

# Instagram as a Friend: A Phenomenology Study

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## ABSTRACT

Entering the era of 4.0 technologies is developing rapidly, and media technology is now more in demand by the millennial generation because digital media is a new media that is considered more attractive and practical. This affects people's behavior in treating technology and how people perceive technology. Considering that currently in a pandemic state, of course, many people will limit themselves to meeting one another, this makes digital technology a very important necessity in bridging society. One example of digital technology that bridges society is Instagram. As a media that has many users, Instagram is very often used by the public. The more often users use Instagram, the more tied the user is to Instagram. Once bound, the user will experience dependence on the media. Based on this, the researcher used a phenomenological qualitative approach to examine the phenomena that occurred between Instagram and the user in the Media Equation Theory review. The study was conducted by interviewing six informants who were active users of Instagram as research subjects and to analyze the data from interviews with informants, the researchers used coding techniques in constructing the user experience when using Instagram. The results of this study show the relationship between users and Instagram and how users interpret Instagram as friends.

**Keywords:** Instagram, Friend, Phenomenology, Media Equation Theory, Anthromorph Theory

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, humans have entered the digital era 4.0, where technological developments are increasingly renewing and developing. There are many innovations made to adapt to the changing times. It is undeniable that things are slowly turning to digital and the interaction between humans and technology is inevitable.

Over time, the development of technology and information happened so fast. The impact of the digital era 4.0 is certainly very large for the industrial world and also behavior in society. The development of this technology has made various facilities, especially in the field of communication, so that people who initially used mass media such as print and electronic media in mass communication, switched to one of the modern media, namely social media. One example of such social media is Instagram.

Social media is a medium that is used by individuals to be social online by sharing content, news, photos, and others with others. Based on this, social media is considered to be very fast in reporting or disseminating information in a short time. Besides that, it's also easy to access. Seeing this, social media slowly began to appear to replace the role of conventional mass media in spreading news and became more attractive to the public [1].

Previously humans used mass media, both print and electronic media such as television, radio, newspapers, and so on. The mass media has evolved increasingly sophisticated with the presence of technology, the more

effective it is in responding to human needs and can give rise to dependency as occurs in interpersonal relationships. Over time, human thinking will also immediately adjust to the wishes desired by the media. Human behavior like this is what makes Reeves and Nass argue that the slow evolution of the human brain has influenced humans to treat technology like humans [2]. Media Equation Theory is a theory that is created because of a problem that occurs in humans, namely why people do not realize or automatically respond to what the media communicates to the individual and think of it as a human being. Based on the assumptions of this theory, the media is likened to humans (media and real-life are the same) [3].

The media is more like a human being or someone to talk to. This theory takes into account that the media have human-like characteristics because they are considered to be as worthy as humans so that they can be spoken to. Media can be considered as individual interlocutors such as in interpersonal communication which involves two people in it. What humans can do can be done by mass or digital media. Based on this theory, the authors conducted research that discusses "Instagram as a Friend: Media Equation Theory Review" and aims to see the meaning of Instagram as a friend for active Instagram users.

## 1.1 Related Work

### 1.1.1 Interaction Rituals with Artificial Companions from Media Equation to Emotional Relationships

This research by Scheve [4] proposes an understanding of the interaction and relationship with artificial friends based on the sociological interaction ritual theory. He argues that the formation of relationships with friends and inanimate objects is significantly influenced by the emotional outcome of interactions with these entities. The formulation of the problem in this study is how the interaction and relationship with Artificial Friends based on the sociological theory of ritual interactions. Then, this study uses the observation method to answer the problem formulation with the subject Artificial Companion and Media Equation Theory as concepts to help construct meaning in the results of observations.

The conclusions of this study are similar to Collins' concept of emotional energy which involves feelings of solidarity, belonging, and group inclusion. The formation of social relationships and ritual interactions as evidenced by the more interactions with friends produce an increase in emotional energy, the more stable the social relationship between humans and friends.

### 1.1.2 Servant, friend or master? The relationships users build with voice-controlled smart devices

In this study, Amazon reported that in the first year after introducing Alexa in its Echo voice interactive digital assistant device, half a million home users told 'him' that they love him [5] and half had asked Alexa to marry them [6]. We refer to voice-controlled smart assistants (VCSA), such as Alexa, as smart devices that humans can use to interact by requesting tasks or services via verbal exchanges. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the different relationships that consumers establish with anthropomorphous devices and how these relationships affect actual and expected future use.

The method used in this research is observation. Researchers looked at 39 informants to look at their responses to smart voice-controlled assistants (VCSA) and complemented anthropomorphism theory by leveraging extended self-theory to identify three main roles arising from consumer interactions with these devices. Research has studied the extent to which context factors influence customer anthropomorphic tendencies, including variations in communication messages [7], the role of product complexity [8], and consumer personality traits [9] while focusing on physical product design elements. However, the new possibilities of the Internet of things require a better understanding of consumers' relationships with anthropomorphic digital devices. As a result, it can be concluded that VCSA users tend to think of these things like

humans and communicate with them. This also affects the intensity of future use of the device.

## 1.2. Our Contribution

Given the Covid-19 pandemic requires everyone to be at home, making it difficult for many people to communicate so they need the media as an intermediary. However, because of using it too often, users end up depending on it. This paper describes the research being carried out by researchers about concerning the perceptions of people's behavior in the media like humans by using phenomenological studies and seeing the meaning construction of Instagram as a friend to its users using the concept of Media Equation Theory and Anthromorph. In this study, discussion of the use of technology is rarely carried out. Therefore, researchers examined this study.

## 1.3. Paper Structure

This research is organized as follows. Part 1 is an introduction to the introduction used in this paper, which includes an explanation of the development of technology from time to time and how the interaction between humans and media inevitably affects human behavior towards media itself, given the current pandemic situation. Section 2 presents the research model framework of this paper. Then the research method used in this research is in Section 3. Section 4 is the findings and discussion of research conducted based on in-depth interviews with informants and coding of interview results. Finally, Section 5 concludes the research results.

## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Media Equation Theory

Looking at human behavior about to with concerning to the Ecological Media Theory, Reeves and Nass [10], say that "Media is a full participant in our social and natural world". Reeves and Nass argue that Media Equation Theory is a theory in which media is considered more than just a "tool" but as a true social actor who has an important role in interpersonal or interpersonal communication theory. This theory positions the media as communicants or communicators who can provide messages or feedback directly to humans through a process of interaction.

Media Equation Theory or so-called media equation theory is designed to answer the problem of why humans unconsciously even automatically respond to what is communicated by the media as if they were human. Based on the explanation above, the assumptions of this theory make the media equated with humans. This theory shows that the media can also be a voice medium so that it can be a conversation partner as in interpersonal communication.

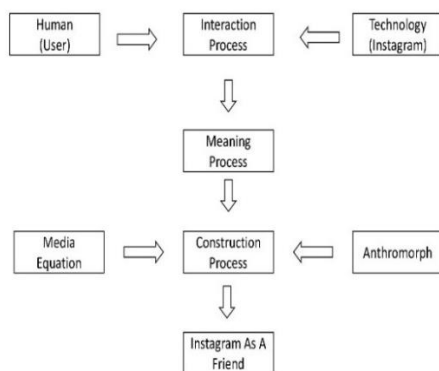
## 2.2 Anthromorph Theory

Talking about human behavior, besides Media Equation Theory, there is also another study, namely Anthromorph. According to eg. Hart et al., Miles & Ibrahim [11], showed that humans can build relationships between humans and other things that are not human and put them into feelings and intentions. Anthromorph refers to the human tendency to perceive humans as agents in all kinds of nonhuman things and events, for example, when viewing human faces in clouds and associating human feelings with pets. The relationship between humans and certain non-human objects can also occur when humans use technology. For example, human assistant technology built into Smart Devices or smart devices such as "Google" and "Siri". Humans become dependent and think of these two things like personal assistants that can help find a lot of information and open the desired application on the user's gadget.

Smart Devices or Smart Devices are technologies that have intelligence and are incorporated into Artificial Intelligence that allows these devices to communicate with other smart devices and humans, to adapt to existing situations and factors, and to make their own decisions. Likewise, the media is one of the technological developments that are always in touch with humans, especially in communication. The media is considered one of the friends to chat and tell stories.

## 2.3 Research Model Framework

Based on the previous research studies above, there have been many examples of theories that discuss the relationship between humans and technology or media. This is closely related to the research that the author discussed and the main theory used namely the Media Equation Theory. The following is the framework that underlies this research:



**Figure 1** Research Framework

Based on this, the research framework model begins with the relationship between humans and technology where humans are Instagram users and the technology used is Instagram social media technology. These two things are interrelated and connected. The relationship that exists

when the two are connected is called an interaction. In the interaction process, there are several activities in it, such as comments, posts, likes, stories, and so on. Based on the interaction process, the meaning process occurs.

The meaning process caused by this interaction is obtained through the results of interviews and the coding process. After getting the results of interviews with informants, to get meaning, a process stage called coding is required. When the meaning has been obtained through the coding stage, it needs to be constructed. The way of constructing meaning must be based on certain concepts.

In this research, the concept used is the Media Equation Theory and Anthromorphous Theory. This is because this research shows that the media can become like humans. After all, the media can speak, teach or spread knowledge, and so on. The media is closer to a tool or intermediary and considers it to have qualities so that humans can relate to it and consider it a friend.

This phenomenon is discussed in the Media Equation Theory about how the media can fulfill personal and social needs and become humanists for mass media users so that it ultimately affects the meaning of media for humans. This is also discussed in the concept of Anthromorphism, which in this concept contains the tendency of humans to consider inanimate objects or things like humans themselves. This happens because humans show signs of openness and changes in their attitudes in treating media, therefore in this study to see how Instagram is a friend, which means that the media is considered a human being, it can be concluded that the process of meaning is in this case. studies are built using these two concepts.

## 3. METHODS

This research was conducted to find out how individuals interpret social media as friends in the media equation theory review. The method used is a method with a phenomenological qualitative approach. According to Cresswell [12], a qualitative approach to phenomenology is an approach that seeks an understanding of how humans or individuals construct important meanings and concepts within the framework of intersubjectivity (understanding of the world is shaped by individual relationships with others). Based on this, the subject, object, and researcher are the main keys in this study. The subjects chosen by researchers were active users of Instagram, while the object of research was Instagram.

Data collection techniques were carried out using utilizing employing through interviews, given the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted online and for data processing or analysis techniques used in this study, namely by using coding techniques. According to Charmaz [13], coding is a process of processing data in qualitative research where the research data is then categorized into short categories that show similarities to other data. Apart from that, coding also shows how the research data was managed by being separated, selected, and sorted by the researcher to initiate the analysis process. That's how researchers compile

the results of interviews with informants to get research data.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher's findings were categorized into several themes based on the results of coding categorization obtained from interviews with resource persons. Following are the findings and discussion of the themes in this study:

### Theme 1: Time Travel with the Media

Based on the informant's statement, the researcher saw that users were exploring the media based on time. Some key points over time between users and media:

High School is the beginning of a user meeting with Instagram, from this it can be seen that users are getting to know Instagram more and more. Just as the friendship process takes time to get acquainted at the beginning of the meeting, so do users and the media.

Judging from the source statement, it can be said that in addition to time, users and the media need technology support to connect. Just as fellow humans need intermediaries in communicating, so do users and the media.

### Theme 2: Experience with Instagram

The influence of technological developments, especially the development of media technology, is growing rapidly. Instagram as one of these technology products provides many features for self-expression. Self-expression is an important part of what humans do to show self-expansion. Users initially used Instagram to display photos to show their identity, but over time users began to take advantage of the media and put media as important things in their lives. In determining identity, Instagram users usually complete photos with captions. Then after they got used to using Instagram, Instagram began to become a place to tell stories, a means of knowledge, and entertain themselves by sharing experiences and what they felt or wanted to convey.

The average experience is based on the results of interviews with informants who are active users of Instagram before using the media, namely normal or feeling nothing and bored. It's different after using the media. Both before and after are still influenced by the user's mood and the content being viewed. Here are some of the effects that users feel after using Instagram:

#### (1) Effect: Feelings of Pleasure

Users feel happy when they can connect with Instagram and can use Instagram all the time to accompany their activities and days.

"Okay, so my feeling is using Instagram social media. The first one is happy because from Instagram, I also have a lot of connections with my high school friends" – Nagia.

#### (2) Effect: A feeling of Satisfaction

Unlike before using Instagram, users are satisfied when they use Instagram. For no particular reason, when users haven't met Instagram, they feel something is missing.

"After that, there may be an excitement or satisfaction in itself" – Felix.

#### (3) Effect: Feelings of Sadness

Not only positive feeling but, there are also negative feelings that users feel, namely sadness. Users feel sad when they usually meet and talk to Instagram for some reason or obstacle being blocked.

"You could say sadly. Moreover, Instagram is one of the social media that many people use. It is as if social media is important, then hope to recover as soon as possible, like yesterday the internet was down, right?" – Natania.

#### (4) Effect: Feelings of Disappointment

Another negative feeling is a disappointment. When you feel that the features or content on Instagram do not match expectations, users will feel disappointed in Instagram. For example, a user expects to be able to post with a long duration but there are duration restrictions and the content that the user wants to see at that time is entertainment but quite the opposite.

"Not by following per under expectations, either from the application or from the content or features that we use, sometimes it doesn't match our expectations, or sometimes content we don't want to see" – Natania.

#### (5) Effect: Feelings of Anger

There is also a feeling of anger. When a user cannot compromise when a user posts something. Instagram error, when a post is not uploaded or even gets uploaded several times or it also makes the results of user posts broken or ugly, not as expected and made by the user, the user will feel angry at Instagram.

"Yes, angry, the term we have tried to make a set of displays that match we want but in the end, it does not match expectations, yes angry. So yeah, don't use it for a while until you wait for a fix from the Instagram." – Felix.

#### (6) Effect: Resentment

Users have also experienced annoyance. For some users, when Instagram Error or not according to their expectations and desires, it can make them angry and emotional, but some also just feel annoyed and not get angry or emotional. "Okay, for the application error I feel like I'm annoyed, when we want to search for something on Instagram and I want to post or want to upload something, all of a sudden I can't seem to get annoyed" – Nagia.

#### (7) Effect: Feelings of Annoyance

Users have also been irritated by Instagram because of some things that are not well understood in using Instagram and some that users cannot do on Instagram.

"Oh, I once posted it on the feed, so I wanted to make a caption, it couldn't even be entered, so I got to the side immediately, that's the real feeling, how do I know how to do it so that there is space between one line and another." – Nagia.

#### (8) Effect: Feelings of Discomfort

Discomfort will arise when users are thirsty for lack of information or miss the latest news/updates from Instagram. "Because I'm a person who doesn't like it, for example, a friend is telling me about the latest news, but I don't know about it, I feel like I'm not updated with the latest information." – Hansen.

#### (9) Effect: Confused Feelings

When using Instagram users never feel confused, especially when the user posts something. Ordinary users are confused about the captions, filters used, and new features on Instagram and their placement when they change with each update.

"Maybe from that feeling, the feeling is confused because you want to post and want to make the caption, the confusion is there, now can you enter the caption or not." – Nagia.

### Theme 3: Instagram As Friends

This theme examines the relationship between users and the media, especially their relationship as friends according to the research topic. This is how users interpret Instagram:

- a. Users interpret Instagram's media as friends by spending most of their time with Instagram wherever and whenever they feel dependent.
- b. Users interpret Instagram as a friend by trusting Instagram and telling stories through captions or posts, either stories, feeds, or live.
- c. Users interpret Instagram as a friend by considering Instagram as someone who is needed and important in the user's life because without Instagram users feel homesick, lack, confusion, and difficulty.

DeVito [14] states that in friendship, there are several forms of relationship, namely reciprocal, receptive, associative, and platonic. Based on the results of interviews with sources, there is a form of relationship that exists between users and the media according to the researcher's analysis, namely associative friendship because, in this friendship, users and the media have a positive relationship and only give each other instantaneously. pleasure and not classified as true friendship. This is because looking at the source information, the reason users use Instagram is mostly that it has nothing to do and they just want to spend time with Instagram to entertain themselves by seeing content and self-expression in the form of photos, videos, and others. text, and more.

### Theme 4: Improved Relationship with Instagram

User trust in Instagram social media plays an important role in increasing relationships with Instagram. This trust comes from the user's knowledge of Instagram and the experience of using it. Instagram is an example of new or digital media that has many users. An activity that is often carried out by Instagram users is posting. Frequently Instagram users post, they will gradually increase their followers or the number of friends on Instagram. Friendship on Instagram apart from getting to know each other, users also take advantage of this application to help each other. The help provided by Instagram users is usually the mutual promotion of products owned by users. The role of Instagram can be seen here not only as self-expression, but users have started to take advantage of the economic benefits of Instagram.

Instagram is used as a source of information today because it is believed that the public has faster access than other media. News that is currently or has just happened can be immediately spread or broadcast via Instagram in a very

short time. The speed of information makes users more attached to Instagram. Also, with online or in-person interactions, users can still use.

Instagram is a forum for getting to know other people to expand and a source of relationship information and can be a means of bridging between users and other people. Another benefit of Instagram itself is that it can be a spiritual medium where users can spread something about the user's religious teachings and can also fill their daily lives.

Instagram is currently popular because it is superior to other social media due to its features. Instagram has many features such as DM (Direct Message), Live, Story and filters, and so on. Even the users themselves compare Instagram social media with other social media so that users switch and start using that media. When users can interpret Instagram according to their hopes and goals, users will be more interested in Instagram, but this interest will decrease if problems in Instagram's social media are not immediately fixed and find solutions. Problems that usually occur on Instagram are feature limitations, such as the duration that was once longer, about two minutes now is limited to only a minute, then there are no restrictions on comments or certain actions for users who are not responsible for social media, it is necessary to report other new users. followed up. However, it only makes the user repeat the action by creating a new account. Also, there are competitors such as other social media who then develop the features and advantages of their media to attract the hearts of old and new users to prefer to use these competitors' media.

The solution for improving relationships is that the problems previously mentioned are reviewed and considered again so that these problems that are entered by users can make Instagram more developed and be more superior in the future. Attract new users and maintain the loyalty of old users.

Based on resource persons the generalizations that can be made are as follows:

1. The higher the intensity of media use, the more users perceive the media as friends.
2. The features, content, and advantages of the media increase the trust of users in the media.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of qualitative research using in-depth interview techniques with sources conducted by researchers regarding Instagram as Friends: Media Equation Theory Review, it can be concluded that time and technology support are important things that affect the relationship between users and Instagram. When users and the media have enough time to "get acquainted", eventually users will feel attached to Instagram. Likewise, technology support, when Instagram as a new media does not have a suitable intermediary, it is difficult for users to communicate with Instagram, let alone relate to that media. In addition, the experience is needed in experiencing Instagram. Activity when using Instagram plays an important role in forming a relationship with Instagram itself. The more interested and

spending more time together will make users continue to use Instagram social media. The feelings felt when dealing with Instagram when using the media, namely effect: feeling happy, effect: feeling satisfied, effect: feeling sad, effect: feeling disappointed, effect: feeling angry, effect: feeling annoyed, effect: feeling annoyed, effect: uncomfortable feeling, and effect: feeling confused. All these feelings depend on the mood of the user as well and the content that the user sees himself.

Answering the research problem formulation, namely how users interpret Instagram as friends are by fostering a sense of trust in the media, then spending a lot of time together browsing content on Instagram, being a place to confide in (outpouring your heart), or telling stories when you want but there are no friends (human) by posting on stories or feeds, and feeling dependent and lost when not meeting Instagram for a day or a few moments when Instagram is problematic or unusable.

The relationship between Instagram as a friend in the Media Equation Theory review, where this theory discusses the equality of media and humans. Based on the statements of active user sources regarding the phenomenon of "Instagram as Friends", the researcher concludes that it fits the theory because users respond to what the media is doing to them and think media is the same as humans by inviting Instagram to interact when using Instagram. The informant also said directly that for users, Instagram is considered to be able to act like and replace humans temporarily as friends, but that does not mean it replaces humans because humans cannot be substituted.

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