participants' subjective experiences. This approach allows researchers to uncover how individuals interpret their experiences in interacting on social media as well as how these experiences shape patterns of social interaction and self-understanding in the digital space

Stages of Phenomenological Analysis

The stages of phenomenological analysis applied in this study include the following steps.

1. Formulation of research problems and questionsIn the initial stage, the researcher formulates the research problem and sets the research questions clearly, specifically, and directed. This formulation aims to determine the focus of research that is oriented towards an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social media use as experienced by participants in daily life.
2. Data collection through life experience textsResearch data was obtained through *in-depth interviews* with participants. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to provide space for participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings related to the use of social media. The results of the interviews were then transcribed and compiled in the form of a descriptive narrative that represented the participants' life experiences as experienced and understood by them.

3. Data analysis through explanation and interpretation of meaningAfter the data is collected, the researcher conducts an in-depth reading and review of the entire interview transcript. Analysis is carried out through an explanatory process to identify the main themes and structure of meaning that emerge from the participants' experiences. Furthermore, the researcher interprets these themes to understand how the meaning of experiences is formed and constructed in the social and cultural context of the participants' lives.

Research Subject

The subjects in this study are adolescents who actively use social media and have accounts on the Facebook platform. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively by considering the active involvement of participants in the use of social media as well as its relevance to the focus of the research. Adolescents were chosen as the subjects of the study because this age group is an intensive social media user and is in a significant phase of social development.

Result and Discussion
Definition of Social Media

Based on the results of a study of various literature and conceptual findings in this study, social media can be understood as a form of internet-based media that allows users to actively participate in the process of creating, exchanging, and distributing content. Social media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a social space that allows interaction, relationship formation, and virtual self-identity construction. The existence of social media has changed the position of users from just information consumers to producers as well as distributors of information.

Social media has the main characteristics of interactivity, participation, and openness. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a set of internet-based applications built on the ideological foundations and technologies of Web 2.0, which enable the creation and exchange of *user-generated content*. This definition emphasizes that social media is collaborative and places users as the main actors in the communication process.

In the social context, social media can be understood as a new interaction space that is symbolic and cultural. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media is a web-based service that allows individuals to build public or semi-public profiles, form a list of connections, and view and trace the relationships made by other users in a system. Thus, social media not only facilitates interpersonal communication, but also builds complex and interconnected social networks.

The results of the analysis show that social media plays an important role in shaping the social interaction patterns of modern society. Interactions that previously took place directly in physical spaces have now moved to virtual spaces. Social media allows communication to take place quickly, simultaneously, and across geographical boundaries. This is in line with the view of Castells (2010) who states that contemporary society has entered the era of a network *society*, where social relations are increasingly mediated by information and communication technology.

Furthermore, social media also functions as a space for self-expression and the formation of social identity. Users can display self-representation through text uploads, photos,

or videos shared with the public or their network of friends. This process shows that social media is not neutral, but rather an arena where social meaning is produced and negotiated. According to Jenkins (2006), social media encourages the formation of a participatory culture, where individuals not only consume content, but also actively contribute to the production of digital culture.

In the context of the younger generation, social media has an increasingly strong influence on the way they interact and interpret social relationships. The high intensity of social media use makes digital platforms part of daily life. Social media is an important space for adolescents to build social relationships, gain recognition, and express personal views and experiences. This condition shows that social media has transformed into a new social institution that has a significant role in people's lives.

However, social media also contains ambivalence. On the one hand, social media expands the communication space and strengthens social connectivity. On the other hand, social media has the potential to cause social problems, such as the spread of false information, online conflicts, and superficial social relationships. Therefore, understanding social media needs to be done critically by considering the social and cultural context that surrounds it.

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that social media is a digital-based media that not only functions as a communication tool, but also as a social and cultural space that forms patterns of interaction, social relations, and individual identity. Social media has become an integral part of the life of modern society and has a significant influence on social dynamics in the digital era.

Social Media Forms Identity

The results of the study show that social media has a significant role in the process of forming individual identities, especially among the younger generation. Social media not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a social space where individuals display, build, and negotiate their identity. Identity in the context of social media is not static, but dynamic and continues to undergo a process of formation along with the social interaction that occurs in the digital space.

Social media provides a variety of features that allow users to represent themselves, such as user profiles, photo and video uploads, and status updates. Through these features, individuals can choose certain aspects of themselves to be displayed to the public. This selection process shows that the identity built on social media is the result of social construction influenced by personal preferences, social norms, and expectations from the digital social environment. This is in line with the view of Goffman (1959) who stated that individuals tend to do impression *management* in social interactions, including in the context of online interactions.

In practice, social media allows individuals to build an identity based on digital symbols, such as language, visual style, and the form of interaction displayed. The digital identity that is formed often reflects how the individual wants to be perceived by others. Boyd (2014) explained that social media is an important space for adolescents to explore their identity, build a sense of belonging, and gain social recognition from their network of friends. This recognition is often manifested through other users' responses in the form of *likes*, comments, and *shares*.

The results of the analysis also show that identity formation on social media is greatly influenced by reciprocal social interactions. Identity is not only built individually, but it is also constructed through responses and judgments from other users. In this context, identity becomes the product of a symbolic interaction that takes place continuously. This view is in line with the theory of symbolic interaction which emphasizes that the meaning of the self is formed through the process of social interaction (Blumer, 1969).

Social media also allows for the formation of a collective identity through membership in online communities, such as groups, pages, or specific interest-based networks. Individual participation in these communities reinforces a sense of social identity and group affiliation. The collective identities formed on social media often transcend geographical and social boundaries, thus expanding the space of individual self-identification. Castells (2010) calls this phenomenon part of a networked society, where identity is built through relationships mediated by digital technology.

However, the process of forming an identity through social media also contains a number of challenges. The pressure to display an ideal self-image and gain social recognition can affect an individual's psychological well-being. The identity that is built tends to be performative and does not always reflect the true condition of oneself. This condition shows that social media can create a distance between online identities and offline identities, which has the potential to cause identity conflicts.

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that social media plays a strategic role in the process of forming individual identities. Social media allows individuals to express themselves, build a social image, and interact with the wider social environment. However, identity formation in social media needs to be understood critically by considering the social, cultural, and psychological context that surrounds it. Thus, social media not only forms personal identity, but also reflects the social dynamics of society in the digital era.

Conclusion

The development of social media as part of the advancement of digital technology has brought significant changes in the patterns of social interaction and the formation of individual identities, particularly among adolescents. Social media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a social and cultural space that allows interaction, participation, and virtual self-identity construction. Through the various features available, individuals can display, construct, and negotiate their identities in the context of technology-based social interactions.

The results of the study show that social media forms an interaction pattern that is increasingly mediated by technology, where communication no longer depends on physical presence. In addition to providing opportunities to expand social networks and express oneself, social media also presents challenges, such as formative identity formation, social pressure, and the potential for the emergence of superficial social relationships. Therefore, social media needs to be understood critically as a social institution that has a great influence on the dynamics of people's lives in the digital era. Digital understanding and literacy are important so that the use of social media can take place wisely, responsibly, and oriented towards strengthening positive social values.

Acknowledgments

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