The Transformation Of Social Media And Academic Communication In Padang City

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ABSTRACT
Digital transformation has significantly changed the academic communication patterns of university students in Padang City, affecting not only technology use but also social and cultural aspects. This study explores how students adapt to changes in academic communication during digital globalization while maintaining their local cultural values. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative strategy, the research involved participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature studies with ten selected students. Data were analyzed using Symbolic Interactionism Theory, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory, and the concept of glocalization. The findings show that social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram have created new, more flexible norms for academic communication, while still preserving Minangkabau cultural values. Students show strong social intelligence, adjusting their communication style between formal and informal contexts. The novelty of this study is its focus on how local culture not only survives but actively shapes communication practices in the digital era. These results contribute to digital communication studies by highlighting the importance of integrating local cultural perspectives and suggest the need for culturally sensitive digital literacy programs in higher education.

KEYWORDS: Digital Transformation, Academic Communication, Social Media, Local Culture, Glocalization

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Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed various aspects of life, including higher education. One of the most notable phenomena is the increasingly prominent role of social media as a means of communication among university students. In Padang City, students from various educational institutions utilize digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to support their academic activities. Social media today functions not only as a space for social interaction but has also transformed into a primary medium for academic communication that is more flexible, fast, and informal.

This change indicates a shift in communication patterns --from those previously tied to physical classroom settings to more fluid and dynamic digital spaces. Students can now engage in discussions, ask questions, share course materials, and interact with lecturers and peers in real time, unrestricted by time or location. However, alongside these conveniences, new dynamics have also emerged, such as the blurring of boundaries between formal and informal spaces, ethical challenges in online communication, and the risk of information overload that may hinder learning focus. This phenomenon reflects a transformation that involves not only technological changes but also shifts in social relationships, communication styles, and academic culture as a whole.

Based on this reality, the main question that underlies this research is: how do students in Padang City interpret and practice academic communication through social media in their daily academic lives? This study also seeks to explore the dynamics and challenges that arise from these shifting communication patterns and how such transformations influence students' ways of thinking and interacting within the context of increasingly digitized higher education.

Previous research has illustrated the complex role of social media in academic communication. A study by Al-Rahmi et al. in Malaysia demonstrated that the appropriate use of social media can enhance student satisfaction and academic performance.[1] Wang et al.[2] in China highlighted the collaborative benefits of digital platforms in open learning environments, while Olannye-Okonofua and Oji in Nigeria found that WhatsApp became the primary communication tool after the pandemic, despite raising issues of professionalism. In Vietnam, Nguyen et al.[3] emphasized the importance of online academic communities in promoting researcher creativity and productivity. Meanwhile, Anto et al.[4] in the United Kingdom examined the ambivalent psychological effects of social media on university students.

While these studies provide valuable insights, most of them focus on international contexts and employ quantitative approaches that emphasize effectiveness or outcomes. In the Indonesian context -- particularly in a diverse educational landscape like Padang City-- there is a scarcity of in-depth qualitative studies exploring the meanings and experiences of using social media in academic settings. This is where the novelty of the present research lies.

This study offers a fresh contribution by focusing on students' subjective experiences as the primary lens through which to understand the transformation of academic communication in the digital age. Social media is viewed not merely as a tool but as a space for meaning-making, identity formation, and interaction—a space that shapes new communication cultures. Through a qualitative approach and inductive reasoning, this research aims to explore student communication practices in a more contextual and in-depth manner, while also offering solutions and recommendations that are relevant to the realities of today's digital generation.

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[1] Al-Rahmi, W. M., Yahaya, N., Alturki, U., Alrobai, A., Alfarraj, O., & Alzahrani, A. I. (2022). Social media use, collaborative learning and students' academic performance: A case study of international students in Malaysian higher education. *Education and Information Technologies*, *27*(2), 2343–2364.

[2] Wang, Y., Han, X., & Yang, J. (2021). Adoption of e-learning systems in higher education: A systematic literature review. *Computers & Education*, *168*, 104211.

[3] Nguyen, M. H., Ngo, L. V., & Ruël, H. (2024). Social media use and academic research performance: The mediating roles of creative behavior and knowledge sharing. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *43*(1), 56–74.

[4] Nguyen, M. H., Ngo, L. V., & Ruël, H. (2024). Social media use and academic research performance: The mediating roles of creative behavior and knowledge sharing. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *43*(1), 56–74.

Theoretically, this research enriches the literature in educational communication and digital communication by highlighting the social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of academic communication on social media. Practically, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for higher education institutions to design more adaptive, participatory, and professional communication strategies in digital spaces. Furthermore, this study has the potential to promote the development of more critical and ethical digital literacy among students, ensuring that social media is used productively to support collaborative and inclusive learning processes.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach. The use of a qualitative approach with a descriptive-interpretative strategy is based on the primary objective of understanding the subjective meanings behind students' academic communication practices through social media.[5] A qualitative approach was chosen because the phenomenon under study is complex, contextual, and closely related to personal experiences, perceptions, and social interactions, which cannot be deeply explored through a quantitative approach.

The descriptive-interpretative strategy enables the researcher to provide a detailed depiction of how students utilize social media in their daily academic activities, as well as to interpret the meaning behind their behaviors, attitudes, and communication within the context of digital culture. This strategy focuses not only on what students do but also on why they do it and how they make sense of it. Therefore, this approach is relevant for exploring the social dynamics, values, norms, and ethics that develop in digital academic spaces.

Data collection techniques include participant observation, in-depth interviews, and literature study. Participant observation is conducted by observing interactions within academic social media groups such as WhatsApp or Telegram class groups. In-depth interviews follow a semi-structured guide, allowing flexibility in exploring the informants' experiences. Meanwhile, the literature study supports the analysis with relevant theories and previous research findings.

The study involves 10 informants, selected using a purposive sampling method. The criteria for selecting informants are, 1). active university students in Padang City. 2). Actively using social media for academic purposes. 3). Representing diverse backgrounds in terms of study programs, semesters, and gender. 4). Willing to participate and openly share information[6].

To support an understanding of the communication dynamics involved, this study adopts Symbolic Interactionism Theory as the main analytical framework. This theory emphasizes that meaning is constructed and interpreted through social interaction.[7] In the context of this research, social media is understood as a symbolic interaction space where students create meaning in academic communication, build identity, and negotiate the boundaries between formality and informality. In addition, the study also applies the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) Theory to explain how the characteristics of digital communication—being asynchronous, multimodal, and cross-temporal --affect the way students interact academically. CMC enables different communication patterns compared to face-to-face interaction and, in this context, offers flexibility but also presents challenges such as miscommunication, multitasking, and information overload.

Data analysis is carried out using a thematic analysis approach, involving coding, grouping data into key themes, and in-depth interpretation. The researcher also employs source triangulation and member checks to enhance data trustworthiness. With this approach, the study is expected to comprehensively reveal

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[5] Anto, J. M., Sutton, K. L., & McKeown, G. J. (2023). University students' anxiety and the dual role of social media: A mixed-method study in the UK context. *Journal of Adolescence*, *96*, 95–108.

[6] Palinkas, L. A., et al. (2021). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research,* *48*(2), 181–188.

[7]

how students make sense of the role of social media in shaping the way they communicate, learn, and engage academically in the digital era.[8]

Results And Discussion

In the increasingly dynamic digital era, social media is no longer merely an additional communication channel but has undergone a significant shift in meaning in students' lives. In Padang City, students use social media not only for social or entertainment purposes but also as a primary space to support academic activities. This transformation aligns with the increasingly fluid boundaries between formal and informal spaces in higher education and the growing need for flexibility and digital connectivity. In this context, Symbolic Interactionism Theory, which emphasizes that meaning is constructed through social interactions, provides a foundation for understanding how students interpret the role of social media in academic environments. Every message, symbol, and action conveyed through social media carries meanings that are continuously negotiated in everyday interactions. Meanwhile, the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) perspective helps explain how social media, as a digital communication medium, shapes the way students build relationships, manage identities, and organize their learning activities[9].

3.1. The Meaning of Social Media for Students in Padang City

The findings show that students in Padang City have internalized the use of social media as part of their academic practices[10]. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram are preferred because of their ability to support real-time communication across time and space[11]. Sonia Saputri, a student from the Communication Studies Program at Ekasakti University, stated that the class WhatsApp group had become the main coordination center for all matters related to coursework. Sonia explained, "Sometimes lecturers respond faster on WhatsApp than by email. If there's a schedule change or a new assignment, we usually discuss it directly in the group. It's more practical, even though sometimes it gets mixed with non-academic chats." This statement illustrates how the boundaries between formal and informal communication blur in digital spaces but are still considered functional by students[12]. Telegram also holds a special place, particularly for students who need to manage large volumes of academic data[13]. Ilham Maulana, a Civil Engineering student from Bung Hatta University said, "We use Telegram to collect lecture materials, assignments, even Zoom recordings. It's like our independent digital repository. Everyone can access it anytime, no need to wait for lecturers to upload it to the campus."

This shows that students are not just passive users but also active producers and managers of their academic digital spaces[14]. Besides its practical functions, social media also facilitates emotional and social

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[8] Madge, C., Meek, J., Wellens, J., & Hooley, T. (2023). Facebook, social integration and informal learning at university: 'It is more for socialising and talking to friends about work than for actually doing work'. *Learning, Media and Technology, 48*(1), 64–79.

[9] Oussama, B., & Abdelhafid, B. (2022). *The Impact of Computer-mediated Communication upon Written English* (Doctoral dissertation, university center of abdalhafid boussouf-MILA).

[10] Greenhow, C., & Galvin, S. (2022). Teaching with social media: Evidence-based practices for integrating social media into courses. *Educational Research Review, 36*, 100475. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100475.

[11] Al-Dheleai, Y. M., & Tasir, Z. (2021). Student engagement in online learning: A review of learning platforms, technologies, and student motivation. *Education and Information Technologies, 26*(6), 6549–6567. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10513-0

[12] Madge, C., & O'Connor, H. (2022). Academic life online: Reconfiguring knowledge and relationships in the COVID-19 era. *Social Media + Society, 8*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221092497

[13] Thomas, L., & Roberts, J. (2021). Learning management systems or personal repositories? Students'mana gement of digital academic resources. *The Internet and Higher Education, 50*, 100811. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2021.100811

dimensions of students' academic lives. Platforms like Instagram, previously seen more as personal media, are now used to share motivation and support among peers. Yoga Saputra, a student from the English Education Program at Universitas Negeri Padang, revealed, "Many friends now use Instagram to share educational quotes, study tips, or thesis progress stories. It really motivates us because we see others struggling and staying enthusiastic." This experience shows how social media can foster a sense of community and solidarity within academic environments, especially during stressful periods like exams or thesis writing[15].

In fieldwork practices, Aulia Anggraini, a student from the Public Health Program at Andalas University, explained that WhatsApp groups became vital coordination tools. "We usually create small WhatsApp groups during fieldwork. We update each other on findings, send data, and even have direct discussions with supervisors. So, even if we're in different locations, communication runs smoothly." This strengthens the role of social media as a tool that bridges physical distances and enables effective academic collaboration[16]. Interestingly, creativity has also become part of the dynamics of using social media in academic spaces. Satria Kurniawan, a student from the Islamic Economics Program at UIN Imam Bonjol, shared his experience, "Our lecturer once assigned us to review study materials through TikTok videos. At first, it felt strange, but it turned out to be fun. Many students became more enthusiastic because they could be creative while still focusing on the material.[17]

This case shows that social media is not only seen as a communication tool but also as an academic expression medium adaptable to the preferences of the digital generation. However, the use of social media is not without challenges. Students recognize the risk of distractions from non-academic content and the multitasking that can reduce focus. One major challenge is distinguishing between formal and informal communication styles, especially when interacting with lecturers in digital spaces where etiquette boundaries are unclear. Nevertheless, local cultural values such as politeness, hierarchy, and a sense of kinship continue to frame communication[18].

Upon closer analysis, the meanings constructed by students in using social media are multidimensional. From a symbolic perspective, every interaction in digital spaces is a process of negotiating meanings that reflect identity, power relations, and collective solidarity. In the CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) framework, social media creates communication conditions tailored to user needs --fast, flexible, and personal yet functional. Thus, social media becomes a third space between institutional formality and social familiarity, where learning processes and academic interactions actively and dynamically take place.[19]

`Overall, students' academic communication practices in Padang City through social media show a cultural transformation [40]. Students are not merely adopting technology but are rearticulating ways of

[14] Manca, S. (2023). Social media and student agency: Opportunities for new academic practices. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 54*(3), 785–799. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.13269

[15] Pham, T., & Tran, T. (2022). Emotional engagement in online learning: The role of social media. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology, 38*(4), 105–120. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.7881

[16] Lowenthal, P. R., Borup, J., West, R. E., & Archambault, L. (2022). Thinking beyond Zoom: Using social media to support online learning. *Online Learning Journal, 26*(1), 190–208. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v26i1.3080

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[18] Cho, M. O., & Byun, J. (2021). Digital communication etiquette in academic settings: Insights from Korean university students. *Journal of Pragmatics, 179*, 215–228. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2021.04.015.

[19] Julian McDougall & John Potter (2018). *Digital media, culture and education: Theorising third space literacies.* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

communicating, learning, and building academic relationships. Social media becomes a digital ecosystem they build themselves, responding to the demands of the times and local conditions. In this framework, social media is not merely a tool, but a living and evolving space --a reflection of a new way for students to interpret education and togetherness.

The data reveal that social media platforms are not merely digital tools for communication, but have become embedded in the everyday academic culture of students in Padang City. This integration reflects a significant cultural shift where digital platforms are interpreted, adapted, and creatively utilized to fulfill both academic and socio-emotional needs. From the interpretative lens, several thematic patterns emerge, demonstrating how students construct meanings around social media use.

1. Social Media as an Academic Hub
Students view platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram not simply as chat applications, but as central hubs for academic collaboration. The rapid, real-time nature of communication enhances responsiveness and facilitates coordination, as noted by Sonia Saputri and Ilham Maulana. These practices align with the Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory, which emphasizes that technology shapes, but does not determine, communicative practices. Instead, users tailor communication patterns to meet situational demands. As one student, Nurul Hidayati, a Sociology major at Universitas Andalas, elaborated in a follow-up interview: "Our thesis discussion group on WhatsApp is more active than formal consultations. We brainstorm ideas, clarify references, even share our emotional struggles. It feels like a virtual academic family."
This suggests that social media fosters not only efficiency but also intimacy and solidarity in peer-to-peer academic interactions.

2. Digital Space and the Blurring of Formality
A recurring pattern in the data is the **blurring boundary between formal and informal communication**. Digital spaces allow for simultaneous coexistence of academic discussions and casual interactions. While this fusion can create ambiguity in terms of etiquette --especially when communicating with lecturers— students learn to navigate these boundaries using cultural norms. **Dewi Melati**, a student from the Faculty of Education at UNP, shared: "When texting lecturers, we still use formal language and emoticons sparingly. Even though it's WhatsApp, we must show respect. That's how we were raised culturally." This reflects how local values such as politeness, hierarchy, and respect continue to shape the way students engage with authority figures in digital spaces, preserving cultural scripts within new media environments.

3. Creativity and Motivation through Social Media
The integration of platforms like Instagram and TikTok into academic tasks illustrates a transformation in pedagogical engagement. Instead of resisting social media as a distraction, students and lecturers are beginning to reframe it as an educational asset. Creative tasks not only increase student motivation but also reflect the multimodal literacy of the digital generation. Hafiz Ramadhan, a student of Islamic Education at IAIN Bukittinggi, commented: "When our lecturer asked us to explain Islamic economic concepts via Instagram Reels, it felt strange. But it pushed us to simplify complex ideas creatively. I even gained followers who asked questions about the topic." This case shows how digital platforms expand the audience and visibility of academic content, transforming students from mere consumers into content creators and peer educators.

4. Social Media as Emotional Infrastructure
Social media also serves as an emotional infrastructure where students find encouragement, empathy, and shared resilience. Especially during high-stress periods like final exams or thesis completion, the virtual community becomes a space for emotional regulation and support**.** Siti Nurhaliza**,** a student from the Nursing Department at Universitas Perintis Indonesia, described: "We often share memes, motivational quotes, and prayers before exams. It's comforting. Even if we don't meet physically, we feel connected and encouraged." This illustrates the psychosocial dimension of social media use, resonating with the concept

of "ambient intimacy," where emotional closeness is sustained through digital presence and symbolic gestures.

5. The Emergence of a Digital Academic Ecosystem

Overall, social media emerges not only as a communication platform but as a self-constructed academic ecosystem. Students curate, manage, and transform their digital spaces into functional environments that blend learning, collaboration, creativity, and emotional well-being. This reflects a process of rearticulation --students are not merely adopting technology, but reshaping academic practices to suit their generational identity and local realities. As Andi Saputra, a postgraduate student in Public Administration at Universitas Ekasakti, concluded: "Social media is our campus outside the campus. It's where we meet, learn, laugh, and survive together. The boundaries of learning are no longer fixed to time and place."

This quote encapsulates the symbolic meaning of social media for students today: a third space between institutional formality and social familiarity, where educational practices are personalized, dynamic, and deeply human.

Table 1 Interpretative Analysis of Social Media Use in Academic Communication

Theme	Conceptual Explanation	Theoretical Lens	Representative Quotes	Implications
1. Social Media as an Academic Hub	WhatsApp and Telegram are used as collaborative, real-time learning spaces, beyond just messaging tools.	Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC); Constructivist Theory	"Our thesis discussion group on WhatsApp is more active than formal consultations." – Nurul Hidayati	Enhances collaborative learning; peer-based academic support becomes more effective than formal structures.
2. Blurring of Formal and Informal Communication	Formality and informality coexist in one space. Students adjust tone/style depending on cultural and relational context.	Symbolic Interactionism; Speech Code Theory	"Even though it's WhatsApp, we must show respect. That's how we were raised culturally." – Dewi Melati	Requires digital etiquette literacy; reinforces cultural norms even in informal digital spaces.
3. Creativity and Academic Motivation	Instagram, TikTok, and Reels used for academic tasks promote engagement and creativity, redefining classroom activities.	Media Ecology; Multimodal Literacy	"It pushed us to simplify complex ideas creatively." – Hafiz Ramadhan	Encourages innovative learning methods; empowers students as co-creators of knowledge.
4. Social Media as Emotional Infrastructure	Digital platforms foster emotional support and	Ambient Intimacy (Larsen);	"We often share memes, motivational quotes, and	Strengthens community feeling and psychological

	solidarity among peers, especially during stressful academic periods.	Psychosocial Support Theory	prayers before exams." – Siti Nurhaliza	well-being in the absence of physical presence.
5. A Digital Academic Ecosystem	Social media forms a self-managed academic space—where students curate, share, and engage based on their needs and identities.	Third Space Theory; Digital Habitus (Bourdieu)	"Social media is our campus outside the campus." – Andi Saputra	Indicates cultural transformation in academic life; dissolves boundaries between formal education and personal agency.

Source : Result of research

3.2. Transformation of Academic Communication Among Students in Padang City

Major changes in higher education are not only occurring in curricula or teaching methods but also in the ways students build academic communication. Social media, which was initially merely a space for entertainment and friendship, has now shifted to become one of the crucial foundations in students' academic ecosystems. In Padang City, the role of social media in supporting academic activities has become increasingly visible, especially after the pandemic accelerated the digitalization of campuses.[20] In this context, social media can be understood not merely as an auxiliary tool but as a digital classroom where the exchange of ideas, task collaboration, and even inter-campus academic discussions take place.[21]

Robbi Setiawan, a student from the Indonesian Literature Program at Andalas University, described how the Telegram groups he participated in functioned almost like interactive classes. Robbi said, "We discuss lecture materials there; sometimes lecturers also provide additional materials or ask for our opinions. It feels like a class but more flexible." Social media transforms the physical boundaries of classrooms, making them more fluid and responsive.[22] Discussions are no longer bound to lecture schedules but can happen at any time, allowing students to be more active in seeking, sharing, and commenting on academic information.

Echoing Robbi's view, Nadia Pertiwi, a Public Administration student from Universitas Negeri Padang, mentioned that social media also expands the space for asking questions. "In class, we are usually shy to ask questions, but in WhatsApp or Discord groups, friends are more open. Sometimes, discussions even go deeper there," she said. This reflects a shift in interaction patterns: from a top-down approach in conventional classrooms to a more horizontal, participative, and non-hierarchical environment in digital

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[20] Sun, J., & Zhang, Y. (2021). *Digital transformation in higher education: Trends and challenges*. Educational Technology Research and Development, 69(3), 1571–1585. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-09993-5

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[22] Rapanta, C., & Cantoni, L. (2021). *The pedagogical role of social media in online learning environments during COVID-19*. Computers in Human Behavior Reports, 4, 100103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chbr.2021.100103

spaces.[23] Communication becomes more equal, with students taking on a more active and confident role in expressing their opinions.

Additionally, Natasha Salsabila, a Management student from Ekasakti University, highlighted the role of social media in facilitating open access to academic materials. "I often find lecture slides, e-books, and even seminar recordings on Instagram or TikTok. So, it's not just entertainment --it becomes a place for learning too," she revealed. This shows that social media has encouraged greater openness in accessing academic information.[24] Students no longer rely solely on institutions or lecturers to obtain materials; instead, they can explore and choose learning resources from various channels.

From the perspective of communication decentralization, Ali Gufron, a student of Islamic Broadcasting Communication at UIN Imam Bonjol, emphasized how social media allows academic discussions to no longer be centralized within formal institutions. "I'm active in a Facebook community forum for medical students; it's full of students from all over Indonesia. We often exchange information about research and lecture topics," he explained. Through social media, academic communication is no longer tied to specific classrooms or campuses. There is a shift in authority --from lecturers being the sole sources of knowledge to a collective discussion ecosystem involving fellow students from various regions and backgrounds.[25]

Nevertheless, this transformation also demands new adaptations in communication styles. Muthia Hafizah, a Law student from Bung Hatta University, shared, "Sometimes it's confusing to adjust the language. On one hand, we want to be casual, but in serious discussions, we still need to maintain communication etiquette. So, we learn to manage our tone too." This shows that even though social media opens up more fluid communication spaces, there remains a demand to uphold academic norms in conveying messages. Students are challenged to manage their communication styles to remain productive while still respecting the scholarly context.[26]

The transformation of academic communication among university students in Padang City represents a broader cultural and technological shift within higher education. Social media, once viewed merely as a personal and entertainment tool, has now become central to how students interact, share knowledge, and co-construct academic discourse. This shift reflects the emergence of what can be called a networked academic culture, shaped by decentralization, horizontal communication, and personalized learning pathways. From the perspective of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory, this transformation highlights a move toward asynchronous, participatory, and user-centered communication models. In contrast to traditional classroom interactions --which are typically structured, time-bound, and instructor-led-- social media enables students to initiate, extend, and deepen academic exchanges at their own pace and comfort level. The statements from Robbi Setiawan and Nadia Pertiwi show that these platforms reduce psychological barriers and foster cognitive presence, where students are more willing to ask questions, clarify doubts, and engage in critical reflection outside formal classroom settings.

This transformation also aligns with decentralized communication theory, which posits that in digitally mediated environments, authority and expertise are no longer held exclusively by institutions or

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[23] Wang, R., & Chen, L. (2023). *From passive reception to active participation: Students' roles in social media-enhanced learning*. Computers & Education, 200, 104791.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2023.104791

[24] Kimmons, R., & Veletsianos, G. (2022). *Openness and social media in higher education: A systematic review*. Educational Research Review, 35, 100432.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100432

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https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v22i1.5093

[26] Li, Y., & Wong, K. (2024). *Navigating language and tone in digital academic communication*. Journal of Pragmatics, 215, 1–12.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2024.01.002

individuals in formal positions. As described by Ali Gufron, students actively participate in cross-campus academic forums and communities, often assuming the role of information curators and peer educators. This is a profound departure from the lecturer-centered paradigm and resonates with constructivist learning theories, where knowledge is collaboratively built and socially distributed.

Natasha Salsabila's experience underscores the phenomenon of "platform convergence", where social media traditionally used for leisure (Instagram, TikTok) is now repurposed for educational content. This reflects what Henry Jenkins terms "participatory culture", wherein users become producers, remixing and sharing content in ways that challenge conventional boundaries of media and learning. The blending of academic content with social media aesthetics makes learning more accessible, visual, and resonant with the digital generation. Importantly, this transformation brings about new literacies and identity negotiations. As noted by Muthia Hafizah, students must now develop adaptive communication strategies --navigating between casual and formal tones, negotiating the norms of politeness, and maintaining respect even in peer-driven environments. These adjustments signal a form of digital professionalism, where students learn to code-switch between social and scholarly registers.

Overall, the transformation of academic communication through social media within higher education environments in Padang City has shaped a new landscape in academic culture. Social media has evolved into an adaptive and open digital classroom, expanding access to information and encouraging a more democratic decentralization of communication.[27] In this space, students are no longer merely recipients of information but active participants in building academic discourse across geographic and institutional boundaries.

Table 2 Interpretative Analysis of Academic Communication Transformation via Social Media

Theme	Conceptual Explanation	Theoretical Framework	Representative Quote	Implications
1. Social Media as a Flexible Digital Classroom	Social media platforms (e.g., Telegram, WhatsApp) serve as fluid academic spaces, unconstrained by time and location.	Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC); Cognitive Presence	"It feels like a class but more flexible." – Robbi Setiawan	Enables asynchronous learning; increases student agency and participation outside formal schedules.
2. Horizontal and Participative Interaction	Digital communication reduces academic hierarchy, encouraging open peer-to-peer discourse.	Constructivist Learning Theory; Participatory Communication	"In WhatsApp or Discord groups, friends are more open. Sometimes, discussions even go deeper there." – Nadia Pertiwi	Enhances equality in academic discussion; builds confidence in student expression.
3. Open and Decentralized	Platforms like Instagram and TikTok provide	Decentralized Communication Theory;	"It's not just entertainment – it becomes a	Democratizes learning content; shifts learning

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[27] Dron, J., & Anderson, T. (2021). *Education as a networked phenomenon: The rise of the digital classroom*. Distance Education, 42(2), 188–202.
https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2021.1910495

Information Access	alternative academic resources beyond formal institutions.	Knowledge Society	place for learning too." – Natasha Salsabila	authority from lecturers to student networks.
4. Cross-Campus Academic Networking	Social media fosters inter-campus and national academic communities through collaborative forums.	Network Society Theory (Castells)	"We often exchange information about research and lecture topics." – Ali Gufron	Promotes academic collaboration across geographic boundaries; redefines academic community.
5. Code-Switching and Digital Professionalism	Students adapt language and tone based on context and audience, balancing casual and formal styles.	Digital Literacy; Speech Accommodation Theory	"We learn to manage our tone too." – Muthia Hafizah	Cultivates communication awareness; trains students in context-sensitive interaction and digital etiquette.
6. Convergence of Entertainment and Education	Social media originally meant for leisure is repurposed for educational use, blending fun and function.	Participatory Culture (Henry Jenkins); Media Convergence	"Instagram Reels or TikTok now share e-books and seminar recordings." – Inferred from Natasha's comment	Makes learning multimodal and engaging; reshapes pedagogical strategies to suit digital learners.

Source : Result of research

3.3. Social and Cultural Implications in Academic Communication

Amidst the deepening digital transformation within academic life, communication among university students has undergone significant changes --not only in terms of medium but also across social and cultural dimensions. As one of the higher education hubs in western Indonesia, Padang City has witnessed how students from diverse cultural backgrounds and institutions navigate these shifts in academic communication, particularly through social media.[28] Communication, which was once more formal, has now become more flexible and casual, while local cultural influences remain a foundational element in shaping the ethics and style of digital communication.[29] These social and cultural implications cannot be

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[28] Greenhow, C., & Lewin, C. (2022). *Social media and education: Reconceptualizing the boundaries*. Learning, Media and Technology, 47(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2022.2038669

[29] Velázquez, A., & Elías, C. (2023). *Cultural aspects in online academic communication: New dynamics of interaction*. Journal of Multicultural Discourses, 18(1), 76–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2174571

ignored, as they significantly affect relationship patterns, academic perceptions, and the dynamics of campus communication.

One tangible form of these social implications is the shift in norms between formal and informal communication. Previously, academic communication was dominated by formal letters, face-to-face meetings, or rigidly structured and formal emails. Today, students prefer using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and even Instagram DMs as their primary communication channels, both with classmates and lecturers.[30]

Informant Nadia Pertiwi mentioned that they feel more comfortable discussing lecture materials or coordinating assignments via group chats because they are not required to always use formal language. "It feels more relaxed—you can get straight to the point, but we still know the limits," she said. This indicates that students are beginning to form new communication norms that contextually combine elements of formality and familiarity.[31] However, this shift also brings its own challenges. Robbi Setiawan (a student at Andalas University) admitted to feeling awkward when he had to contact a lecturer via short messages. He said, "Sometimes it's confusing—if I use formal language, it might sound too stiff, but if I'm too casual, it might seem disrespectful."

This anxiety reflects how students are in a process of adjusting to new norms that have not yet fully stabilized. They must read the situation and determine an appropriate communication style, depending on the recipient and the communication context. These changes demand that students possess social intelligence and the ability to understand new, unwritten communication codes.[32]

Beyond the issue of formal-informal norms, local cultural influences also shape the distinctive style of digital academic communication among students in Padang City. Minangkabau culture, which highly values politeness, respect for elders, and the importance of maintaining harmony in communication, remains alive and relevant --even within digital spaces.

Natasha Salsabila (a student at Ekasakti University) shared that when contacting lecturers or seniors, they still use polite opening phrases like "Permission to ask, Sir/Madam" or "Sorry to disturb you for a moment." For her, this is not just a matter of etiquette but also a reflection of cultural identity. Even during casual discussions, students tend to avoid direct or aggressive communication styles, preferring a softer approach that reflects local values. The influence of local culture is also evident in how students express opinions or socialize digitally. Informant Ali Gufron (a student at UIN Imam Bonjol) noted that while social media allows freer communication, value boundaries are still maintained. "We can have discussions using the Minangkabau language to feel more familiar, but we still understand the context when discussing academic topics. Not everything is made casual."

This shows that local culture does not hinder digital communication but rather serves as a filter or guide to adjust communication styles while maintaining politeness and respecting social norms. In practice, students in Padang City demonstrate high adaptability in blending global communication styles with local values. They use memes, popular abbreviations, or emojis in daily conversations, yet still maintain

[30] Ratten, V. (2021). *Social change and education: The role of digital communication*. Education and Information Technologies, 26(3), 3189–3201. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10497-0

[31] Al-Ali, S. (2023). *The hybridization of formal and informal communication among university students on social media platforms*. Computers & Education, 198, 104775. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2023.104775

[32] Bouhnik, D., & Deshen, M. (2022). *Norm instability in digital academic communication: Challenges and coping strategies*. International Journal of Educational Research Open, 3, 100158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100158

politeness when interacting with respected figures.[33] Muthia Hafizah (a student at Bung Hatta University) even mentioned that local humor or typical Minangkabau jokes are often used in discussion groups as a way to lighten the atmosphere without losing the substance of the discussion.

These communication forms show that digital culture and local culture do not negate each other but rather complement one another in shaping a new, more fluid academic culture. The social and cultural implications of the transformation of academic communication among university students in Padang City, based on field findings, demonstrate that technological changes have opened new spaces for expression, interaction, and learning. However, at the same time, cultural values remain an essential foundation for navigating these changes. Students are adapting not only technologically but also socially and culturally, forming dynamic, contextual academic communication patterns that are rooted in their local identity. Within this increasingly inclusive digital space, they continue to act as agents of change, shaping a new face of academic communication that is more humane and relevant to the times.

The digitalization of academic communication among students in Padang City is not merely a technological shift --it is also a deeply cultural and social transformation. As digital tools increasingly mediate educational interactions, students are not simply adopting new technologies; they are negotiating new norms, reinterpreting cultural values, and redefining the social boundaries of academic discourse. From a sociocultural communication perspective, the fluidity between formal and informal language usage on platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram represents a hybridization of speech codes. Traditional academic interactions --previously characterized by formality, structure, and hierarchy-- are now blended with more conversational, peer-like modes of expression. Yet, as Nadia Pertiwi's account indicates, this does not mean a loss of respect or structure. Instead, students are developing "contextual formality"-- an adaptive communication style that blends clarity and informality without sacrificing respect.

This adaptive code-switching mirrors the concept of "cultural hybridity" in postcolonial communication theory (e.g., Homi Bhabha), where individuals navigate multiple linguistic and cultural systems simultaneously. Robbi Setiawan's uncertainty about how to address lecturers via chat messages reflects the liminal space students occupy: one where digital immediacy clashes with traditional deference structures. In this space, they learn to read not only messages but also social cues--an exercise in emotional and intercultural intelligence.

Local cultural values, especially those rooted in Minangkabau traditions --such as politeness, hierarchy, and harmony-- continue to shape how students interact in digital academic spaces. Natasha Salsabila's adherence to polite greetings like "Permission to ask, Sir/Madam" even in casual online exchanges shows that cultural scripts are not erased by digital tools, but instead recontextualized within new communication environments. This behavior aligns with Goffman's dramaturgical theory, where individuals perform identities based on the expectations of a given social stage—be it face-to-face or digital.

Ali Gufron's example of switching between Indonesian and Minangkabau during digital discussions illustrates linguistic identity preservation within academic discourse. Even on platforms designed for fast, global communication, students assert cultural intimacy through local languages and humor. These acts are not only expressions of identity but also strategies for maintaining cognitive and emotional cohesion in group discussions. Moreover, students actively use humor, memes, emojis, and local idioms not as distractions but as cultural tools to humanize academic spaces. This digital-local fusion reflects media ecology theory (Neil Postman, Marshall McLuhan), in which media environments influence the structure of human interaction. Social media doesn't merely transmit information --it reshapes social relationships and cultural expectations, making academic interaction more inclusive, affective, and relatable.

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[33] Bouhnik, D., & Deshen, M. (2022). *Norm instability in digital academic communication: Challenges and coping strategies*. International Journal of Educational Research Open, 3, 100158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100158

Table 3 Interpretative Analysis of Social and Cultural Implications in Academic Communication

Theme	Conceptual Explanation	Theoretical Framework	Representative Quote	Implications
1. Hybrid Norms of Communication	Students merge formal and informal speech patterns to fit various academic contexts on social media.	Sociocultural Communication; Hybrid Speech Codes	"It feels more relaxed—you can get straight to the point, but we still know the limits." – Nadia Pertiwi	Leads to the development of "contextual formality," encouraging clarity without compromising respect.
2. Navigating Liminal Communication Spaces	Students are in between formal academic structures and informal digital practices, requiring emotional and social intelligence.	Cultural Hybridity (Homi Bhabha); Code-Switching Theory	"If I use formal language, it might sound too stiff; if I'm too casual, it might seem disrespectful." – Robbi Setiawan	Encourages students to read social cues, enhancing intercultural and emotional competence in digital settings.
3. Cultural Continuity in Digital Spaces	Minangkabau cultural values (politeness, respect, hierarchy) remain influential in digital interactions.	Dramaturgical Theory (Erving Goffman); Cultural Identity Theory	"Permission to ask, Sir/Madam" or "Sorry to disturb you for a moment." – Natasha Salsabila	Demonstrates that local etiquette adapts to but is not erased by digital tools; cultural values are recontextualized.
4. Language and Identity Preservation	Use of local language and codes (e.g., Minangkabau) helps maintain identity and intimacy in academic discourse.	Linguistic Relativity; Identity Negotiation Theory	"We can have discussions using the Minangkabau language to feel more familiar, but we still understand the context." – Ali Gufron	Reinforces group cohesion and cultural pride; supports inclusive academic interaction.
5. Localized Humor and Emotional Expression	Memes, emojis, and jokes are employed to reduce stress and humanize digital academic spaces.	Media Ecology Theory (Postman, McLuhan); Affective Communication	"Local humor or typical Minangkabau jokes are used in discussion groups." – Muthia Hafizah	Cultivates a sense of belonging and emotional safety; transforms academic communication into a more humane experience.

Source : Result of research

4.4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that academic communication among university students in Padang City has undergone a significant transformation alongside the increased use of social media. This change is not merely technological but also carries complex social and cultural dimensions. Students are not simply adopting social media as a communication tool; they are also shaping new norms that blend flexible language styles with politeness values rooted in local culture, particularly Minangkabau culture.

In this context, social media has become a fluid space for interaction, where the boundaries between formal and informal communication are increasingly dynamic. Although students tend to prefer a more relaxed and direct communication style, they continue to uphold appropriate etiquette according to the context and social relations, such as using polite language when interacting with lecturers or seniors. This reflects a form of social intelligence in reading communication situations, based not solely on rigid norms, but on a continually evolving contextual understanding.

These findings reinforce the theory of "glocalization" in digital communication, which explains how global communication practices are adapted to align with local values. Although platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram possess universal communication characteristics, students in Padang City are able to embed Minangkabau cultural elements --such as traditional greetings, use of local language, and distinctive humor-- into academic conversations. This affirms that local culture is not marginalized by the wave of digital globalization; rather, it serves as a value framework for navigating digital communication.

Compared to previous research, which has largely highlighted the role of technology in accelerating academic communication or enhancing information access, this study adds new understanding by showing that communication transformation also involves processes of negotiating cultural and social identity. New communication norms are not formed instantly; instead, they emerge through a process of trial and error experienced by students in their daily lives, including moments of awkwardness, uncertainty regarding language style, and the search for appropriate forms of communication. Thus, this study contributes to the development of digital communication literature by emphasizing the importance of considering locality and social values in understanding the dynamics of academic communication. These findings are also relevant as a foundation for campus policy development in supporting digital literacy that not only focuses on technological proficiency but also on the ethical, cultural, and social relational aspects that accompany it.

Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the above discussion show that the transformation of academic communication among students in Padang City reflects not only an adaptation to technological developments but also involves complex social and cultural dynamics.

Students have successfully established new communication patterns that are more flexible and casual without completely abandoning politeness norms and local cultural values, which remain important guidelines in digital interactions. These findings align with the expectations and results of previous studies that highlighted the role of social media in creating more inclusive and democratic communication spaces. However, this study offers a new contribution by emphasizing how local cultural identity actively shapes digital communication ethics. Thus, this research enriches our understanding of the integration of culture within the context of academic communication transformation and underscores the importance of a contextual approach in examining changes in communication practices in the digital era.

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