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Children's Communication BehaviorDue To Gadget Dependence (Case Study in the Tanjung Raya Permai Housing Complex, RT 07, Pematang Wangi Village, Bandar Lampung)

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the communication behavior of children who are dependent on gadgets, specifically within the community of Tanjung Raya Permai Housing Complex in Bandar Lampung. The background of this research stems from the increasing use of digital devices among children, which is believed to affect their social interactions and interpersonal communication patterns. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, the data will be collected through observations, in-depth interviews with children, parents, and as well as relevant documentation. The focus is to understand how gadget usage may influence the way children express themselves, interact with others, and build relationships in both family and social settings. The study also seeks to provide input for developing healthier communication patterns between children and their environment in the digital era.

Keywords: communication behavior, gadget dependency, children, social interaction, case study

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed children's communication patterns and social interactions. Gadgets such as smartphones and tablets have become an integral part of children's daily lives, even from an early age (Zuqria, 2024). While

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gadgets offer educational benefits and easy access to information, excessive and uncontrolled use can negatively affect children's social, emotional, and communication development (Putri, 2021).

Studies indicate that gadget dependency in children is associated with reduced verbal skills, limited vocabulary, low initiative in face-to-face communication, and difficulties in interpreting social cues (Nurbani et al., 2023; Pranata et al., 2020). Children who spend more than three hours per day using gadgets tend to show lower social skills and decreased responsiveness in direct interaction compared to those with limited screen time (Wulandari et al., 2021). From a behavioral perspective, gadgets function as stimuli that provide instant reinforcement, encouraging repetitive use and reducing interest in real-life social interaction (Siregar et al., 2021).

Parental practices play a crucial role in shaping children's gadget use. Many parents unintentionally use gadgets as a means to calm or occupy children, which may reduce family communication and emotional bonding (Shalehah et al., 2024). Insufficient parental supervision increases the risk of gadget dependency and its negative impact on children's communication behavior (Fahrizal, 2024). Therefore, digital parenting strategies—such as time limits, content supervision, and direct interaction—are essential to support healthy communication development.

In the context of Perum Tanjung Raya Permai, Bandar Lampung, preliminary observations show that most elementary school-aged children own personal gadgets and spend considerable time engaging with digital content. This condition reflects an urban digital culture that potentially weakens children's interpersonal communication skills. Accordingly, this study aims to explore how gadget dependency affects children's communication behavior and how parents and the surrounding environment respond to this phenomenon through a qualitative case study approach..

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in several key theories in communication and social psychology. This framework offers insights into how children's communication behaviors with gadget addiction are perceived by various segments of society.

1. Behavioral Theory Framework

Behaviorism explains human behavior as a result of observable stimulus–response (S–R) interactions shaped by reinforcement and punishment (Skinner, 1953). In this study, gadgets and digital content act as powerful stimuli that trigger repetitive behaviors in children, such as excessive gadget use and reduced face-to-face communication. Positive reinforcement in the form

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of entertainment and emotional satisfaction strengthens these behaviors, while negative reinforcement occurs when parents allow gadget use to stop children's negative reactions. Behaviorism also highlights modeling, where children imitate gadget-use patterns observed in parents or peers (Watson, 2017). Therefore, behaviorism provides a relevant framework for explaining how gadget dependency develops and influences children's communication behavior through environmental stimuli and reinforcement mechanisms.

2. S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) Theory

The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) theory extends the classical Stimulus–Response (S–R) model by incorporating the organism as an intervening variable that mediates the relationship between external stimuli and behavioral responses. Introduced by Woodworth, this model emphasizes that individuals actively process stimuli rather than responding automatically (Woodworth, 1928).

Within this framework, stimulus refers to external influences such as gadget use and exposure to digital content, including videos, games, and social media. The organism represents internal factors that shape interpretation and response, such as age, cognitive development, emotional state, prior experience, and parenting style. The response is the observable outcome, including changes in children's communication behavior, such as reduced verbal interaction, passive engagement, or imitation of digital language patterns.

Applied to this study, the S–O–R model explains why children exposed to similar levels of gadget use may display different communication behaviors. Variations in internal and social conditions, particularly family interaction and parental mediation, significantly influence how digital stimuli affect children. Therefore, the S–O–R theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interaction between gadget exposure and children's communication behavior in the digital era.

3. Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Model

This behavioral model views communication as a stimulus that triggers psychological processing within individuals (organism), resulting in specific reactions (response). In the context of this study, political messages are stimuli; citizens interpret these messages through moral, cultural, and emotional lenses before deciding to accept, reject, or remain indifferent. This framework is particularly relevant in understanding how religious figures and youth respond differently to the same message.

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4. Interpersonal Communication Theory

Interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of messages between individuals aimed at building mutual understanding and social relationships. According to DeVito (2019), this process involves essential elements such as sender, receiver, message, channel, and feedback. In the context of children with gadget dependency, communication channels often shift from face-to-face interaction to digital media, which may reduce emotional engagement, responsiveness, and the ability to interpret nonverbal cues. Excessive reliance on digital interaction can hinder the development of empathy and social awareness, as children have fewer opportunities to practice direct communication skills such as eye contact, tone interpretation, and body language (Miller, 2005). Therefore, interpersonal communication theory provides a relevant framework for analyzing how gadget dependency affects the quality of children's social interaction and communication behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this study is a **qualitative descriptive** approach using a case study strategy. This approach was selected because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena, particularly gadget dependency and its impact on children's communication behavior. The study focuses on exploring the experiences, perceptions, and social interactions of children who exhibit gadget dependency within a specific social environment. A qualitative approach is applied to examine and interpret the meanings constructed by individuals or groups regarding social and human issues. The research process involves direct field data collection, thematic analysis, and interpretation of emerging meanings within their specific contextual setting.

Research Location

This research was conducted at the **Tanjung Raya Permai Housing Complex**, a modern housing complex located in Bandar Lampung City, Indonesia. This urban area is socially diverse and representative of urban voters in Indonesia, making it an ideal location to explore how children's communication behaviors impact gadget addiction.

Informants and Sampling

A total of **fourteen key informants** were purposefully selected to represent various social roles within the community:

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- 1 Neighborhood Head (RT)
- 5 Parents
- 5 Children
- 3 General Citizens (female)

Selection was based on their active involvement in the community and their access to information related to children's communication behavior related to gadget addiction.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through:

- **In-depth interviews**, using semi-structured interview guides
- **Field observations**, noting community reactions during campaign events
- **Documentation**, including pamphlets, social media posts, and campaign materials

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in an informal setting to ensure comfort and openness, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Data Analysis Technique

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are conducted simultaneously as an integrated process. Analysis does not begin after all data have been collected but is carried out continuously throughout interviews, observations, and documentation. The purpose of qualitative analysis is not only to answer research questions but also to uncover deeper meanings, identify social patterns, and develop a holistic understanding of the studied phenomenon within its specific context.

In this study, data analysis focused on understanding how gadget dependency shapes children's communication behavior within their social environment in Tanjung Raya Permai RT 07, Bandar Lampung. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing field data obtained from in-depth interviews with parents of children aged 5–10 years. Relevant information related to gadget usage patterns, parental supervision, and children's communication behavior was retained, while unrelated data were excluded. The data were then coded and categorized into key themes to identify recurring patterns and relationships.

Data display was conducted through narrative descriptions supported by thematic tables

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and selected interview excerpts. This stage facilitated interpretation by linking empirical findings with relevant communication theories and highlighting variations in parental involvement and children's gadget use.

The final stage involved drawing and verifying conclusions based on identified patterns and relationships among categories. Data validity was ensured through triangulation by comparing interview results with observations and documentation, as well as cross-checking information from multiple informants. This process ensured that the conclusions accurately reflected the social realities observed in the research setting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings in Tanjung Raya Permai RT 07

Based on in-depth interviews conducted with fourteen informants consisting of children, parents, and community figures, this study identified a shift in children's communication behavior closely related to gadget dependency. Thematic analysis of the data revealed five interrelated themes: patterns of gadget use among children, changes in children's communication patterns, the impact of gadget dependency on interpersonal communication, the role of parents in supervision and guidance, and environmental and social perspectives.

These themes collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of how excessive gadget use influences children's daily communication practices. The presentation of findings integrates key interview excerpts as empirical evidence with descriptive analysis to capture the subjective meanings and social contexts underlying the informants' experiences.

The findings indicate that most children in the Tanjung Raya Permai RT 07 area use gadgets for extended periods, averaging more than three hours per day. Gadgets are primarily used for watching online videos and playing digital games. This usage pattern is routine and difficult to control, particularly when children are emotionally engaged with digital content.

One parent stated:

"Once they start using the phone, it's very hard to ask them to stop. They can spend hours on it."

This statement suggests that gadgets have become embedded in children's daily routines and may lead to dependency. Descriptively, repeated and intensive gadget use shifts children's activities away from social interaction toward screen-based engagement.

Another prominent theme concerns changes in children's communication patterns, both verbal and nonverbal. Children who use gadgets intensively tend to display more passive communication behaviors, characterized by brief responses, limited initiative to speak, and

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reduced eye contact during interactions.

As one parent explained:

"Now when I talk to my child, the answers are very short—sometimes just 'yes'."

These changes indicate a decline in the quality of two-way communication. Children become more accustomed to receiving stimulation from gadgets rather than actively participating in face-to-face conversations, which limits their ability to express and respond to messages interpersonally.

Gadget dependency has a direct impact on children's interpersonal communication with family members and peers. Children tend to withdraw from social interactions and prefer engaging with gadgets rather than interacting with people around them.

A community leader noted:

"Children rarely play together now. Most of them just sit alone with their phones."

This finding reflects a decrease in both the frequency and quality of face-to-face interactions. Analytically, gadget dependency reinforces one-way communication patterns and reduces opportunities for children to develop empathy, listening skills, and socially responsive behaviors.

Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's gadget use and communication behavior. Interview data indicate that some parents provide gadgets as a means to calm children or occupy their free time, often without clear time limits or active supervision.

One parent stated:

"Sometimes I give them the phone so they stay calm, especially when I'm busy."

This situation shows that gadgets are frequently used as a practical parenting solution. The lack of parental guidance contributes to increased gadget dependency and reduces the intensity of direct communication between parents and children.

The social environment also influences children's communication behavior. High levels of gadget ownership and easy internet access have normalized gadget use among children. This normalization indirectly reinforces uncontrolled gadget use.

One informant commented:

"Almost every child has their own phone now, so it's considered normal."

Descriptively, a permissive social environment toward gadget use contributes to the development of more individualistic and less socially interactive communication patterns among children.

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Theoretical Analysis and Discussion

This study demonstrates that children's communication behavior in RT 07 is shaped by a dynamic interaction between digital stimuli, internal psychological processes, and the social environment. Gadget use functions not merely as a technological activity but as a behavioral and social force that influences how children communicate, interact, and build relationships.

From a behaviorist perspective, gadgets act as strong external stimuli that provide positive reinforcement through entertainment, instant gratification, and emotional satisfaction. These reinforcements encourage repetitive gadget use, gradually forming habitual behavior. Interview findings show that children prefer digital interaction because it offers faster and more consistent pleasure than face-to-face communication. As a result, direct communication, which requires patience and emotional engagement, becomes less attractive. Parental supervision, such as limiting usage time, operates as negative reinforcement that helps reduce excessive behavior and restore balance.

Through the S–O–R (Stimulus–Organism–Response) framework, children's responses to gadgets are mediated by internal factors such as emotional regulation, self-control, and family support. Children who receive consistent parental guidance are better able to control gadget use, while those with limited supervision tend to develop dependency and emotional resistance when restricted. Social factors, including peer influence and imitation within the community, further reinforce gadget use, indicating that dependency is shaped not only individually but also socially.

From the perspective of interpersonal communication theory (DeVito), excessive gadget use weakens essential elements of face-to-face interaction, such as eye contact, emotional expression, empathy, and immediate feedback. Children show shorter verbal responses, reduced attention, and lower emotional sensitivity during direct communication. Although digital communication can support long-distance interaction, it cannot replace the depth and emotional richness of interpersonal communication.

In synthesis, gadget dependency significantly alters children's communication patterns by reinforcing digital interaction over direct social engagement. Gadgets function as social agents that reshape communication habits, emotional responsiveness, and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, balanced gadget use, strong parental supervision, and the reinforcement of face-to-face communication are essential to support healthy communication and social development among children.

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Research Implications

This study indicates that children's gadget dependency in Tanjung Raya Permai RT 07 significantly influences their communication behavior through the interaction of technological, psychological, family, and social factors. Gadget use functions not only as a medium of entertainment and communication, but also as a social agent that shapes children's communication habits, emotional responses, and interpersonal relationships.

From an academic perspective, the findings confirm the continued relevance of Behaviorism, the S–O–R model, and Interpersonal Communication Theory (DeVito) in explaining communication behavior in the digital era. Gadgets act as strong stimuli that reinforce repetitive behavior, while children's responses are shaped by internal self-regulation and external social environments. This study contributes to communication research by contextualizing classical theories within contemporary digital settings involving children and families.

Practically, the results emphasize the importance of parental supervision, emotional support, and clear boundaries in managing children's gadget use. Children who receive consistent guidance demonstrate better control and healthier communication patterns. Schools and communities are encouraged to support digital literacy education and provide social activities that promote direct interaction as a balance to digital engagement.

Socially, gadget dependency affects not only individual children but also community interaction patterns, reducing social sensitivity and participation in collective activities. Strengthening community-based interactions and improving digital communication literacy are essential to ensure that technology supports, rather than replaces, meaningful interpersonal communication.

Overall, gadget dependency should be understood as a multidimensional communication issue that requires a holistic approach involving families, educational institutions, communities, and local authorities to support healthy communication development among children in the digital era.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that excessive and unsupervised gadget use significantly affects children's communication behavior in the Tanjung Raya Permai residential area, Bandar Lampung. Children spend approximately two to four hours daily engaging in digital activities, which has shifted their social space from direct, physical interaction to individualized digital environments.

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This shift has led to a decline in face-to-face social interaction within both family and community contexts.

The findings indicate notable changes in family communication patterns, characterized by brief verbal responses, reduced eye contact, and a preference for expressing emotions through digital media such as text messages, emojis, and videos. Additionally, the influence of social media language contributes to diminished warmth and politeness in family communication, potentially weakening emotional bonds between children and parents. Peer influence further reinforces gadget dependency as a normalized daily behavior.

Conceptually, these findings support Behaviorism, the S–O–R model, and interpersonal communication theory, demonstrating that changes in children's communication behavior result from the interaction between technological stimuli, psychological responses, and social environments. Therefore, parental supervision, emotional support, and community involvement are essential to maintaining balanced gadget use and fostering healthy communication and social empathy among children in the digital era.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are proposed.

First, parents are encouraged to model responsible gadget use by implementing time limitations, monitoring age-appropriate content, and allocating gadget-free family time to strengthen face-to-face communication. Parents should also promote children's participation in social, physical, and religious activities to support the development of social skills and emotional empathy.

Second, community members and local neighborhood administrators are advised to organize sustainable social programs for children, such as traditional games, group sports, and regular religious activities. These initiatives may serve as positive alternatives to excessive gadget use while fostering social interaction, solidarity, and emotional bonding among children.

Finally, future studies are recommended to involve more diverse populations and broader geographical settings. Employing quantitative or mixed-methods approaches is also suggested to obtain measurable data on gadget dependency and its relationship with psychosocial variables, thereby enhancing the robustness and generalizability of research findings.

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