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## THE COMMUNICATION PATTERNS BETWEEN PARENTS AND MIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL ERA: STRENGTHENING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pola komunikasi antara orang tua dengan anak perantau dalam era digital, serta dampaknya terhadap koneksi emosional antara keduanya. Teknologi digital memberikan kesempatan bagi orang tua dan anak untuk tetap terhubung meskipun terpisah jarak, namun intensitas komunikasi menjadi faktor penting dalam membentuk kualitas hubungan tersebut. Penelitian ini dilakukan terhadap mahasiswa perantau yang tinggal di asrama Universitas Pattimura menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa anak perantau yang sering berkomunikasi dengan orang tua merasa lebih terhubung secara emosional, tidak terlalu kesepian, serta mampu mengembangkan kemandirian dan pengalaman baru. Sebaliknya, mahasiswa dengan intensitas komunikasi yang kurang merasa lebih kesepian, namun menjadikan hal tersebut sebagai strategi bertahan untuk tetap fokus dalam kehidupan perantauan. Beberapa mahasiswa menyatakan bahwa komunikasi yang terlalu intens dengan orang tua justru memicu kerinduan yang berlebihan dan keinginan untuk pulang. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pemahaman bagaimana teknologi digital bukan hanya sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai penghubung emosional dalam keluarga yang terpisah jarak. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar kajian lanjutan lebih mendalami aspek psikologis dan sosial dari intensitas komunikasi serta dampaknya pada kesejahteraan emosional anak perantau. Hasil kajian ini berkontribusi bagi pengembangan ilmu sosial dan humaniora, terutama dalam memahami dinamika komunikasi keluarga di era digital.*

**Keywords:** Pola Komunikasi Digital; Keluarga Perantau; Koneksi Emosional; Adaptasi Sosial; Teknologi Komunikasi

### INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, family communication patterns have undergone significant transformations, particularly for families separated due to children migrating for education or work (Ramdhan et al., 2022). Digital communication technologies such as instant messaging, video calls, and social media have now become the connecting bridge between parents and children who are geographically apart. However, an interesting phenomenon has emerged: the intensity of such communication has varying impacts on migrant children (Afdhal et al., 2022; Zahra et al., 2022). Some children feel emotionally connected and supported as they navigate life away from home. On the other hand, for others, frequent communication leads to a deeper sense of loneliness and a stronger desire to return home, thereby hindering their adaptation to the new

environment. This condition indicates that, while technology can strengthen family relationships, its impact on the emotional well-being of migrant children requires further in-depth study (Arjanggi & Fauziah, 2021; Julika & Setiyawati, 2019). This issue is the focus of this research, specifically examining how digital communication patterns between parents and migrant children affect the emotional balance and adaptation of the children in their new environment.

Previous studies have discussed how digital technology facilitates communication within migrant families. Research by Chung (2020) found that communication technologies, such as messaging apps and video calls, help parents maintain their involvement in their children's lives despite the physical distance. However, excessive communication intensity can trigger stress on both sides, especially when communication expectations are unbalanced. In line with these findings, Shih et al. (2021) indicated that digital communication often creates emotional expectations that are difficult to meet, leading to dissatisfaction among migrant children. In the context of migration, research by Baldassar et al. (2020) highlighted that although digital technology facilitates cross-border communication, the sense of emotional connection greatly depends on the frequency and quality of interactions.

Furthermore, Rudi et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of communication intensity in influencing the psychological well-being of migrant children. Children who frequently communicate with their parents feel more connected and experience lower levels of loneliness. On the other hand, children who rarely communicate tend to feel more independent and are better able to adapt to their new lives. A study by Lim et al. (2020) confirmed that overly frequent digital communication can cause emotional pressure on migrant children, who sometimes feel caught between the obligation to communicate and the need to focus on adapting to their new environment.

Further research by Park et al. (2021) and Wang & Liu (2022) also highlighted the psychological aspects of digital communication. They found that digital technology allows parents and children to share emotional support more flexibly, but at the same time, it can exacerbate feelings of homesickness and stress if the frequency is not properly managed. Studies by Yoon & Hong (2022) and Zhang et al. (2022) supported this view by showing that migrant children often have to balance their sense of responsibility to communicate with their parents and their need for independence.

In Indonesia, research on family communication patterns in the digital era is still limited. Satriawan et al. (2021) examined the impact of digital technology on family relationships in Indonesia but focused more on the technological aspects as communication tools, without delving into the emotional implications. This study fills that gap by exploring how communication intensity affects the emotional well-being of migrant children, particularly students living far from their families. Using qualitative methods and in-depth interviews, this research provides a richer perspective on the experiences of migrant children in the digital era.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach, which not only views technology as a communication tool but also as a medium that influences the emotional balance and adaptation process of migrant children. This study enriches the existing literature by focusing on the Indonesian context, particularly migrant students at Universitas Pattimura. Additionally, the article contributes new insights to the discourse in social sciences and humanities, offering perspectives on how digital communication can be optimized to support the emotional well-being of migrant children. This research also provides practical recommendations for families and educational institutions in managing communication expectations, ensuring they do not become an emotional burden for migrant children.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach aimed at deeply exploring the communication patterns between parents and migrant children in the digital era, with a focus on Batak students living in the Student Dormitory at Universitas Pattimura (Creswell, 2017; Leavy, 2022). This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand interactions, the meanings embedded in communication, and the diverse subjective experiences. The primary goal of this research is to reveal how technology, particularly instant messaging applications like WhatsApp, plays a central role in maintaining emotional connections between students and their parents, who are separated by geographical distance.

The data collected in this study includes communication patterns, covering the frequency, intensity, and quality of interactions; the role of technology in maintaining relationships; and the emotional dynamics that arise in long-distance relationships. These variables are analyzed to understand how students and parents use technology to communicate and how they emotionally respond in maintaining their relationship amidst physical separation. The main data sources for this study are migrant Batak students living in the dormitory and their parents who reside in North Sumatra. The selection of subjects was done through purposive sampling with specific criteria, namely students who actively and routinely communicate with their parents via digital platforms. By selecting appropriate subjects, this research is able to gather relevant and comprehensive data.

Data were collected through three main methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document studies (Miles & Huberman, 2020; Neuman, 2015). In-depth interviews served as the primary method for understanding the personal experiences of the students and parents. Interviews with the students were conducted face-to-face to capture emotional nuances more deeply, while interviews with parents were conducted through WhatsApp, given the geographical distance between Ambon and North Sumatra. In these interviews, the researcher asked open-ended questions about communication patterns, challenges faced, and the role of technology in maintaining family relationships. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted participant observation of the students' daily lives in the

dormitory. This observation provided a direct view of how the students use digital technology to communicate with their families, as well as how they express emotional needs. Participant observation helped the researcher gain a more contextual understanding of student communication patterns and the role of technology in their lives.

Document studies complemented the interviews and observations with visual evidence, such as screenshots of WhatsApp conversations between students and their parents, as well as other relevant documentation of their interactions. This data was used to strengthen and validate the findings from the interviews and observations, providing a more in-depth and concrete picture of the communication patterns being studied. The data analysis process was conducted using a thematic approach. Interview and observation results were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding, which helped identify key themes such as communication patterns, the role of technology, and emotional dynamics. These themes were then interpreted to understand the relationships between elements that influence the communication patterns between migrant students and their parents. Documentation data were used to reinforce the findings, making the analysis results more valid and reliable.

Although this research successfully uncovered communication patterns and emotional dynamics between migrant students and their parents, there are several limitations to note. This study was conducted solely on Batak students living in dormitories, making the results not generalizable to students from other cultural backgrounds or those living outside dormitories. Additionally, interviews with parents were conducted virtually, limiting the observation of non-verbal cues that might be more evident in face-to-face interviews. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study still provide significant insights into how digital technology plays a role in maintaining emotional relationships amid physical separation. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of family communication in the digital era, particularly in the context of migrant students. Technology has become an important bridge in maintaining close interpersonal relationships, and this study strengthens that understanding in the context of migrant students in Ambon.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Technology and Family Communication Patterns in the Digital Era**

Digital communication technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the way families communicate. This development not only facilitates the communication process but also influences the dynamics of relationships between individuals in the family, particularly those separated by geographical distance, such as in the case of migrant families. Before the digital era, the limitations of space and time often posed barriers to maintaining close relationships. However, with the advent of communication applications like WhatsApp, physical distance is no longer a significant obstacle to maintaining close family bonds (Madianou & Miller, 2020). Within the framework of social change, technology facilitates more

intense, quick, and flexible relationships between family members who are far apart. This is highly relevant in the context of migrant students living far from their parents. The advancement of technology not only simplifies communication but also creates new forms of maintaining emotional connections between parents and children, despite the physical distance.

Social change is the process through which transformations occur in social structures, behaviors, and interactions within a society. Modern communication technology, such as smartphones and messaging applications, plays a pivotal role in this change, accelerating and simplifying the exchange of information across regions and time. On one hand, technology minimizes the limitations of space and time that were previously major obstacles in interpersonal communication. On the other hand, it reshapes social interaction patterns, particularly in families whose members are geographically separated, such as in the case of migrant students living far from their parents. Technology has triggered what Anthony Giddens refers to as “disembedding,” where interactions are detached from local contexts, making them more flexible and less dependent on physical proximity (Giddens & Sutton, 2021; Herry-Priyono, 2016). In this context, migrant families leverage technology such as WhatsApp to maintain relationships and strengthen emotional connections despite being physically apart.

This application facilitates both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (delayed) communication, which is highly beneficial for migrant students and their parents, who may have conflicting schedules. One migrant student from North Sumatra, identified as A, living in the University of Pattimura student dormitory, shared in an interview, “WhatsApp helps me stay connected with my parents even though we are on two different islands. We can exchange news every day, whether through messages or video calls. It makes me feel close to them, even though we are physically far apart.”

This statement illustrates how WhatsApp has expanded opportunities to maintain close family relationships, even with significant physical distance. In the context of social change theory, such digital communication overcomes the barriers of time and space. Anthony Giddens' concept of “disembedding” emphasizes that social relationships are no longer bound by geographical location (Giddens & Sutton, 2021). WhatsApp, as a digital communication tool, supports this idea by enabling virtual presence between distant family members. Furthermore, a mother of a migrant student expressed through a virtual interview, “I can see my child through video calls, hear them talk about their daily life, and it helps me worry less. The distance is there, but technology keeps our communication smooth.”

This statement highlights how technology like WhatsApp not only sustains emotional connections but also provides a sense of security for parents whose children are studying far from home. Thus, digital technology not only facilitates the transfer of information but also serves as a medium for families to maintain emotional closeness despite physical separation.

Before the advent of digital technology, communication among family members separated by long distances was very limited. Letters, expensive phone calls, or direct visits were the primary means of maintaining relationships. However, one informant, a migrant student from

North Sumatra, said, “In the past, if I wanted to talk to my parents, I had to make an expensive phone call or wait for the holidays to go home. Now, with WhatsApp, I can contact them anytime, even for small things I want to share.” A theoretical analysis of this situation illustrates how communication patterns have changed with the advancement of technology. Before apps like WhatsApp, technological limitations forced migrant families to use more restricted media like letters or phone calls, which were more costly and tended to be less flexible. Now, communication is cheaper and more flexible. Apps like WhatsApp support both synchronous and asynchronous communication, allowing migrant families to share news anytime, without being constrained by time or cost, in line with Giddens' concept of “disembedding,” which shows that social relationships can continue even without being in the same location (Kovačević & Kovačević, 2017).

The mother of one migrant student also added in a virtual interview, “In the past, we could only send letters or wait for a phone call, but now with WhatsApp, I can talk to my child anytime. This technology has truly changed the way we communicate as a family separated by distance.” This interview further highlights the significant influence technology has had in changing the communication patterns of migrant families. This transformation shows that technological advancements have changed how families maintain their relationships, from sporadic and limited communication to more intensive and nearly limitless interaction. In this case, technology has removed the barriers that previously existed in long-distance communication, making it easier and cheaper, while providing an opportunity for migrant families to stay personally connected despite being geographically separated.

Technology has become a key factor in changing family communication patterns, particularly in the context of migrant families. Apps like WhatsApp make communication easier, faster, and more intensive between family members separated by significant geographical distances. However, the emotional impact of digital communication must be managed properly to avoid creating excessive dependency. In the context of migrant students, technology has become an important tool for maintaining emotional connections with their parents, even though they are physically far from home. Over time, further research is needed to better understand the long-term effects of communication technology on family relationships, particularly in the context of social change in the digital age. The combination of technological convenience and human emotional needs shows that technology is not just a tool but an essential medium in interpersonal relationships in modern times.

### **The Role of Polymedia in Maintaining Emotional Connections**

In the digital era, polymedia has emerged as an important concept for understanding how technology facilitates various communication methods that cater to the emotional needs of geographically separated families. The concept of polymedia, introduced by Madianou & Miller (2020), emphasizes that technology should not be viewed merely as standalone communication tools but as a diverse system of media that allows users to choose the platform most suitable for

their emotional goals and contexts. In this regard, polymedia provides users with the flexibility to tailor their communication media according to specific needs in maintaining emotional relationships.

Current digital communication technologies, such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and other social media platforms, offer a wide range of options for families to stay connected. In an interview with one informant, a migrant student from North Sumatra, he expressed, “When I really miss my parents, I prefer video calls over just chatting. It feels closer, more real. However, when I’m busy, I just send a text message to update them.” This illustrates that the choice of media used in family communication is not just about convenience, but also relates to the emotional needs felt in specific situations. The concept of polymedia helps explain how media choices are based on the emotional context that users want to bridge.

Polymedia also highlights how technology gives users access to adjust their communication methods according to the dynamics of their emotional relationships. In this sense, digital communication technology offers high flexibility in creating both synchronous and asynchronous communication. For instance, apps like WhatsApp enable real-time conversations through video calls or phone calls, which are particularly beneficial when there is an urgent need for intense emotional interaction, such as when a migrant student is experiencing stress from academic pressures or other situations. Another informant mentioned, “When I need to hear my mom’s voice to calm down, I call her right away. No matter what time it is, I know she’ll answer.” In this context, polymedia allows the selection of communication platforms that are most relevant to urgent emotional needs.

Conversely, in situations where communication does not require real-time interaction, text or audio messages that can be accessed asynchronously become a more efficient choice. Thus, polymedia not only provides technical options but also accommodates emotional needs in a more nuanced and personal way. This supports Madianou & Miller (2020) theory that polymedia gives users full control in selecting media that aligns with specific emotional contexts.

The use of polymedia in maintaining emotional connections has both positive and negative complementary impacts. On one hand, polymedia enables separated families to adjust their communication methods according to their needs, whether for maintaining emotional closeness or sharing important information. This is especially critical in the context of migration, where physical distance separates family members. Polymedia allows emotional ties to remain intact even without direct physical interaction. One migrant student expressed in an interview, “I can choose when I need a video call or just chatting. It depends on how I feel at that moment. If I want to feel closer, I will choose a video call.”

However, on the other hand, the convenience and accessibility of various communication platforms can also present challenges. An overwhelming number of media choices may lead to confusion in determining the appropriate medium for specific situations and reinforce the phenomenon of “overcommunication,” where individuals feel pressured to always be connected or to respond to messages immediately. A mother of one migrant student stated, “Sometimes I

feel like my child contacts me too often about little things he could handle on his own. It makes it hard for me to focus on my own activities.” This shows that while polymedia facilitates more intense emotional communication, it also has the potential to create additional pressure for some users. Furthermore, another negative impact of polymedia is the potential for distortion in communication. Although video calls can offer more personal interaction, not all communication can be interpreted correctly through a screen. Emotions expressed through text messages or videos can sometimes be difficult to fully grasp, which can trigger misunderstandings. Despite enabling smoother communication, technology still has limitations in conveying more subtle emotional nuances. This miscommunication represents a significant drawback in using polymedia to maintain emotional connections.

### **Strategies for Migrant Students to Cope with Distance and Loneliness**

Migrant students often face significant challenges, including the physical distance that separates them from their families and the accompanying feelings of loneliness. In the midst of these situations, they are compelled to develop coping strategies that help them navigate emotional and social difficulties. One effective approach employed by students is leveraging communication technology, such as WhatsApp, which serves not only as a means of information exchange but also as a tool for maintaining emotional balance in long-distance relationships with their families. From a sociological perspective, these coping strategies reflect individual adaptations to changes in the social structure they experience, particularly in the context of internal migration. For instance, migrant students residing in dormitories at Universitas Pattimura utilize technology to mitigate feelings of alienation and to maintain close ties with their families back home. One Batak student mentioned in an interview, “I felt lonely at first, but when I regularly communicated with my parents through video calls, I felt calmer and no longer isolated.” This routine communication helps students sustain their emotional bonds with their parents, despite living in an environment far from home.

In addressing loneliness, migrant students rely not only on verbal communication with their families but also develop various other coping mechanisms, such as forming friendships with fellow migrant students and creating support communities in their dormitory. This demonstrates that coping mechanisms depend not only on long-distance relationships with family but also on social integration built in their new surroundings. As one informant in this study stated, “I not only frequently contact my family, but I also spend time with friends here. We support each other when one of us feels homesick.” Social involvement in their environment provides a balance between the need for family support and the need to adapt to new life experiences in their migration context. From a sociological standpoint, these actions can be seen as a form of solidarity among migrant students. Such solidarity not only aids students in the adaptation process but also strengthens their identity as part of a group facing similar challenges. Consequently, migrant students are able to overcome the challenges of loneliness and alienation by combining support from their families with the social connections they build in their new living



environment.

Migrant students also manage long-distance relationships with their families through communication strategies tailored to their emotional needs and individual circumstances. Technologies like WhatsApp provide them with the flexibility to balance the need for intensive communication with time constraints and various situations. Several students expressed that they do not always engage in video calls but maintain communication through text messages or voice notes, depending on their circumstances and busyness. “When I’m busy with coursework, I just send a message to my mom. But when I’m relaxed, I prefer to call or video chat,” one student shared. This approach illustrates that technology serves not only as a communication tool but also as a medium that allows migrant students to maintain emotional balance. Technology provides the freedom to manage when and how they want to communicate with their families, ultimately helping them feel connected without experiencing pressure. A sociological analysis in this context underscores the importance of technology as a means for migrant students to create flexible communication spaces that cater to their emotional and practical needs.

### **Embedded and Technological Communication: Communication Patterns of Migrant Students**

This research not only views technology as a tool to facilitate long-distance communication but also as a medium that influences the emotional balance and adaptation processes of migrant students. Through technology, students can choose communication methods that align with their emotional conditions, whether through more personal video calls or more practical text messages. This highlights how technology mediates migration experiences and aids students in adapting to their new lives. For instance, one student in this study expressed that video calls provide greater emotional comfort compared to text messages: “When I video call, I feel like I’m talking directly to my parents. It gives me a better feeling than just sending messages.” This choice of medium demonstrates that technology serves not only as a communication channel but also as a crucial element in maintaining emotional balance for migrant students.

This research enriches existing literature by focusing on the context of migrant students in Indonesia, particularly at Universitas Pattimura. While many studies have addressed the use of technology in family communication, this study contributes uniquely by exploring how technology is used by migrant students as a coping strategy in facing emotional and social challenges during their migration. In the context of Indonesian culture, which emphasizes familial values, the use of technology by migrant students not only serves to maintain family ties but also helps navigate emotional and social transitions in their new environments.

The findings of this study indicate that intense communication between migrant children and their parents plays a crucial role in maintaining emotional connections and providing psychological support. Migrant students who regularly communicate with their parents through various digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, feel more emotionally connected and tend to

experience less profound loneliness. As one informant stated in an interview, “Routine communication with my mom makes me feel like I’m still close to my family, so I don’t feel too lonely even though I live far away.” This communication not only helps students maintain emotional balance but also supports their independence, as they feel encouraged to explore new experiences in their migration context.

From a sociological analysis, intense communication can be seen as a form of an “emotional bridge” connecting migrant children with their families. Technology allows them to maintain uninterrupted social interactions, even when geographically separated. This illustrates how digital technology has transformed traditional communication patterns, enabling emotional connectivity despite migration. In the context of migrant students at Universitas Pattimura, technology becomes a crucial factor in their adaptation process, allowing them to feel a “presence” of family, which can help alleviate psychological pressures often encountered in migrant life.

On the other hand, the results of this study also reveal that not all migrant students perceive intense communication as equally beneficial. Some students with lower communication frequency consider loneliness as part of their coping strategy. One student noted, “Communicating too frequently with my family makes me miss them more, so I choose to reduce the frequency of communication to focus more on life here.” In this case, technology is used more selectively, where students decide to manage communication frequency to avoid excessive feelings of longing and maintain concentration on their lives in their new environment. This approach demonstrates variations in how migrant students utilize technology, influenced not only by emotional needs but also by adaptation goals. For some students, limiting communication is a way to foster independence and practice facing life challenges on their own. This underscores that digital technology is not always viewed as a tool for maintaining close relationships but also as a medium that can be tailored to meet individual psychological needs in specific situations.

The novelty of this research lies in the understanding that digital technology functions not only as a communication tool but also as an “emotional connector” within geographically separated families. Technology allows families to continue to feel each other's presence, whether through synchronous communication (like video calls) or asynchronous communication (like text messages), which helps maintain emotional balance and reduce the negative impacts of physical separation. In the context of migration, digital technology not only facilitates information exchange but also becomes an essential medium for preserving deep emotional connections. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that communication intensity does not always correlate directly with emotional well-being. In some cases, excessive communication can trigger overwhelming longing and unwanted emotional stress. This provides a new perspective in sociological studies on how digital technology affects family relationship dynamics in the modern era. The role of technology in balancing emotional needs and adaptation processes is a crucial focus in understanding its impact on migrant students.

This research recommends that future studies delve deeper into the psychological and social aspects of communication intensity and its impact on the emotional well-being of migrant children. By considering the differences in how students utilize technology, subsequent research could explore the psychological impacts of various communication patterns, such as frequency, types of media used, and how individuals interpret their digital interactions with family. This study also contributes to the development of social sciences and humanities, particularly in understanding the dynamics of family communication in the digital age, where technology not only mediates social interactions but also influences emotional and social adaptation processes of individuals in migration contexts.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this study indicates that digital technology, especially through applications like WhatsApp, plays a crucial role in maintaining the emotional relationship between migrant students and their parents. Students who frequently communicate with their parents tend to feel more emotionally connected, better able to cope with feelings of loneliness, and successfully develop independence and new experiences during their time away from home. Effective communication provides emotional support that helps migrant students face existing challenges, and in some cases, strengthens family bonds despite significant geographical distance. However, this research also finds that excessively high communication intensity does not always yield positive effects. Some students feel that excessive communication triggers strong feelings of homesickness and a desire to return home, which can hinder their adaptation process in a new environment. Conversely, students who choose to limit communication with their parents use this as a coping strategy to remain focused on their life as migrants and to reduce emotional dependency. The novelty of this study lies in the understanding that digital technology functions not only as a communication tool but also as an emotional connector that can influence the psychological balance of migrant students. Technology allows families to remain emotionally connected even when physically separated; however, the intensity and manner of technology usage play a significant role in determining the resulting emotional impact. Therefore, further studies are recommended to delve deeper into the psychological and social aspects of communication intensity, as well as its influence on the emotional well-being of migrant students. The findings of this research contribute to the development of social sciences and humanities, particularly in understanding the dynamics of family communication in the digital era and its impact on the adaptation process and emotional well-being of migrant students in the Indonesian context.

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