



Reframing Historical Communication for Digital-Native Youth: A Comparative Case Study of Adolescents in Yogyakarta and Global Implications for Civic Identity

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Abstract

This study examines historical communication as a strategic tool for cultivating civic awareness and nationalism among digital-age adolescents, utilizing Yogyakarta, Indonesia, as a case study. Using a qualitative, comparative case study approach, data were collected from two schools, involving early to late adolescent participants, through interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and document analysis. The results show clear differences between developmental stages: early adolescents were more interested in emotionally charged, symbolic, and ritual-based historical narratives, while late adolescents were more interested in critical discourse that was relevant to current civic issues and digital activism. The research presents a Differential Model of Historical Communication with four interconnected dimensions: informative, inspirational, interactive, and relevant. This strategy is designed to facilitate the cognitive and emotional development of adolescents and is compatible with digital technologies. The method supports historically communicative activities that are in line with developmental paths and digital culture. Theoretically, this research amalgamates cultural memory theory, participatory communication frameworks, and adolescent developmental psychology. The concept provides age-appropriate historical teaching, digital civic education, and interactive cultural program design. The study makes a big difference in how we deal with problems in history and civic education in digital environments that are getting more complicated.

Keywords: *Historical Communication, Civic Identity, Teenagers, Digital Media, National Defense*

INTRODUCTION

History has traditionally been seen as a cornerstone in developing civic identity, national consciousness, and communal responsibility. It does not just act as a chronological record of events but also as a reservoir of shared experiences and collective memory through which communities negotiate their past and imagine possible futures. In the modern period marked by increased globalization, the prevalence of digital media, and cultural hybridization, the challenge of nurturing historical knowledge among adolescents has grown increasingly challenging. This intricacy is particularly visible in Indonesia, where surveys suggest a waning interest in history among the younger generation and a growing estrangement from civic and national defense principles. Such patterns match worldwide dynamics, where digital-native adolescents typically love global influencers more than national heroes, prompting anxiety about the durability of civic identity and democratic engagement (Anderson, 2016).

The case of Yogyakarta provides a unique perspective for exploring these difficulties. As a city rich with historical symbolism and sometimes regarded as a living repository of Indonesia's national resilience, Yogyakarta has long been an educational and cultural hub. Yet even within this setting, many adolescents display a diminishing commitment to history, considering it as distant,

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abstract, or irrelevant to their lives. Adolescence itself is a vital developmental stage in which individuals seek consistency between personal narratives, social belonging, and future aspirations. Traditional methods of teaching history, generally centered on rote memory and unidirectional transfer of facts, struggle to resonate with this developmental trajectory ([Santrock, 2019](#)).

This paper suggests that historical communication should be reconceptualized not as a static transfer of knowledge but as a dynamic, participative, and audience-centered process. Building upon findings from communication studies, developmental psychology, and historiography, it presents a Differential Model of Historical Communication that contains four interdependent dimensions: informative, inspirational, participatory, and relevant. Each of these dimensions is designed to fit with adolescents' cognitive development, emotional needs, and media behaviors. The aim is to renew civic identity by making historical narratives not only accessible but also interesting, meaningful, and applicable in modern circumstances.

This research contributes in three significant ways. First, it gives empirical information on how teenagers at different developmental stages engage with historical narratives, showing distinctions between early and late adolescence. Second, it develops a theoretical framework that incorporates cultural memory theory, participatory communication, and psychological models of adolescent identity formation. Finally, it offers practical implications for educators, policymakers, and cultural institutions globally, thereby framing the Indonesian instance as part of a broader international conversation on youth, digital media, and civic involvement ([Assmann, 2018](#); [Jenkins et al., 2016](#); [Steinberg, 2014](#)).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Communication as Cultural Memory

Historical communication is not neutral. It is a selective and symbolic activity through which cultures recall, reinterpret, and transmit collective experiences. Classical historiography frequently portrayed history as an objective series of events; however, contemporary perspectives such as Assmann's theory of cultural memory stress that history is actively rewritten to fulfill present identities and political objectives ([Assmann, 2018](#)). Ricoeur further contends that story representation is crucial in defining how societies interpret time, memory, and responsibility ([Ricoeur, 2018](#)). Digital media has exacerbated this dynamic by creating what [Hoskins \(2017\)](#) labels as "connective memory," enabling users to remix and distribute historical narratives across platforms. While this democratizes access and involvement, it also amplifies risks of fragmentation, misinformation, and narrative incoherence ([Hoskins & Tulloch, 2022](#)).

Communication, Identity, and Nationalism

National identity is largely perpetuated through communication. Anderson's foundational concept of "imagined communities" highlights that nations survive through shared narratives communicated via media channels ([Anderson, 2016](#)). History works as a medium for civic cohesion by imparting collective symbols, myths, and values. For adolescents, involvement with history is deeply linked with personal and societal identity formation. Emotionally and culturally resonant narratives strengthen civic attachment, whereas abstract or irrelevant ones risk alienating youth from their national heritage ([Harris, 2022](#)). In Indonesia, the discourse of *bela negara* (defending the nation) reveals the frictions of ceremonial versus contextual approaches in citizenship education, especially among digital-native youth who increasingly seek participatory and meaningful experiences in both physical and digital spheres ([Saputra et al., 2024](#)).

Adolescent Development and Historical Learning

Developmental psychology offers insight into why adolescents engage with history differently at various stages. Piaget's framework posits early adolescents, in the concrete operational stage, respond best to tactile, visual, and emotionally engaging narratives, while late adolescents in the formal operational stage express higher-order reasoning and critical thinking (Santrock, 2019). Erikson's model underscores identity exploration as core in adolescence, where historical narratives help students negotiate self-concepts amid societal change (Steinberg, 2014). Studies consistently reveal that younger adolescents valorize symbolic heroes and rituals, whereas older youth demand critical inquiry, dialogical engagement, and relevance to contemporary civic issues (O'Neill, 2022).

Participatory Digital Media and Historical Literacy

The digital era has revolutionized how adolescents access and participate in historical discourse. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram foreground short, visually-rich content, aligning with Prensky's (2020) digital natives learning paradigm. Jenkins et al. (2016) define this environment as participatory culture, enabling adolescents not only to consume but also to produce and remix information. However, research by Wineburg and McGrew (2019) signals a persistent gap in digital and media literacy; many adolescents lack the skills to evaluate the authenticity of historical claims, rendering them susceptible to mis/disinformation. Civic education scholars argue that effective citizenship education in the digital age requires a holistic integration of media literacy, critical thinking, and collaborative. Strengthening these literacies is pivotal not just to counter misinformation but also to empower youth as critical, reflective, and responsible citizens.

Current Debates and Contribution Position

Recent Indonesian and global scholarship increasingly recognizes the dual role of digital media as both opportunity and threat for civic education. On one hand, media can enhance engagement, collaboration, and creative expression in citizenship learning (Saputra et al., 2024). On the other hand, the pervasive spread of hoaxes (hoaxes), polarization, and digital hate speech demands robust critical literacies anchored in Pancasila values, reflective dialogue, and ethical engagement (Harris, 2022). The latest literature recommends adaptive, contextual, and technology-integrated pedagogies to meet these challenges, led by cross-sectoral collaboration among educators, families, platforms, and policymakers.

This study positions itself at the intersections of these debates by presenting empirical evidence and a developmental framework for effective historical communication in the digital era, foregrounding participatory, critical, and value-oriented approaches to civic education for Indonesian and global youth (López et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative comparative case study design to capture the diverse ways adolescents interact with historical communication and create civic identities in different developmental stages. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth evaluation of phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not well defined (Yin, 2018). By concentrating on two unique teenage cohorts within Yogyakarta, the study attempted to illuminate both age-specific characteristics and underlying principles.

Yogyakarta was purposively selected due to its dual significance as both a symbolic core of Indonesian nationalism and a hub of educational innovation. Historically, Yogyakarta has been associated with important stages in Indonesia's war for independence, making it a suitable site for

exploring how teenagers engage with narratives of national resilience. The study purposefully recruited 48 participants, divided equally between two public schools: SMP Negeri 4 Depok Sleman for early adolescents (aged 12–14) and SMA Negeri 6 Yogyakarta for late adolescents (aged 16–18). Gender balance was maintained in both groups (12 males and 12 females per cohort). Selection criteria included active school enrollment, informed consent from both students and guardians, absence of cognitive/psychological disorders, and willingness to join both group and individual activities. Diversity of academic performance and extracurricular involvement was also ensured to capture a broad spectrum of adolescent experiences (Steinberg, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2018; Foster & Crawford, 2019).

Multiple strategies were employed to bolster data credibility, including semi-structured interviews to explore personal experience, focus group discussions to capture peer dynamics, participant observation for naturalistic insights, and document analysis of school materials and digital content. Miles et al. (2014) framework was used for analysis: transcribed data underwent open and axial coding, with codes collapsed into themes. Thematic matrices were constructed to allow cohort comparison. Data validation followed steps of triangulation (method and researcher), peer debriefing, member checks, and maintaining a systematic audit trail; analysis cycles were repeated to maximize reliability and theoretical coherence (Miles et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 2018).

Maintaining research ethics, all participants used pseudonyms in transcripts, and digital footprint analyses were guided by best practices in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). The relatively small, urban-based sample and reliance on self-report are noted as limitations, though the triangulation of methods strengthened overall credibility. Despite these constraints, the study provides a contextually grounded, transparent methodology that supports reproducibility and interpretability for future research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most remarkable things this study uncovered is that kids at different stages of development had quite distinct methods of interacting with history. These distinctions go deeper than just skin deep; they are based on how individuals think, how they feel, and the social situations they are in. The study demonstrates varying patterns of involvement by meticulously examining and contrasting early adolescents in junior high school with late adolescents in senior high school. This shows how vital it is to talk about history in many ways.

Various Methods of Participation

When history is told through stories that are emotive, symbolic, and ritualistic, it becomes important to young teens. Many students spoke about national heroes, such as General Sudirman, in interviews and focus groups as if they were superheroes. They expressed a lot about how brave, powerful, and ready he was to give up everything for his country. This kind of story is great for younger kids because it offers obvious moral teachings, symbols that are easy to understand, and heroic characters that are easy to relate to. Piaget (1972) said that youth learn best when they are doing something that can be seen, like dramatic events or symbolic rituals. This is what their involvement matches with.

But kids in their late teens didn't enjoy simple or romanticized depictions of historical individuals as much. They were more concerned in figuring out the key causes and big-picture frameworks instead. They sought to uncover why conflicts occurred, what structural forces keep injustice going, and how those fights are tied to problems in society today, like climate change, inequality, or corruption. A lot of high school seniors who took part in focus groups said that colonial exploitation is like today's concerns about environmental degradation because both have

to do with justice and sovereignty. Their involvement is an example of Erikson's theory (1968) that adolescence is a time for figuring out who you are. History is crucial during this time because it helps them figure out where they fit in society and deal with moral dilemmas. These distinctions suggest that kids are still engaged in history; it's just evolving. They need history that makes sense for their age and what they've been through.

Using Civic Values

Teenagers also displayed their civic identity in different ways depending on their age. For younger kids, conducting rituals was a frequent method to show that they cared about their community. People thought that following the rules at school, singing the national song, and raising the flag were all good ways to show that you love your country. According to Assmann's theory of cultural memory, rituals help people remember things over time. People felt like they belonged, and their feeling of community grew stronger because they did these things over and over again. They thought that taking part in ceremonies was the same as keeping the country safe. But older kids thought these kinds of ceremonies weren't enough. They exhibited their civic identity by doing more meaningful things, such as volunteering for social programs, organizing community clean-ups, and joining online campaigns. They thought that being patriotic didn't mean blindly following commands; it required doing something to fix the problems that were happening right now. Some people even suggested that joining environmental groups or internet campaigns against corruption was a means to keep fighting for the country. This goes along with Anderson's theory that tales vary throughout time and are the backbone of nations, not permanent traditions ([Anderson, 2016](#)). This change in generations illustrates that rituals are still good for getting youngsters involved in civic activities early on, but later teens could think they're superficial if they don't relate to issues that are important to them in their everyday lives.

Digital Participation and Media Choices

The media was just as essential. Teenagers in their early teens definitely appreciated short, visually appealing stuff like TikTok videos, animated videos, and YouTube shorts. These fashions soon captured their eye and gave them the over-the-top drama they wanted. Students reported that watching a one-minute TikTok video taught them more about historical individuals than spending hours in class listening to lectures. This trend is similar to what has been seen around the world about how young people who grew up with technology use the media ([Van der Merwe, 2022](#)).

Older teenagers, on the other hand, enjoyed platforms that had a lot of depth and opportunity to get involved. They watched extended documentaries, took part in structured conversations, and even generated their own digital content, including podcasts or video essays that related historical events to issues in society today. This approach of taking part fits with Jenkins' idea of participatory culture, where young people don't just utilize things, they also figure them out ([Jenkins et al., 2016](#)). But even though these were good signals of participation, both groups were nonetheless open to incorrect information. As [Wineburg and McGrew \(2019\)](#) pointed out, it's challenging for teens to critically analyze sources. This is shown by the fact that several students distributed erroneous information they received on social media. This highlights the necessity of integrating digital literacy into historical discourse.

Differential Model of Historical Communication

The article employs a Differential Model of Historical Communication as a framework to disseminate information to educators, legislators, and cultural institutions. There are four elements to this model, and they all work together ([Gruber & Schäfer, 2022](#)). The instructive aspect acknowledges that accurate information must evolve as children mature. Younger kids need stories

that are easier to understand and have more illustrations of heroes and important things that happen. Older children need facts, old records, and photos that make them think critically. Second, the portion that inspires you is about building an emotional connection. Younger children are more inspired by stories of bravery and sacrifice, while older students are more inspired by moral concerns and trying to figure out why things happened in the past. Third, the interactive component illustrates how crucial it is to take part. Dramatizations, role-plays, and games are wonderful strategies to get younger teens interested. For older youth, advocacy, conversations, and project-based learning are excellent. Last but not least, the relevant dimension implies that history should be linked to what is going on right now. By connecting previous wars to modern issues like corruption, democracy, or environmental sustainability, history becomes more relevant and beneficial for older teens. This strategy integrates principles from cultural memory theory (Assmann, 2018), participatory media (Jenkins et al., 2016), and narrative persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000; Heath & Heath, 2020) to build a complete plan for how to talk about history in the digital era.

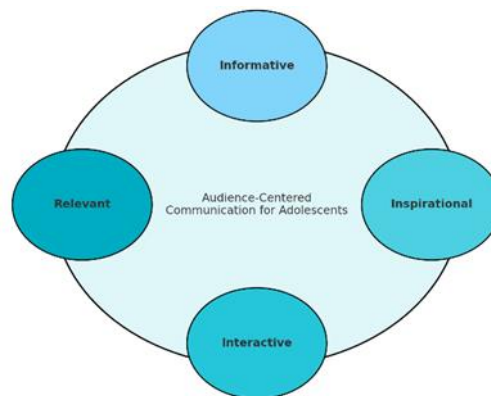


Figure. Model of Historical Communication

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that historical communication for teenagers must be reconceptualized as a diverse and participative practice connected with developmental psychology, cultural memory, and digital media ecologies. Early adolescents are primarily drawn to emotionally evocative, symbolic, and ritualized narratives, while late adolescents seek contextualization and critical thought, expressing civic identity through activism and social participation. The proposed Differential Model of Historical Communication presents a globally applicable paradigm for customizing history to digital-native youth. It underscores the requirement of audience-centered, developmentally appropriate tactics that are responsive to digital media practices. In an era of digital fragmentation and misinformation, telling history as a living, interactive process is important to safeguarding civic identity and democratic values. Theoretically, this study merges cultural memory, participatory culture, and adolescent psychology into a coherent framework. Practically, it informs differentiated pedagogy for educators, developmentally matched civic education for policymakers, and interactive exhibition design for cultural organizations. Globally, it contributes to issues of preserving democratic involvement among youth whose civic identities are increasingly defined by fragmented digital landscapes.

In addition, the findings call for concrete recommendations. For policymakers, this entails the integration of history education with digital literacy and civic learning policies that are sensitive to the psychological and cultural development of adolescents, while fostering collaboration

between schools, cultural institutions, and digital platforms. For educators, this requires the adoption of differentiated pedagogical strategies that combine participatory methods, critical engagement, and creative digital media practices, enabling students not only to consume history but to actively co-construct it as part of their civic identity.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise several limits. The study's sample was confined to two urban public schools in Yogyakarta, featuring a deliberately balanced, although comparatively small cohort of participants, perhaps limiting the generalisability of the findings to rural or culturally dissimilar settings. The dependence on self-reported data and qualitative methodologies presents possible biases; nonetheless, measures such as triangulation and member checking were employed to augment credibility. Furthermore, given that the study concentrated on a particular age group and regional context, subsequent research should investigate comparative cohorts across various areas, educational institutions, or international contexts to attain a more comprehensive knowledge of the intersection between digital media and civic literacy in historical education. Despite these constraints, this study offers a clear and theoretically sound basis for additional investigation and practical advancements in youth-focused historical and civic education

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