

The Process of Message Production Among Whatsapp Social Media Users

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ABSTRACT

As a result of developments in technology and information, the way individuals communicate has changed. This is also the case with the SMAN 3 Bandung Class of '82 Alumni Association, which uses a WhatsApp group (WAG) as a platform to gather and exchange information. However, there is a problem, namely that the dynamics of communication within the ikasma3badg82 WAG cannot always be conveyed in their entirety. The researcher argues that dishonesty in conveying messages within the WAG is part of an effort to maintain solidarity among group members. The objectives of this study include (1) to determine the message production process within the ikasma3bdg82 WAG and (2) to determine how the message production process within the ikasma3bdg'82 WAG is related to the characteristics of its members. The research methodology uses a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative approach. The results of the study include (1) The message production process carried out by members of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG, between passive and active members, is fairly balanced. (2) Based on Trait Theory, members of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG can be classified into Conversational Narcissism, Argumentativeness, and Social Communication Anxiety. The uniqueness of this study is the emergence of the Super Conversational Narcissism component, which is a development of Littlejohn's Trait Theory.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans communicate using language, both verbal and nonverbal. As stated by Watzlawick (Miller, 2005, p. 67), "We cannot not communicate," meaning that basically every human being cannot help but communicate because humans are social creatures. Without communication, humans cannot socialize. Through communication, humans can get to know and understand one

another. From birth, even from the womb, humans already communicate. At birth, a baby's cry is the first language used by the baby to convey its presence. From that moment on, its ability to communicate continues to increase significantly, both directly and through the use of tools or media that facilitate human communication. With the development of technology in the field of communication and information, especially through new media, the integration of

computer technology, telecommunications, and media allows everyone to use it at any time. Anyone can access the internet anytime and anywhere as long as there is a connection, both for direct face-to-face communication and by utilizing old and new mass media.

This technology makes it easy for anyone to obtain information even when they are not at home, at the office, or even when traveling. New media is part of the development of communication technology that is capable of removing the boundaries of space and time. The presence of the internet has become one of the important discoveries in the field of communication because it allows people to connect with anyone without being hindered by distance or time.

Dominick [1] defines the internet as a network of computer networks, which is a system that connects computers with servers, enabling communication and meetings around the world. This condition then gave rise to the term "bringing the distant closer and distancing the near." Along with this, social networking has grown rapidly and made it easier for individuals to exchange information without having to meet face-to-face, even though they are located far apart. Examples of such social media include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Line. In subsequent developments, the number of WhatsApp users has surprisingly increased very rapidly, as shown in Figure 1.

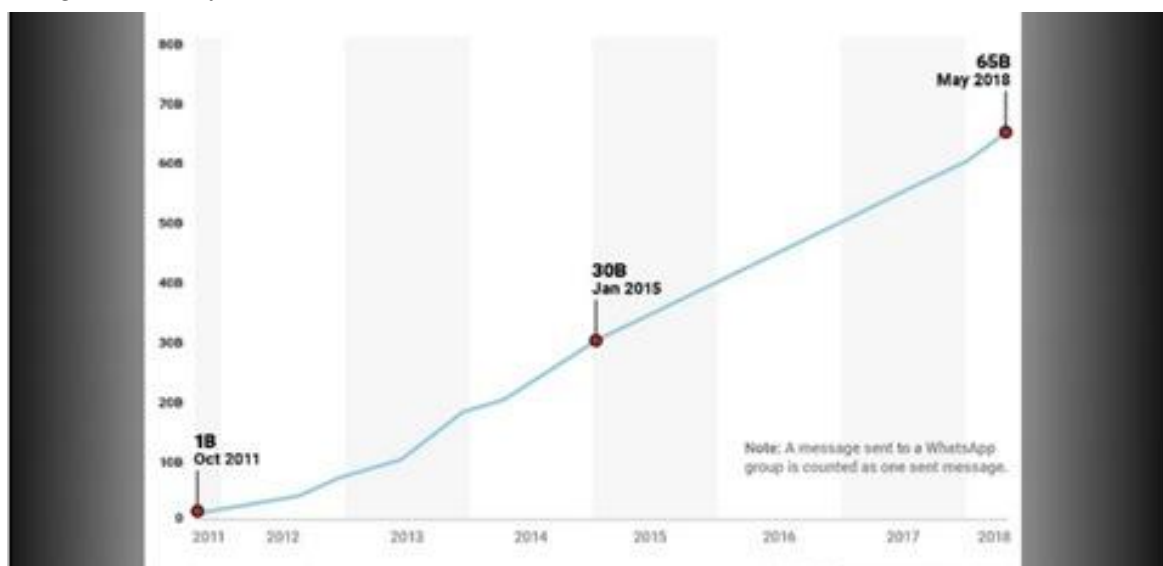


Figure 1. Number of WhatsApp Messages Per Day
Source: Company Announcements, Business Insider (2018)

Referring to Figure 1, which shows the number of WhatsApp (WA) users per day, there has been significant global growth, particularly since WA was acquired by Facebook in 2014. According to a statement by Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, monthly active users (MAU) reached 1.5 billion, an increase of 14% compared to 1.3 billion in July 2017. The number of messages sent also increased sharply, from 1 billion messages in October 2011 to 30 billion in January 2015, reaching 65 billion messages per day. WhatsApp even became the most downloaded application in 2018, with 779 million downloads (forbes.com in

tekno.tempo). In Indonesia, internet penetration reached 132.7 million users out of a total population of 265.4 million in January 2018, and 40% of them use WA in their daily activities. Compared to other social media platforms, WhatsApp has the highest user growth rate.

As it has developed, WhatsApp has enabled the creation of group chats, which initially could only accommodate 50 members but now can accommodate up to 256 members. This phenomenon shows how rapidly WhatsApp usage has grown. This condition has attracted researchers to examine the process of message production

among social media users, focusing on one of the application's features, namely WhatsApp Group (WAG). Messages produced in WAG can be tailored to the initial purpose of the group's formation and used to facilitate communication in various contexts: family, lectures, academic guidance, and even school friendships. One example is the WhatsApp Group *ikasma3bdg82*, which consists of alumni of SMAN 3 Bandung class of 1982.

Members of WAG *ikasma3bdg82* have very diverse backgrounds, both in terms of culture, social status, education level, and profession. This heterogeneity reflects the variety of characters that influence the message production process. The WAG is used as a means of exchanging news, both happy and sad, sharing information, joking and reminiscing, as well as discussing specific topics according to the expertise of the members. This dynamic makes the interaction lively and broadens the horizons of the group participants. However, this diversity also has the potential to trigger conflicts influenced by differences in interests, such as politics, economics, profession, culture, and religion. Researchers note that the dynamics of communication in the *ikasma3bdg82* WAG do not always reflect frankness, but rather a strategy to maintain solidarity among members.

Based on this phenomenon, this study was conducted to observe the message production process of the members of the *ikasma3bdg82* WAG. The focus was to identify whether there was a gap between the ideal of communication and the reality of the practice. The greater the level of difference in the WAG, the greater the potential for problems to arise. It is interesting to examine how group members mitigate these potential problems and how individual characteristics influence the way they produce messages. In this context, the researcher refers to Littlejohn's Trait Theory as a framework for analysis. The research was conducted using a constructivist paradigm and a qualitative approach, viewing WhatsApp as a new social media construct since its introduction in 2009. Thus, this study not only explores the dynamics of communication in WAGs, but

also epistemological and axiological reflections on the use of social media, which are expected to build communication harmony among members.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Study

A number of previous studies have shown the role of WhatsApp Groups (WAGs) as a dynamic medium of communication. Seufert [2] emphasize WAG as a new paradigm of social media-based group communication, Rachmaniar & Renata [3] find that member loyalty is influenced by bonding, sharing, ease of connection, and information needs, while Rosenfeld [4] highlight differences in usage patterns based on gender, age, and group size. Other studies also confirm the function of WAG in various contexts: Sukrillah [5] in an academic environment, Tikno (2017) through TAM, Pratama [6] in Group Investigation-based learning, Dewi et al. on the silent reader phenomenon, and Harahap & Kurniawati on da'wah communication strategies. In addition, WhatsApp is also used by public figures [7], to support learning communities [8], and as a medium for global crisis communication [9]. This study is similar to previous studies in that it focuses on WhatsApp Groups, but the difference lies in the emphasis of this study, which examines the message production process in relation to the characteristics of members, thus providing a new perspective on the dynamics of communication in the digital space.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Communication is understood as the process of conveying messages from communicators to communicants through certain channels to produce an effect [10]. In the context of new media, communication is mediated by the internet, thereby expanding its

reach in terms of space and time. Communication media are now divided into old media (print, radio, television) and new media (internet, social media), which enable more interactive communication [11]. WhatsApp as a social media has the characteristics of a network, information, archives, interactivity, social simulation, and user content [12]. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), according to Baldwin, Perry, & Moffit [13], shifts the function of old mass media from mere information and entertainment to a means of social interaction, as well as the basis for the formation of a network society (Castells) where social relations take place in digital space.

The Message Production Theory [14] explains that communicators use knowledge, goals, interaction coordination, and specific strategies in producing messages. This process often occurs

automatically, but can also be reflective depending on the context. Meanwhile, Trait Theory [15] asserts that individual traits influence the way people think, feel, and behave. The three main traits relevant to communication in WAG are conversational narcissism (dominant and egocentric), argumentativeness (fond of debating), and communication apprehension (anxious or avoiding communication). The Big Five model (Digman) further enriches the analysis of individual traits. By combining the frameworks of communication theory, social media, message production, and individual traits, this study seeks to explain why members of the WAG ikasma3bdg82 produce messages in certain ways, including the choice to be frank or not, in order to maintain solidarity within the group.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

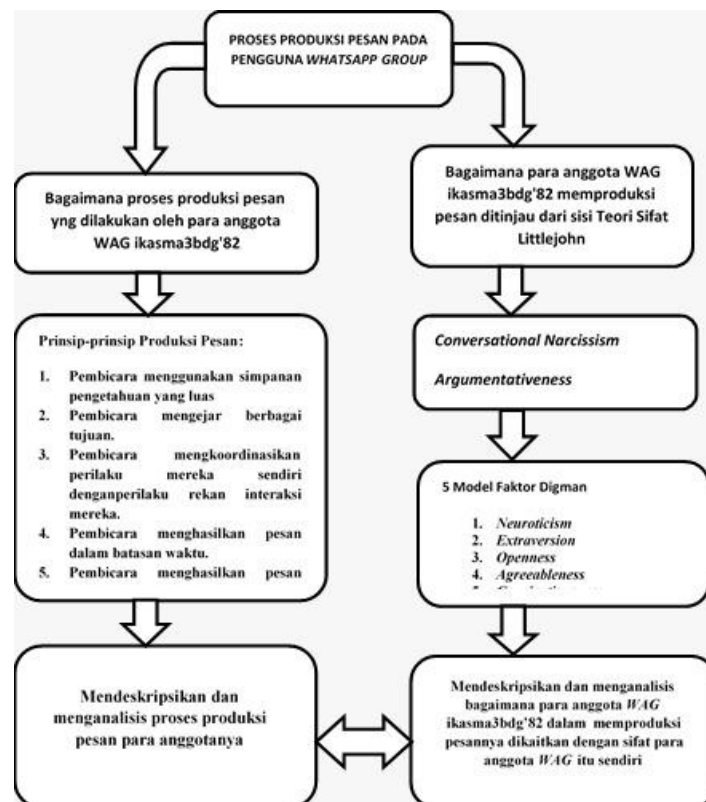


Figure 2. Framework

Source: researcher's work, 2023

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Conceptual Framework

This study uses the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality as the result of meaning construction by actors. According to Schwandt in Denzin & Lincoln [16], constructivism rejects the notion that facts exist separately from researchers. Knowledge and truth are considered to be the result of perspective, not something that is completely objective. Therefore, this study emphasizes understanding the meaning constructed by WhatsApp Group (WAG) members in the message production process.

3.2. Research Approach

The approach used is qualitative. This approach was chosen to explore social phenomena in the field holistically. Denzin & Lincoln [16] and Creswell [17] emphasize that qualitative research focuses on meaning, context, unexpected phenomena, the processes behind events, explanations of causality, and patterns of interaction. Thus, researchers play a direct role in understanding the dynamics of communication that take place in WAGs.

3.3. Research Subjects and Objects

The subjects of this study were social media users, specifically members of the WAG ikasma3bdg82 (alumni of SMAN 3 Bandung Class of 1982), with informants determined through purposive sampling, involving key figures such as the group administrator, Windy HM, and several active members relevant to the research objectives. The object of the research focuses on the message production process and meaning construction by members of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG, with a primary focus on the relationship between message production and

the individual characteristics of each member.

3.4. Concept Definitions

The message production process is the way WAG members compose and convey messages, whether in the form of text, images, photos, or videos, so that they can be understood by other members. This process takes place through social media as an internet-based online communication tool that allows for the exchange of messages without space and time limitations. In the context of this study, WhatsApp is the social media application used because it facilitates the sending of messages in the form of text, voice, images, emoticons, and even voice and video calls using an internet data network.

3.5. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was carried out using three main techniques, namely observation of interactions in the WAG ikasma3bdg82, in-depth interviews with administrators and active group members, and document studies in the form of conversation notes, articles, and related literature. The data sources used consisted of primary data obtained directly through interviews and observations of WAG members, as well as secondary data from documents, journals, books, and other supporting references.

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study used the Miles & Huberman model [18], which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documents to focus more on matters relevant to the research objectives. Next, the reduced data is presented

in the form of narratives or tables to facilitate the interpretation and meaning-making process. The final stage is drawing conclusions or verification, where the research findings are retested by comparing various data to produce valid conclusions.

The validity of the data is tested through triangulation techniques as proposed by Patton [19], which include source triangulation by comparing information from various informants, method triangulation by combining interviews, observations, and document studies, triangulation of theory by using various theoretical perspectives in interpreting data, and triangulation of researchers (if conducted in a team) by comparing the results of interpretations between researchers. The application of triangulation aims to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, so that the research results can be scientifically accounted for.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview of the Research Object

The WhatsApp Group SMA Negeri 3 Bandung angkatan '82 (Bandung State High School 3 Class of '82) was formed around September 2012, starting from communication between alumni through the mailing list `ikasma3bdg82@egroup.com`, which then moved to `ikasma3bdg82@yahoogroups.com`. From the conversations on the mailing list, the idea of the first grand reunion on September 9, 2012, emerged, which also resulted in the formation of the `ikasma3bdg82` management and the collection of alumni data, including telephone numbers. The results of this data collection were then used to create a

database and encouraged the formation of a BBM group, although it was limited because not all alumni had Blackberry devices. This was then supplemented with Facebook, Line, and Telegram groups, until finally the WhatsApp Group became the most active. Currently, there are around 300 `ikasma3bdg82` alumni, with 170–180 WAG members; around 90–100 of them are active, while the rest are passive or only appear at certain moments, such as times of grief, important days, birthdays, or family celebrations. Some members never interact at all, acting as silent readers or observers in the group dynamics.

4.2. Research Results

The results of this study are a grouping of information obtained during observations and interviews on the WhatsApp Group (WAG) `ikasma3bdg82`. The data was analyzed according to the research questions and linked to relevant theories, particularly message production theory and trait theory.

1. Message Production Process of `ikasma3bdg82` WAG Members

a. Personal Knowledge

The messages produced by members are mostly related to topics such as technology, sports, health, music, and entertainment. For example, discussions about how to overcome technical obstacles in WAG or sharing articles about health and sports, which are relevant to the conditions of members who are mostly approaching retirement.

b. Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is reflected in the use of emojis to avoid misunderstandings, as well as the tendency of some members to write long

messages containing explanations or promotions of personal businesses. This shows that messages are produced not only to share information, but also to build self-image and social relationships.

c. Personal Motivation

Members often share photos of personal activities, family, or grandchildren, as well as information about social activities such as fundraising and scholarships.

These positive messages serve to maintain emotional closeness and solidarity among members.

d. Interaction Behavior

Interactions in WAG include sharing news, including hoaxes, to group rules and lengthy discussions. Although conflicts occasionally arise, interactions tend to be directed toward mutual understanding and maintaining group harmony.

2. Message Production in Terms of Member Characteristics

a. Self-Existence

Some members stand out through straightforward, open messages, while others are reluctant to speak. There are also those who exhibit narcissistic behavior by dominating the conversation.

b. Solidarity

Messages of solidarity appear during moments of sorrow and happiness, such as birthdays or children's weddings. WAGs serve to strengthen relationships in line with their original purpose.

c. Sensitivity

Some members show sensitivity in the form of anxiety or self-doubt, which affects their participation in conversations.

d. Provocation

Some members make provocative comments, either in the form of jokes or sharp criticism of political or social issues. The responses of other members vary, from responding seriously to neutralizing the atmosphere.

e. Responsiveness

Some members are very responsive to certain posts, giving rise to patterns of intensive interaction between certain members.

3. Types of Messages Produced

The types of messages produced are not always related to profession or educational background, but rather to current trends, general knowledge, social activities, and issues that are currently being discussed. This shows that WAGs are a space for sharing information while maintaining social cohesion.

Table 1. Profile of WhatsApp Group ikasma3bdg82 Members

Education	High School	DIPLOMA	Higher Education	Other	Total
	1	1	79	95	176
Work	PROFESIONAL	ASN	KARYAWAN	Other	
	46	22	38	70	176

Source: researcher's analysis, 2023

4. Message Content Based on Social Context and Profession

When linked to profession, background, and chosen topics, it can be concluded that most members of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG tend to produce general messages. This is in line with the initial purpose of forming the group, which is to strengthen the bonds of friendship among high school classmates. The most dominant messages are those related to happy and sad events. Happy events are usually related to birthdays, promotions, or children's weddings. Meanwhile, sad events occur when a member or a member's family passes away or falls ill. Messages of sorrow are usually accompanied by documentation in the form of photos of the funeral procession, condolence flowers, or photos of visits to sick friends. Thus, the content of the messages emphasizes solidarity and emotional support rather than the

members' professions or academic backgrounds.

In general, conflicts rarely drag on. Although political topics or sensitive issues occasionally arise and have the potential to trigger differences of opinion, members tend to maintain tolerance. Usually, if the discussion starts to heat up, other members will immediately change the topic to prevent the conflict from escalating. A similar thing happens when a big holiday is coming up, where there are different views on how to say congratulations, but the situation remains under control. In some cases, there are members who choose to leave the group, but generally they will be contacted privately and invited to rejoin. This pattern shows that there is an informal mechanism for maintaining group cohesion and a spirit of togetherness, which is the main foundation of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG.

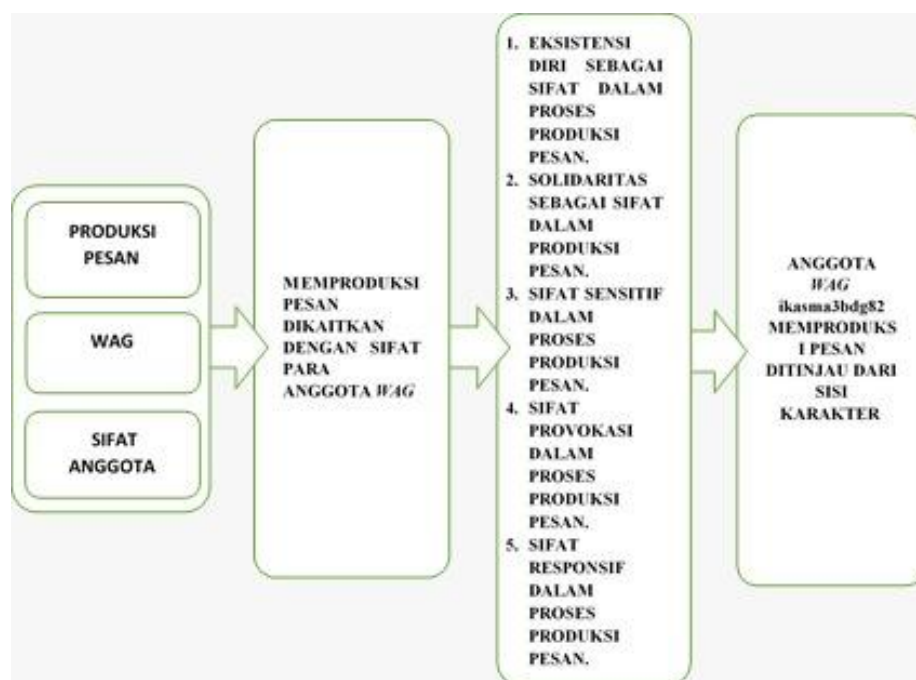


Figure 3. Chart of Research Results on Message Production and Characteristics of WAG Members

Source: researcher's analysis, 2023

4.3. Analysis of Message Content and Member Characteristics

Referring to Figure 3, it can be explained that members of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG produced messages with various contents that reflected individual characteristics. The content of the messages conveyed was not only general information or personal news, but also showed the communication characteristics of each member. From the analysis results, five prominent trait tendencies in message production can be seen, namely: (1) self-existence, as shown by messages that emphasize personal achievements or individual experiences; (2) solidarity, through messages that express support when members experience joy or sorrow; (3) sensitivity, which is reflected in messages that are emotional, cautious, or tend to avoid conflict; (4) provocative, in the form of messages containing criticism, jokes, or controversial issues that provoke responses; and (5) responsive, seen

in quick and consistent interactions in responding to other members' messages.

4.4. Theoretical Reflection

Messages are a major component of communication, alongside the communicator as the sender and the audience as the receiver. Without messages, communication would not take place. Messages are meaningful only if they are conveyed in context and understood by the recipient, whether through verbal or nonverbal language, text symbols, images, colors, or other agreed-upon forms. In the context of this study, the message production of ikasma3bdg82 WAG members was observed to see its relationship with individual characteristics, whether in the form of personal information, happy news, or sad news.

Based on the results of the study, the Message Production Theory [14] proved to be relevant because it was able to explain how members produced messages with

the aim of sharing information, strengthening solidarity, and maintaining interaction within the group. Meanwhile, Digman's Trait Theory (Big Five Personality) enriches the analysis with five dimensions of traits: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, which influence individual communication styles. This theory complements Littlejohn's Trait Theory, which more specifically highlights three trait tendencies in communication: (a) conversational narcissism, where individuals like to show off and dominate conversations; (b) argumentativeness, namely individuals who enjoy debates and controversial topics as a means of learning and honing their skills; and

(c) social communicative anxiety, namely individuals who are anxious, reluctant, or avoid communication due to discomfort or fear of interaction.

This theoretical reflection shows that communication behavior in WAG cannot be separated from the innate traits and psychological conditions of each member. The messages produced represent the character of the individual, whether they tend to be dominant, supportive, sensitive, provocative, or responsive. Thus, the communication dynamics in the *ikasma3bdg82* WAG can be understood as an intersection between communication goals, the form of messages produced, and the personal characteristics of its members.

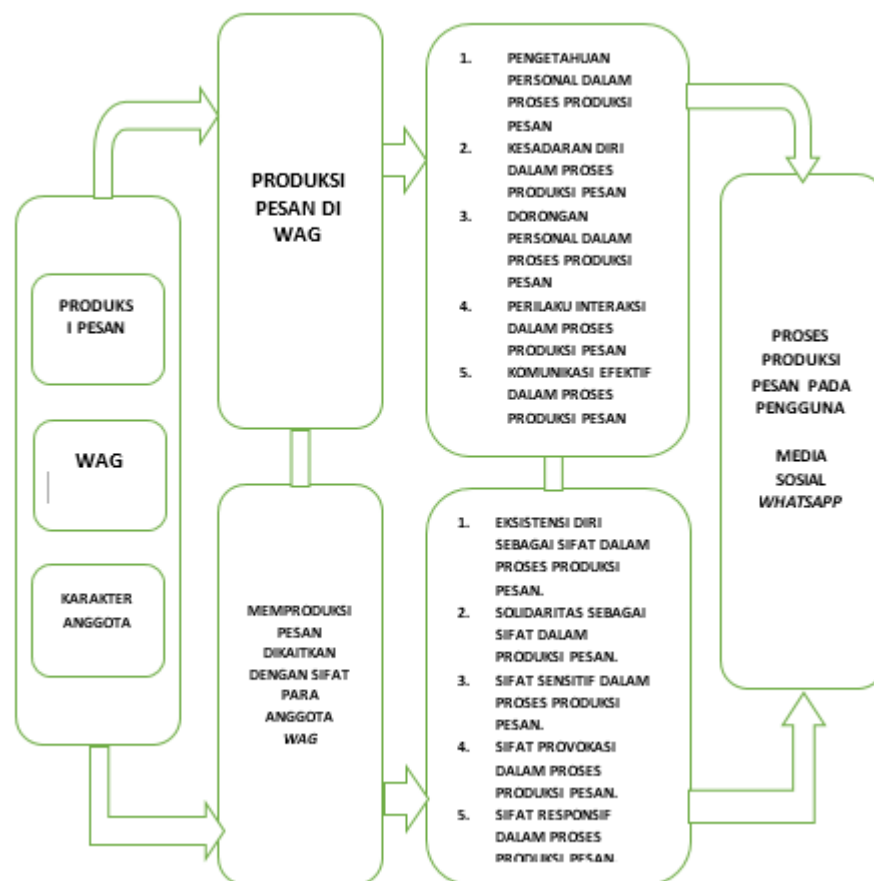


Figure 4. Message Production Model and Member Characteristics in WAG

Source: researcher's compilation, 2023

Based on the research results, Littlejohn's Trait Theory in 2011, which includes Conversational Narcissism, Argumentativeness, and Social Communicative Anxiety, has been developed with the discovery of a new component, namely Super Conversational Narcissism, which was not previously included in the theory. Littlejohn [15] states that traits are qualities or characteristics that distinguish the relatively consistent ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving of individuals in various situations, as opposed to temporary states that are influenced by situational factors and specific intentions. Trait theory is one of the earliest theories in the discipline of communication to describe communicators, which is basically adapted from psychology. Furthermore, Littlejohn and Foss [15] (in Afrilla, et al., 2020:66) explain that individual trait theory explains how we think as communicators, that traits are characteristics that distinguish individuals from one another. Traits indicate relatively consistent patterns of how a person thinks, feels, and behaves in various situations, and are often used to predict behavior. Thus, a person's behavior is determined by a combination of traits and situational factors that influence them at that moment. In this study, the types of traits identified include: (a) Conversational Narcissism, (b) Argumentativeness, (c) Social and Anxiety Communications Apprehension, and (d) Super Conversational Narcissism as new findings from the study.

4.5. Novelty of the Research

The findings in this study show the development of Littlejohn's types of traits, namely Conversational Narcissism, Argumentativeness, and Social Communicative Anxiety. Littlejohn

[15] states that traits are qualities or characteristics that distinguish the relatively consistent ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving of individuals in various situations, as opposed to temporary states that are influenced by situational factors and specific intentions. Trait theory was one of the first to be developed in the discipline of communication to describe communicators, which was largely adapted from psychological theories. Furthermore, Littlejohn and Foss [15] (in Afrilla, et al., 2020:66) explain that individual trait theory explains how we think as communicators, that a trait is an individual characteristic that distinguishes one person from another. Traits show relatively consistent patterns of how a person thinks, feels, and behaves in various situations, and are often used to predict behavior; a person's behavior is determined by a combination of their traits and the situational factors present at the time. This study found an additional trait, namely Super Conversational Narcissism, which is basically similar to narcissism in that both want to stand out, are indifferent, and do not care about their surroundings because they are too busy with themselves, but this trait is more extreme. The term Super Conversational Narcissism was obtained by researchers from observations of one WAG member who openly showed indifference to other members. For example, when all members were expressing their condolences for a tragedy, this member sent messages that were completely irrelevant, such as sharing family photos, food, or stories about their personal life.

4.6. Limitations of the Research

Constraints in this study include the limited focus, which only discusses one type of social media, namely WhatsApp Groups, and the

research locus, which only covers the SMAN 3 Bandung Class of 1982 group. In addition, the use of a qualitative approach did not allow for quantitative measurement of the influence of the message production process. Another constraint was the difficulty in obtaining data from key informants and informants, as most of them reside in Bandung or often travel out of town or abroad for work, making it difficult to arrange meeting times.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the ikasma3bdg82 WAG, it can be concluded that the message production process of the

members is influenced by personal knowledge, self-awareness, personal motivation, and interactive behavior that shapes the dynamics of communication within the group, with the level of member activity fluctuating according to the topic being discussed. In terms of character, the main tendencies found were self-existence, solidarity, sensitivity, provocation, and responsiveness, which were reflected in the members' messages, as well as indications of the development of new traits such as super conversational narcissism. Thus, WAG functions not only as a means of socializing, but also as a space for information exchange, solidarity, and social interaction that reflects individual character as well as group dynamics.

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