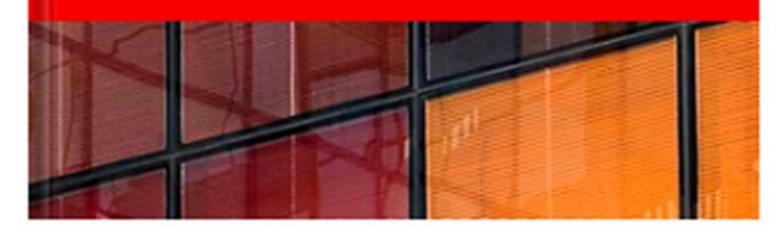


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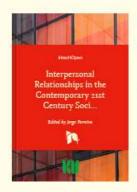
# Exploring the Evolution of Family Communication Patterns in Javanese Indonesia: A Qualitative Analysis of the Impact of Digital Technology

WRITTEN BY

### Rama Kertamukti

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### Chapter 4

# Exploring the Evolution of Family Communication Patterns in Javanese Indonesia: A Qualitative Analysis of the Impact of Digital Technology

Rama Kertamukti

### **Abstract**

This research explores the evolution of family communication patterns in Java in a digital context, focusing on the impact of technology on intergenerational interactions. The background of this research is based on the phenomenon of the development of information technology, such as social media and instant messaging applications, which has changed the way families communicate. Using qualitative methods, the research involved in-depth interviews with 15 Javanese families living in urban and rural areas, with the aim of identifying the stages of digital technology acceptance and the barriers they face. Thematic analysis was used to categorise the findings based on key themes, such as the role of parents in digital parenting, technology adaptation, and the influence of digital media on local cultural values. The results showed that Javanese families experienced five evolutionary stages of digital technology acceptance: incomprehension, exploration, adaptation, integration and active engagement. Although technology strengthens long-distance communication, challenges were found, such as vulnerability to hoaxes, changes in the quality of face-to-face interactions, and differences in the meaning of digital symbols between generations. In conclusion, digital technology plays an important role in maintaining family relationships, but there needs to be a balance between digital interactions and the preservation of cultural traditions.

Keywords: family, Java, evolution, digital technology, communication patterns

### 1. Introduction

Family communication plays an important role in shaping the dynamics of social life in society. In Java, Indonesia, family communication patterns have undergone significant changes over time, especially in the rapidly evolving digital world. Families in Java play an important role in maintaining cultural heritage and social values that have existed for centuries. The family is the smallest social organisation in society that

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has an important role, especially in the stages of shaping and developing children's character during the early period of children's lives [1]. Families provide cultural influences to children in the formation of their first attitudes and interests in everything around them. In the city of Yogyakarta, one of the cities in Java, as the centre of the city and the centre for Javanese culture [2]. The daily life of families in Yogyakarta reflects a blend of rich traditions and social changes influenced by modernisation [2]. On the one hand, structured patterns of life, full of rituals and social interactions, are still visible in daily activities, but on the other hand, changes in the economy, technology, and culture have brought significant impacts on family dynamics [3]. Families try to interpret local culture as an identity and try to pass it on to their children [4]. What parents do is an attempt to communicate or enculturate local cultural values to their children. For example, Javanese families in Yogyakarta try to practice local cultural values in their daily lives [1]. But today, communicating local culture to children is not an easy matter; the challenges are heavy. Cultural influences on families in Java are no longer dominated by parents; mass media and new media such as the internet and social media also strongly influence family life in Java [4]. Whereas before the massive use of digital media, parents in Javanese families had a very important role in educating and shaping the child's personality before the child plunged into society. Parents in Javanese families are always willing to be a rock for the safety of their children [5]. The phenomenon of closeness is influenced by the intensive communication of family members in Java. In Java, family togetherness is the main foundation of social life. The philosophy of "gotong royong" upheld by the Javanese community is also reflected in the pattern of family life. Each family member is taught to help, respect and look after each other. Gathering together, especially on certain occasions such as slametan, family gatherings, or simply having dinner together, becomes an important moment to share stories, give advice, and strengthen relationships between family members. This tradition of gathering is not only done by the nuclear family but also involves the extended family, which includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. This spirit of togetherness strengthens the wider social ties within the Javanese family structure, so that family relationships remain close even though members are scattered in various places. The Javanese family lifestyle is strongly influenced by strong traditional values, a culture of gotong royong, and respect for social order and religion [6]. Despite changes with modernisation and technological development, Javanese families still maintain many aspects of their traditional life. Respect for parents and elders is one of the main values in Javanese families [7]. In Javanese society, age hierarchy is highly valued. Children are taught from childhood to respect their parents and older family members, not only in their daily behaviour but also in making important decisions. Parents are often a source of advice and wisdom and are considered the moral leaders in the family [8]. This pattern is also seen in daily interactions, where children speak with polite and respectful grammar to parents or older family members. In addition, important decisions in the family are often discussed and agreed upon through deliberation, where the opinions of parents and elders are highly considered.

In Java, the family is a fundamental unit in society that plays an important role in shaping individual values, norms and behaviour [9]. Communication patterns in the family have a significant impact on the relationship between family members and the psychosocial development of family members. However, with the development of information and communication technology, especially in the current digital era, family communication patterns have undergone significant changes. The digital era has brought fundamental changes in the way humans interact and communicate [10].

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A survey conducted by the Research and Development Agency of Kominfo and UNICEF (2011–2012) found that Indonesian children and adolescents rely on online communication to communicate with friends (89.3%) and family (56.3%).

Technological advances in Indonesia, especially in Java, such as the growing use of mobile phones, social media, instant messaging applications, and content sharing platforms, have changed the way family members communicate with each other [11]. Although in Indonesia local cultural values are still a determining factor in the communication patterns that occur. Domestic or household activities are an important part of daily life in Javanese families. In many traditional families in Java, household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children are mostly done by the mother or women in the family [9]. But these roles began to change when communication technologies developed, especially in urban areas, where husbands and wives often share tasks in household life. Some studies provide results that there are changes in the family with the inclusion of communication technology in the interaction. Changes can include family leisure time, offline family bonding, and intense communication together being negatively affected due to the use of communication technology [12]. Also, communication technologies play diverse roles in family life across generations [13]. It even develops empowerment in rural communication technology in the form of community power in building in rural areas [14]. The basis of this research is the phenomenon that parents are naturally responsible for the development of children in all aspects of life. The positive use of gadgets is one of the media to help the development of cognitive, psychomotor, emotional and social aspects. Then how is the evolution of family communication patterns in Java as a result of the impact of digital technology? This is a question that must be described.

### 1.1 Research methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with in-depth interview methods. 15 interviewees from Javanese families living in big cities and rural areas became participants in this study, randomly selected. Interviews were conducted in person and through digital platforms, according to the participants' conditions. Questions focused on how digital media is used in family interactions, its impact on traditional values, and the challenges faced in integrating digital technology in daily life. Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis techniques, which allow for the categorisation of information according to themes that emerged from the participants' answers [15–17]. This included themes of communication between family members, the role of parents in digital parenting, and understanding cultural values in the context of technology.

### 2. Research results

### 2.1 Balancing digital and tradition in a Javanese family

In an increasingly digitalised world, it is important for Javanese families to find a balance between the use of technology and the preservation of the tradition of respect for parents and elders. Technology should be used as a tool to strengthen relationships, not replace physical interactions that are rich in cultural values. Some Javanese families try to keep the tradition of physical gatherings in important moments, such as Hari Raya celebrations or big family events, even though most of the daily

interactions happen digitally. At the same time, when technology is used, they still emphasise the importance of maintaining manners, such as speaking politely, not using harsh words, and always showing respect in communication.

In the data collected through in-depth interviews in Javanese families, almost all interviewees regularly use digital media, such as WhatsApp and social media, to communicate with family members. For families who live apart, digital media is the main bridge to maintaining relationships. One interviewee, Mr. Ahmad (45 years old), who lives in the city of Yogyakarta, stated: "I always use WhatsApp to communicate with my parents who live in the village. Every day I send a message or make a video call to ask how they are doing. This makes it very easy for us, even though we are not face-to-face." However, some interviewees also felt that while communication through digital media makes interaction easier, the intensity of deep and warm conversations as in face-to-face interactions tends to decline. Mrs. Rina (52), who lives in Sleman, Yogyakarta, said: "Kids nowadays would rather send a text message than come in person. It feels different, there is no warmth like before when everyone gathered at home." There are some notable differences in the meaning of digital media use between urban and rural families. In urban areas, digital media is seen as a daily necessity that supports mobility and productivity, while in rural areas, digital media plays more of a role as a basic communication tool and source of practical information. Urban families tend to be more engaged in social media and utilise it for various purposes, including entertainment, while rural families are more limited in their use of digital media due to infrastructure constraints. However, similarities were also seen in the concerns felt by both groups regarding the impact of digital media on in-person family interactions. In both urban and rural areas, parents realise that their children are starting to focus more on mobile phones and gadgets, which reduces the quality of family togetherness. This concern reflects that while technology brings many benefits, excessive use can disrupt traditional Javanese family values, such as togetherness and face-to-face communication.

The difference in the meaning of digital media use in urban and rural areas in Java lies in the context of use, purpose and infrastructure. In urban areas, digital media is seen as an integral part of daily life, whether for communication, entertainment or education. Meanwhile, in rural areas, digital media is more focused on basic needs such as long-distance communication and practical information. Limited access to technology in rural areas also affects the way families interpret the use of digital media. Rural families tend to still rely on face-to-face interaction in their daily activities, although they are starting to adopt digital technology for communication purposes.

Access to the internet and technology in urban, digitalised areas is almost seamless. Families in big cities usually have stable and high-speed internet networks. This allows them to use digital media in various activities, such as watching streaming videos, accessing social media, working from home (WFH), and others. For urban families, digital media is not just a communication tool but also a means of entertainment and daily productivity. For example, the family of Mrs. Anita (40), who lives in Bandung, regularly uses high-speed internet to watch films on streaming platforms such as Netflix or Disney+. For them, digital media has become an integral part of the modern urban lifestyle. In contrast, in rural areas, access to digital technology is still limited, especially in areas with inadequate internet infrastructure. Many rural families complain of slow or unstable internet networks, so digital media use is more focused on basic functions, such as making calls or sending short messages. Videobased or streaming applications are less likely to be used due to network limitations.

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For example, in the village of Pacitan, East Java. Mr. Joko (47 years old) can only use the internet at certain times, when the signal is strong enough. He says that sometimes his children have to go to the village centre to get a good internet signal if they want to do school assignments that require internet access. In this situation, digital media cannot be fully utilised due to limited access.

There are some notable differences in the meaning of digital media use between urban and rural families. In urban areas, digital media is seen as a daily necessity that supports mobility and productivity, while in rural areas, digital media plays more of a role as a basic communication tool and a source of practical information. Urban families tend to be more engaged in social media and utilise it for various purposes, including entertainment, while rural families are more limited in their use of digital media due to infrastructure constraints. However, similarities were also seen in the concerns felt by both groups regarding the impact of digital media on in-person family interactions. In both urban and rural areas, parents realise that their children are starting to focus more on mobile phones and gadgets, which reduces the quality of family togetherness. This concern reflects that while technology brings many benefits, excessive use can disrupt traditional Javanese family values, such as togetherness and face-to-face communication.

### 2.2 Symbols as visual language in Javanese family communication

Symbols, such as emojis and stickers, have become a frequently used form of visual communication on instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp and social media. In Javanese families, symbols are often used to convey emotions, such as love, care or happiness, which are more difficult to express formally in Javanese communication culture. In Javanese culture, which heavily emphasises politeness and manners, symbols can help convey lighter and less formal messages. For example, young children in Javanese families often use the smile ③ or heart ③ emoji to show respect or affection to their parents. The use of these symbols is considered more casual but still shows care, which is sometimes difficult to express in formal language. Mrs. Dewi (40 years old), who lives in Surakarta, said: "My son often sends a heart emoji every time he says good morning. It's simple, but I feel it's his way of showing respect and care." This suggests that symbols can be an effective way to convey more informal feelings in family contexts that have formalised communication norms, such as in Java.

While symbols can be an effective communication tool, there are notable differences in the way they are used among different generations within Javanese families. Younger generations, such as Generation Z and millennials, are more accustomed to using symbols in everyday conversations, even in quite a large number in a single message. They use emojis, stickers and memes to add context or humour to their conversations. For them, symbols are part of their digital identity and a way to express themselves more creatively. Meanwhile, older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, tend to use symbols more conservatively. They use emojis less often and are often more literal in their use. The symbols used tend to be simple and formal, such as thumbs-up (1) to express approval or a smile as a sign of courtesy. Mr. Budi (55 years old), a father of two in Yogyakarta, said: "I only use the thumbs up or smile emoji when replying to messages from children. For me, it's enough to show I agree or that it's okay." This difference often leads to misinterpretation or misunderstanding between generations. For younger generations, using too few or too literal symbols can come across as flat or inexpressive, while for older generations, overusing symbols can come across as unserious or disrespectful.

While there are differences in the way symbols are used and interpreted between generations, symbols can also serve as a communication bridge between them. In Javanese families, where respect for elders is very important, digital symbols can help younger generations communicate in a way that still honours tradition but is more in line with modern communication styles. For example, younger generations may find it easier to express concern for their parents or grandparents by using symbols, especially if they feel awkward expressing feelings directly through formal words. Using the heart symbol ♥ or the hug emoji ⊕ can be an effective way for them to show affection without having to use overly formal words, which are sometimes considered stiff in everyday conversations. On the other hand, older generations are also starting to adopt the use of symbols in digital communication, albeit in a more limited number. They learnt to use emojis as a sign that they are engaged in a conversation, and this keeps them feeling connected to their children or grandchildren. For example, grandparents may send a smiley @emoji in reply to their grandchildren, despite not actively using large numbers of symbols. Pak Harjo (65), who lives in Magelang, said: "My grandson taught me to use emojis. Now I often send a smiley emoji every time I reply to a message, and it makes me feel closer to them." This shows that symbols in digital media can be a tool to reduce the communication gap between generations, helping to create closer bonds despite differences in age and communication styles.

While symbols can help facilitate communication between generations, there are also challenges that need to be overcome. One of the biggest challenges is the difference in meaning of symbols between generations. An emoji or symbol that has a certain meaning to younger generations may not have the same meaning to older generations. For example, the laughing emoji is often used by the younger generation to express fun or even sarcasm. However, older generations may not understand the sarcastic context of the symbol and take it as literal laughter. This can lead to misunderstandings in family conversations. In addition, for the older generation, the overuse of symbols may be perceived as impolite or not serious, especially in Javanese culture, where politeness in speech is highly valued. Some parents or elders may feel that their children or grandchildren are not showing enough respect when using too many emojis in their messages.

Despite the challenges, symbols in digital communication also offer great opportunities to improve intergenerational closeness in Javanese families. With better education and understanding, older generations can be more open to the use of symbols, while younger generations can learn to be more sensitive to the cultural and generational context of using symbols. One way to bridge these differences is through open conversations in the family about how symbols are used and what they mean to each generation. Younger generations can help teach older generations about the meaning and use of symbols, while older generations can explain how they interpret symbols and how they want to communicate digitally.

### 2.3 Conflict in the meaning of symbols and emojis

Visual symbols such as emojis, stickers and GIFs are an important part of communication in digital media. However, different generations often have different understandings of these symbols. Younger generations tend to use emojis and stickers more expressively and creatively, while older generations often use them more literally and simply. For example, the laughing emoji for younger generations is often used in the context of sarcastic or not entirely literal humour. However, older

generations may not understand this context and perceive the emoji as an actual expression of laughter. This difference in understanding can cause confusion or even misunderstanding in communication between generations. Another example is the use of the thumbs-up symbol ①. For many older generations, this symbol represents approval or support. However, for some young people, this emoji can come across as flat or even sarcastic in certain contexts. When Mr. Harjo (65 years old) sent the thumbs-up symbol to his granddaughter as a sign of approval, his granddaughter, Siti (19 years old), took it as a cold and inexpressive response. This caused Siti to feel less valued in the conversation.

One of the main sources of conflict in intergenerational digital communication in Javanese families is the difference in communication styles. Older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, generally tend to use a more formal, polite and respectful communication style, especially in conversations with their children or grandchildren. In contrast, younger generations, such as Generation Z and millennials, prefer to use casual, abbreviation-heavy and often informal language in digital conversations. This difference often leads to misunderstandings. Older generations may feel disrespected when their children or grandchildren use overly casual or informal language in text messages. In contrast, the younger generation may feel that their communication style is efficient enough and see no problem in using casual language. For example, Mr. Budi (55 years old) feels uncomfortable when his grandson, Andi (17 years old), sends messages with abbreviations and slang. Mr. Budi stated: "I feel that the messages from my grandson are too short and impolite. I was always taught to speak with manners, but now it seems like everything has changed." Andi, on the other hand, considers his communication style to be normal among his peers and does not realise that the language he uses could offend his grandfather.

Another conflict that often arises in digital communication between generations is the difference in response rate and response time. Younger generations who have grown up with digital technology tend to respond quickly, mainly because they are used to instant communication through messaging apps and social media. In contrast, older generations may take longer to respond, either due to technological limitations or their slower message handling habits. This often leads to frustration for the younger generation, who perceive the slow response as a sign of indifference or lack of attention. For example, 22-year-old Rani is annoyed that her mom often takes a long time to reply to messages on WhatsApp. For her mother, Mrs. Siti (48 years old), this is due to her busy daily life and habit of checking her phone only at certain times, but for Rani, her mother's slow response is perceived as a lack of attention to their conversation.

The technology gap is also a source of conflict in intergenerational communication. Younger generations are generally more adept at using technology and various digital media features, while older generations often find it difficult to understand or use digital devices. This can lead to frustration when younger generations try to teach technology to their parents or grandparents, and older generations feel uncomfortable or pressurised by the demands of understanding modern technology. For example, when Deni (20 years old) tried to teach his mom how to use a video calling app, she was confused and struggled to follow the instructions. Deni ends up feeling resentful that his mother cannot quickly understand how the technology works, while his mother feels depressed and frustrated at not being able to keep up with the fast-paced technology. Different priorities in using digital media can also lead to conflict. Younger generations tend to prioritise social media, entertainment and instant communication, while older generations often use digital media for more practical

purposes, such as basic communication, finding information or accessing news. This often leads to disagreements about what is considered important in digital conversations or activities. For example, Mr. Agus (50 years old) often feels annoyed that his daughter, Nia (18 years old), spends more time on Instagram and TikTok than replying to messages in the family group on WhatsApp. For Mr. Agus, responding to the family group is a priority, but for Nia, interacting on social media with her friends is an important part of her life. Conflicts in intergenerational communication on digital media in Javanese families are often caused by differences in communication styles, symbol meanings, response rates, technology gaps and priorities in digital media use. While these challenges can create tension in family relationships, solutions such as cross-generational digital education and increased understanding between generations can help overcome these conflicts.

### 2.4 Evolutionary stages of digital media acceptance in Javanese families

Based on the results of thematic analysis, digital media acceptance in Javanese families can be divided into five main stages: The incomprehension stage, exploration stage, adaptation stage, integration stage, and active engagement stage. Each stage shows changes in mindset, response to technology, and level of involvement in the use of digital media.

First, the incomprehension stage. The first stage in the evolution of digital media acceptance in Javanese families is incomprehension. At this stage, older generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X) are often unfamiliar with digital technologies, such as smartphones and instant messaging apps. They tend to rely on direct communication or traditional methods such as landlines and perceive digital media as complicated and difficult to use. The interviews show that at this stage, digital media is seen as a technology that is only relevant to the younger generation. For example, Mr. Budi (65), a retiree from Yogyakarta, said: "I don't understand new technology like WhatsApp. It's easier to use regular phone calls or meet in person." At this stage, there is a fear or apprehension to use digital media because it is considered too sophisticated or unnecessary in daily life.

The second stage is the exploration stage, which describes older family members starting to feel compelled to learn about digital media, often due to the need to communicate with their children or grandchildren who live far away or use the technology in their daily lives. At this stage, they are familiar with smartphones, instant messaging apps and social media, albeit at an early stage. Guidance from the younger generation is often a key factor at this stage. For example, Mrs. Siti (55 years old) from Surakarta started using WhatsApp after her son taught her how to send messages. She said: "My son taught me how to use WhatsApp, and now I can send messages or photos to him every day, although I still make mistakes." The exploration stage is characterised by growing curiosity, although the use of digital media is still limited to basic features.

The third stage is the adaptation process. Older generations become familiar with digital media and start using these technologies more regularly in their daily communication. At this stage, they have mastered basic features such as sending text messages, sharing photos and making video calls. Pak Rahmat (60), a farmer in Wonosobo, says he now uses WhatsApp to communicate with his son, who works in Jakarta. Although it was difficult at first, he is starting to feel comfortable using the technology. According to him: "At first I was confused with smartphones, but now I'm used to it. I can contact my children anytime via WhatsApp, and this is very helpful."

This stage signifies that the older generation is starting to accept digital media as part of their communication routine, although the use of technology is still limited to basic communication needs.

The fourth stage is the integration stage. Digital media begins to be integrated more widely in the daily lives of families. At this stage, the older generation not only uses digital media to communicate but also to access information, seek entertainment and participate in online communities. They feel comfortable using technology and begin to explore other features available. Mrs. Retno (62) from Semarang, who initially only used WhatsApp to communicate with her children, is now also active in community groups on Facebook and uses YouTube to watch cooking tutorials. She feels that digital media provides many additional benefits. She explains: "Now I not only contact my family, but also watch cooking videos and join Facebook groups to share tips with friends." At this stage, digital media is becoming a multifunctional tool in daily life, showing an increase in technology engagement and utilisation.

The last stage is active engagement, where older generations not only use digital media regularly but also become active and creative users. They are able to fully participate in the digital ecosystem, whether through social media, sharing content, or following digital trends. Mr. Agus (68) from Surabaya, who previously only used his mobile phone for phone calls, is now active on Facebook, joining extended family WhatsApp groups, and even sending funny stickers in his family group chats. He has also learnt to make short videos to share with his grandchildren. She said: "I can now be closer to my grandchildren through social media. I even learnt to send funny stickers, and they are happy." At this stage of active engagement, digital media has become an integral part of the older generation's social life, and they are able to interact fully within the digital environment. Key Findings from Thematic Analysis are shows that the acceptance of digital media in Javanese families does not happen instantly but through stages involving changes in perception, improved skills and increased comfort in using technology. Factors such as support from the younger generation, communication needs and the practical benefits of digital media are key drivers at each stage. Each stage in this evolution of acceptance reflects a process influenced by family dynamics, cultural factors and technological limitations. In many cases, this process is accelerated by the need to stay connected with family members who live far apart or to deal with situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which forces families to rely more on digital technologies.

In the evolutionary stages of digital media use in Javanese families, the older generation not only uses digital technology for communication but also actively participates in other digital activities, such as sharing content, joining digital communities, or even producing content on social media. However, despite their proficiency, new challenges arise. The need to keep learning in an ever-evolving technology. Despite being proficient in using certain devices, older generations still have to learn new features or emerging technologies, which can be tiring. Even older generations in Javanese families experience pressure from social norms. Some older interviewees felt that using too much social media or being too involved in digital activities was not in line with their social norms. Despite being actively involved, some older generations still feel that there is a gap in their digital media use styles compared to younger generations, especially in terms of creativity and self-expression. It is noticeable that older generations are starting to integrate digital media into their daily lives. Technology is no longer just for communication but also for finding information, entertainment, or even joining online communities.

### 3. Conclusions

This research shows that the evolution of digital technology acceptance in Javanese families takes place in stages, from the stage of incomprehension to active engagement. Each stage illustrates significant changes in the older generation's mindset, adaptation and engagement in technology use. In the early stages, the older generation had difficulty understanding the technology, accompanied by concerns about the changes brought about by digital media. However, with time and guidance from younger generations, they begin to explore, adapt and eventually integrate digital technology into their daily lives.

Common barriers at this stage include knowledge gaps, limited access to technology in rural areas, and unfamiliarity with advanced features that leave them still dependent on help from their children. While digital media has helped maintain long-distance relationships, especially in families living apart, it has also been found to potentially reduce the quality of face-to-face interactions and the warmth of relationships between family members. On the one hand, digital technology allows the younger generation to communicate more informally and quickly, but this is sometimes seen as disrespectful to more formal Javanese cultural values. Thus, it is important for Javanese families to find a balance between the use of technology and the preservation of traditions so that family relationships remain strong and harmonious in the digital era.

### **Author details**

Rama Kertamukti Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

\*Address all correspondence to: rama.mukti@uin-suka.ac.id

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