

# *The Meaning of Digital Media Content for Teenagers and the Role of Parents Assistance*

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**Abstract**—The development of technology has pushed the life of teenagers to merge into the world of social media and digital. Teenagers' high sense of curiosity has become a source of concern for their parents to grant them digital access. The easiness in accessing information through digital medias has lured teenagers into over communicated trap where the overflowing of information is difficult to digest thush, making the information to be spread freely without prior filtering. In this case, literacy has become a crucial thing to do by teenagers to not to get trapped and lost with an information. The role of parents as guiding partner is no less important as well. The result of this research shows that teenagers consume information through gadget every single day. Parental guidance in using gadget was done due to their concern for negative contents, even though some parents put absolute trust towards their children in using gadget, hence deeming guidance as unnecessary

**Keywords:** *Digital Media, Content, Teenagers, Role of Parents Assistance*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of technology and information has brought an easy access towards a process of information searching nowadays. Indirectly, the development of technology, information, and communication also influences parents on educating their children and teenagers who are currently inseparable from digital media. Based on data presented by The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) shows that in 2017 the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 143.26 million. This figure shows increasement compared to the previous year of 2016 which recorded in 132.7 million people. As for the age, as many as 16.68% of users are aged between 13-18 years and 49.52 percent aged 19-34 years. The development of technology has merged teenagers' life into social and digital media. Their curiosity is a main concern for parents in giving them digital access. The expected positive impact of technology of information is as a medium of education and entertainment, but

unfortunately technology also has its downside of negative impact. According to ECPAT findings in 6 (six) Regency/City in the last 2017 shows that there were deviation where children are exposed to pornography through smart phones. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission also noted that out of 4,500 Junior and Senior High School students in 12 cities, 97 percent of them have accessed pornographic content through their smart phones. Other than that, another threat comes from the uncertainty of sources of information in the internet. Often times, information on the internet doesn't reflect the fact happened. This is very deplorable because ideally every product of information from media shall prioritize the accuracy (accuracy) and relevancy of news. Accuracy is a form of conformity between news delivered with information sources. In addition to these two aspects, completeness of the news (completeness) becomes the next thing that must be found in information [1]. However, it is unfortunate that this does not apply to information in digital media.

In the 21st century, our homes have been transformed into multimedia culture sites, integrating audiovisual, information, and telecommunications services [2]. Life is surrounded by e-commerce, e-learning education, online shopping, online gaming, and the other cyber lifestyle. This sparked concern on the future of teenagers amidst the technology fuss. Livingstone (2002) mentioned that there were speculations about 'digital generation', 'children in information age', 'computer nerds', 'innocent on the net', 'the digital divide', and 'addicted surfers'[2]. All of the above mentioned concepts show how close teenagers' life is towards the virtual life. A pseudo-reality life has allowed them to communicate, make friends, socialize, and form a community with real friends and pseudo-communities they encountered in their computer windows. When everything is possible to be done by sitting in front of the computer, the need to socialize with friends,

community, and family outside the room has deemed to be redundant.

According to Piaget (Hurlock, 1980) psychologically, adolescence is the age at which individuals integrate with adult society; the age at which children no longer feel below the level of adult, but at the same level, at least in matters of rights. The existence of intellectual transformation unique to the way of thinking of teenagers enables them to achieve integration in adult social relations, which in reality is a common characteristic of this period of development.

Upon receiving information in digital media, teenagers tend to interpret it based on their own perspective. In addition to children, teenagers also fall into the vulnerable category to be affected by digital media. The existence of imitation behavior (directly imitating the behavior of people who are seen, heard and read) becomes a problem in the age of digital media usage.

Through understanding of digital media information is highly needed as part of user education. In interacting with media, there has to be guidance for media literacy skill or the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate information in various formats through media, especially the internet. The role of parents in guiding teenagers in using the internet is also something that must be implemented in reducing the influence of hoax content in digital media.

Literacy, according to Jefkins (2009) is an ability and skill of a person to understand images and sound, recognize; the ability to manipulate and change digital media to pervasive distribution and easily adjust it in a new forms of media. Media literacy is also defined as individual knowledge and skills in analyzing, evaluating, or producing media messages [3].

As quoted from *kompas.com* “teenagers are very vulnerable to be the perpetrators in the spread of hoaxes in cyberspace. Some of the hoax spreader that was caught by the police were still students and this is very concerning. According to the Head of the Social Media Management Center of the Staff Office of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Alois Wisnuhardana, teenagers easily believe in hoaxes because young people tend to be very emotional. Every information, let alone a sensational one, will be immediately distributed”.

Based on the statement above, it can be concluded that media literacy is crucial for teenagers in this generation of millennial. Because without a proper guidance in choosing information in the digital media, the greater impact will be the negative ones.

## II. FORMULATION OF PROBLEM

The easiness to access information through digital media has put teenagers in the over communicated trap where the overwhelming flow of information have given users

difficulties in absorbing the information; this caused most of information to be shared without being filtered first. Literacy education is crucial to be done in order to prevent teenagers getting lost amidst the rush of information. The role of parents as guiding partners is also highly important. For this reason, it is necessary to look at the form/pattern of assistance from parents to identify digital media consumption patterns in teenagers, and what forms of literacy education are needed by teenagers to avoid the negative impact of using digital media.

## III. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This research is a qualitative research with reception analysis approach done by in depth interviews aimed to find out the patterns of teenage reception in receiving information in digital media. Audience is an active creator of meaning in relation to text. Hall stated that the production of meaning does not guarantee the interpretation of meanings as meant by coding because of messages, which are constructed as sign systems are polysemic, so that they have more than just a series of potential meanings [4].

## Discussion

In describing the pattern of digital media consumption of digital media, the current fact shows that teenagers are inseparable from their daily activities using gadgets as a means of information. This behavior is caused by the fear of missing information. In addition, the demands of school assignments also make digital media a source of reference in completing these tasks.

One of McLuhan's thoughts on media ecology is concerning media environment. The idea is that technology and technique, information modes and communication codes play an important role [5]. One of the assumptions shows that humans today cannot be separated from the media. Media is an important thing to the point of penetrating into the deepest aspect of human life. The existence of the media influences human life and society.

The meaning of digital media content by teenagers reflects how teenagers interpret what information they get in digital media and whether they trust the information or not. The result of this research shows how teenagers deemed that they have been able to distinguish which information is correct and which information is incorrect. According to them, information is true if it comes directly from their teacher, whereas information comes from their friend might be untrue thus a double check will be needed.

Parental guidance is a form of media literacy carried out by parents to their children in consuming digital media. Media literacy model by parents, according to Arnett (2007) has two models, the first one is protectionist or inoculation model, which try to inhibit access to media and media contents that are considered dangerous, especially to children. This is a

protectionist model of media education which promotes strategies of critical looking and improves parental control of the media to children.

The second model is open-access model, which considers the importance of personal pleasure in the use of media by individuals and groups, with the belief that viewers, including children, deliberately negotiate meaning and realize that the media is something built. The open access model aims to promote education to media literacy from strong freedom of expression, and emphasize the broadest access to media use as the foundation of a democratic society. This model supports relatively limited access to tools, content and distribution, with implications for legal issues and related policies such as copyright, systematic media ratings, media ownership, and the media of community formation.

Parent informants agree with the form of an open mentoring model between children and parents, where there is a process of exchanging messages between children and parents in consuming digital media. Teenagers' informants also stated that they like it when their parents are curious enough to ask what they accessed from their digital media, even though sometimes they refused if their parents were too overprotective of their consumption of information.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The practice of digital media consumption by teenagers nowadays is clearly considered as something natural and bound to happen. This phenomenon by teenagers is something unavoidable. The number of negative contents e.g. pornographic content and hoax information has turned the digital media to be often unfriendly to teenagers. There needs to be a guidance or media literacy by parents to assist teenagers in interpreting digital media contents. Open-access media literacy is a hope for parents and teenagers in concluding the existing meaning of contents and as a form of democratic assistance

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