

Intimate Communication in the Urban Gay Circle in Indonesia (Phenomenon Study on the Usage of *Grindr* as the Medium of Communication)

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Abstract

This research depicts how the phenomenon of *Grindr* app technology usage among the unknown Indonesian urban gay circle as an intimate communication. The group has received more attention recently due to attitude shift towards value and norm in the Indonesian society. This paper aims to: (1) describe the purpose of using *Grindr* app as a medium of communication among Indonesian urban gay men; (2) explore the awareness and meanings comprehended by gay men before and after intimate communication through *Grindr* app; (3) interpret the type of commitment made before and after being involved in intimate communication through *Grindr*. This is a qualitative research that employed phenomenon analysis method which aims to explore deeper understanding of a phenomenon through life experience. The research informants are selected using certain criteria, and six gays from two big cities in Indonesia, i.e. Jakarta and Medan, were selected. The data was collected through in-depth interview and literature study. To validate and keep this research to remain objective, data, theory and source triangulation were performed. The result of this research are as follows: (1) the main purpose of using *Grindr* apps is to gain pleasure and sexual contact; (2) the awareness construction and meanings which appear to a gay during the intimate communication through *Grindr* are for socializing and for mutual introduction; (3) the types of commitment made by the research informants before and after intimate communication through *Grindr* are open relationship and monogamy.

Keywords: Intimate communication; Commitment; Open relationship; Gay; Grindr.

1. Introduction

The existence of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) groups remains unacceptable for the majority of the Indonesian people. Gay is one of the groups whose existence is a matter of controversy wherever they present. Gay refers to individual interests of a male towards other male, which is often termed as homosexual. Various gay communities began to emerge in Indonesia as an effort for the gays to make social contact with their fellow gays. Gay communities are also distributed in various parts of Indonesia, from the West to the East. Some of the known gay communities in Indonesia are Arus Pelangi (Jakarta), Suara Kita (Jakarta), Cangkang Queer (Medan), PLUSH (Yogyakarta), KSM (Makassar), Sure Mandar Community (South West), SALUT (Manado), Binthe Pelangi (Gorontalo) and GAYa Gods (Bali). These groups were founded to strengthen the existence of gay people in the archipelago.

As an individual and a part of a society, a

gay has the sense to show his existence, which means, as a group, the gay community strive for their social existence to be recognized. Therefore, the gay community created a variety of ways to communicate with their fellow gays. The development of communication technology is a positive progress because it enables this community to develop social contact with fellow community members freely, safely and comfortably. *Grindr* application for instance, which uses the GPS (Global Positioning System), enables users to see a list of gay men around a place it is located. *Grindr* application can be installed on one's smartphone, and its GPS feature is part of the package. As a result, the application becomes a new media in finding gay men and forming their community.

The use of *Grindr* brings a more interpersonal communication among gay men and as a result, the level of communication between them reaches the of stage intimate communication. Intimacy does not always mean there is a sex-related relationship, although it might be related to

sex. Intimacy between peers may be due to the involvement of sexual activity between them, but that does not always represent the main concept of an intimate relationship. Emotional intimacy involves understanding and empathy in repeated thoughts, feelings and emotions. Physical intimacy involves understanding and empathy through bodily movement in a real and recurrent acts (McLean, 2005: 127-128).

Intimacy is the ability to merge a person's identity with others without fear of losing the identity. Intimacy can only be achieved when one has already formed a stable ego. People who are unsure of their own identity, can withdraw from psychosocial intimacy or desperately seeking intimacy through meaningless sexual intercourse. Mature intimacy means the ability and willingness to share a sense of mutual trust. This involves sacrifice, compromise and commitment in the relationship of two equals (Feist and Feist, 2010: 307). Real intimacy that exists in the communication using *Grindr* is an intimate relationship in the form of mutual knowledge of a gay person with other gay by involving all aspects of interpersonal communication in themselves, without implied intention to do business or simply for pleasure. *Grindr* as a medium is the initial stage they know each other to be able to choose to continue the relationship in a bonding mutual commitment or end it.

The focus of the problem in this research can be identified as follows:

- a. The description of how *Grindr* app has been used as an intimate communication medium among urban gay Indonesia.
- b. What kind of awareness and understanding of meanings that a gay man found when communicating intimately before and after using *Grindr* application as the media channel.
- c. What kind of commitments made by gay people before and after being involved in an intimate communication mediated by *Grindr*.

2. Theoretical Framework

The paradigm used to study this research is interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is based on the belief that individuals (human) are social and symbolic beings that form and maintain their own reality. The purpose of the development of the theory in this paradigm is to produce a description, the views and explanations of certain social events so that researchers are able to uncover the interpretation and understanding of the system (meaning) that exist in the social environment

(Gunawan, 2013: 56).

2.1. Computer mediated communication (CMC)

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is interesting because in the digital era like today, human beings have already been accustomed to live side by side with the technology. In practice, the Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is part of Interpersonal Communication, as it can affect the habits, behavior, and the state of human psychology. Not only in theory, but in reality, the practice and real activity was also discussed by experts. Meanwhile in our daily lives we also continue to use these technologies. Holmes (2012: 33) states that there are three basic characteristics makes the importance of discussion of the influence of technology on interpersonal communication, especially in the CMC. First, some definitions and theories of interpersonal communication were formulated long before emerging computer technologies. Second, emerging technologies such as computer, mobile phone or gadget is a device interaction and a complex subject. Third, the characteristics of new media that eventually led to the communication habits that are different from the face-to-face communication.

2.2. Interpersonal communication

At each stage of a relationship, communication plays a different role. During the initial stages, the communication is intended to get to know other people so that decisions can be made regarding the relationship if the relationship can continue, what topics can be discussed openly, how close the relationship should be, etc. After this phase, communication is used to maintain, develop and improve relationships, as well as to negotiate the differences that will give satisfaction to the parties involved. During the final stage, communication helps communicators to end the relationship by providing the means to save face, decide their feelings and (ideally) separated based on positive reasons. Knapp and Anita Vangelisti (1996) argued that the fundamental idea of the necessary forms and relationship development model (model of relational development). Human relations may be volatile in the developmental stages before the binding phase, but the relationship that has reached the most familiar phase can even also slumped again. Termination of a relationship is not merely the opposite of what

they called "toward togetherness (coming together)". People do not want to just saying goodbye; only when they want to terminate the

relationship, the reverse process will occur, characterized by diminishing contact and intimacy (coming apart).

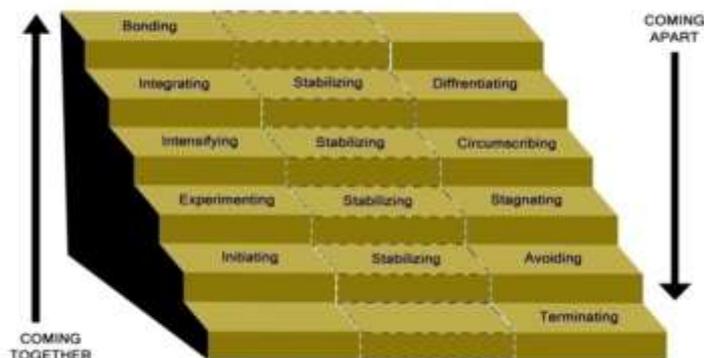


Figure 1. Knapp&Vangelisti Relationship Cycle Model
Source: Baldwin, et.al. (2004: 111)

2.3. Intimate communication

There are five aspects of intimacy argued by Gary Campman (2010) in his article entitled Five Sides of Intimacy (Suciati, 2015: 13-15):

1. Intellectual Intimacy
2. Social Intimacy
3. Emotional Intimacy
4. Physical intimacy
5. Spiritual Intimacy

The intimate communication that exists among gay men who use *Grindr* application in the

end took them to different types of stages of relationships. After going through the stages of friendships, intimate relationships then the gay *Grindr* users will enter the stage of love. The type of love they encounter is varied, depending on how they feel and interpret the meaning. Robert Stenberg in his book "The Triangular Theory of Love" describes that what is commonly called 'Stenberg Love Triangle', which reveals that love has three dimensions, i.e, intimacy, passion and decision and (or) commitment (Wisnuwardhani and Mashoedi, 2012: 62-65).

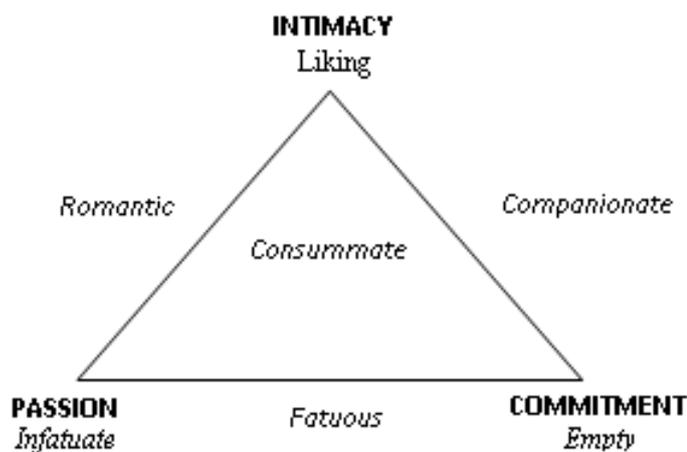


Figure 2. Stenberg Love Triangle
Source: Wisnuwardhani dan Mashoedi (2012: 62)

Based on the level of each component, we can see some types of love from the table below, namely:

Table 1. Type of Stenberg Love Triangle

| <u>Component Type</u> | <i>Intimacy</i> | <i>Passion</i> | <i>Decision/Commitment</i> |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| <i>NonLove</i> | - | - | - |
| <i>Liking</i> | ✓ | - | - |
| <i>Infatuation</i> | - | ✓ | - |
| <i>Empty Love</i> | - | - | ✓ |
| <i>Romantic Love</i> | ✓ | ✓ | - |
| <i>Companionate Love</i> | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| <i>Fatuous Love</i> | - | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>Consummate Love</i> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

Source: Wisnuwardhani dan Mashoedi (2012: 63)

2.4. Social exchange theory and symbolic interactionism

Theories of social exchange can be traced to psychologists Thibault and Kelley (1959) or sociologists Himans (1961) and Blau (1964) and has roots in economics (rewards and costs) or behaviorist psychology (Budyatna, 2015: 363). In Social Exchange Theory, it is said that the reason we develop a relationship is to benefit as much as possible. This theory is based on cost-benefit economic model which says that the benefits derived from income (rewards) minus the cost (cost). Rewards is something that pleases and to obtain the necessary costs. In social relationships, rewards may be money, status, love, information, goods and services. Cost is something that is generally avoided because it is unpleasant or difficult.

The theory of symbolic interactionism focuses its attention on the ways that humans use to construct meaning and structure of society through the conversation. Symbolic Interaction was originally a movement of thought in sociology, which was built by George Herbert Mead and his work later became the core of the school of thought called Chicago School (Morrison, 2013: 224-226).

3. Method

This study employs phenomenology method which seeks about, "something very essential and a single structure or concentration that is based on the meaning of the experience and emphasizes on awareness that includes experience in both the outside view and consciousness from within based on memory, imagery and meaning" (Pembayun, 2013: 148).

Table 2. Data Collection

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Subjects observed | 6 gay men who ever have had intimate communication with other gay using <i>Grindr</i> application as medium of communication and what kind of commitment that exists among them |
| Data access | Finding individuals (gay from different backgrounds, tribes, religions and different races) who have experienced in the phenomenon of intimate communications with fellow gays who previously did not know each other through a support of communication medium name <i>Grindr</i> |
| Sampling / informant strategy | Creating an anonymous account on <i>Grindr</i> and approach with some gay is considered sufficient to have interesting experiences using <i>Grindr</i> app in relationships of intimate communication. |
| Type of data | Interview with gay users of <i>Grindr</i> app then transcribe the interview transcript in manuscript form |
| Data recording process | In-depth interviews in the long term |
| Field issues | Placing the phenomenon of intimate communication of media using <i>Grindr</i> app in brackets (bracketing method). |
| Data Storage | Transcripts of interviews and files on the computer |

Source: Researcher's Own Thought (2015)

Table 3. Data Analysis

| Analysis and data representation | Phenomenology research |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Data processing | Creating and organizing data |
| Reading and remembering the data | Reading the text, making notes and initial code form |
| Describing the data | Describing the significance of intimate communication process among gay who use <i>Grindr</i> app as media communication |
| Applying the data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finding meaningful statements and making list - Grouping the gay statements (informant) that is equal to the unit of specific meaning |
| Interpretation of the data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building a textural description (the intimate communication such as what exists) - Building a structural description (how intimate communication process occurs) - Establish the overall description of intimate communication activities using <i>Grindr</i> app communication medium among gay |

Source: Researcher's own classification (2015)

4. Result and discussion

The results of interviews adapted to the purpose of research and grouped according to the parts in intimate communication process, namely:

1. The type of homosexual is the selection process of homosexuality identity experienced by a homosexual man that consists of various types, as this group is not a small group, but is a community that comes from different background and different segments of society. Classification of the type of homosexual are: genuine homosexual, shy homosexual, hidden homosexual, situational homosexual, bisexual and established homosexual.
2. The aim of using *Grindr*: is the reason informants want to use this communication medium in intimate communication activities among urban gay men.
3. The stages of the relationship is communication addressed to get to know other people so that decisions can be made regarding the relationship, whether the relationship can be continued or terminated. The stages start from building togetherness (coming together) up to separation (coming apart). There are ten steps that will be analyzed, such as:
 - a. Initiating: starters stage
 - b. Experimenting: trial stage
 - c. Intensifying: intensify stage
 - d. Integrating: unite stage
 - e. Bonding: linkage stage
 - f. Differentiating: distinction stage
 - g. Circumscribing: restrictions stage
 - h. Stagnating: stagnation stage
 - i. Avoiding: evasion stage
 - j. Terminating: termination phase
4. The aspects which are the basis for a person's interest in forming a relationship, whether due to aspects of similarity (similarity), proximity (proximity), reinforcement or physical attractiveness and personality
5. The aspects of social exchange, which is a reason to develop a relationship in order to get the maximum benefit from the ongoing relationships.
6. Type of love that is based on three-dimensional, consisting of intimacy, passion and decision and (or) commitment.
7. The construction of awareness which is the intimate experience of how the informants communicate each other before or after the use of *Grindr* app in undertaking intimate communication.
8. The commitment, which is the interpretation of treaties attachment developed by gays before or after being involved in an intimate communication activity mediated by *Grindr*.
9. The categories of intimacy that exists among gay couples in the study.

Table 4. Data summary from all research informants

| Informant code | Homosexual Type | The Aim of Using Grindr | Coming Together Phase | Coming Apart Phase | The aspect of attraction | The aspect of social exchange | Love Type | Construction of awareness | Commitment | Category of Intimacy |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| Informant 1 | Hidden | Pleasure | Bonding | Terminating | Physical | Benefit | Romantic love | Must have a Grindr account for socialization | Monogamy | Social |
| Informant 2 | Established | Pleasure | Intensifying | Terminating | Reward/praise | Benefit | Infatuation | The ease of application for socialization | Open relationship | Physical |
| Informant 3 | Established | Pleasure | Bonding | Terminating | Physical | Benefit | Companionate love | The increasingly of gay's repressive attitude, only communicate intimately through Grindr | Monogamy | Social |
| Informant 4 | Hidden | Pleasure | Intensifying | Circumscribing | Similarity | Benefit | Romantic love | The openness access in relationship status which is undertaken | Open relationship | Intellectual |
| Informant 5 | Hidden | Pleasure | Intensifying | Terminating | Physical | Benefit | Infatuation | As a medium of socialization and its exclusivity | Monogamy | Physical |
| Informant 6 | Bisexual | Pleasure | Intensifying | Terminating | Physical | Benefit | Infatuation | As media enhancer insight into the gay world | Open relationship | Physical |

Source: Results of research analysis (2015)

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the overall analysis of the research, there are some conclusions. First, the purpose of urban gay men in this study to use *Grindr* app is just for fun, whether it was to get acquainted and biological needs in the form of sexual relations with partners they met through the application *Grindr*. Six informants stated that they can immediately make an appointment for date and have sexual relations although they were meeting for the first time after making introductions on *Grindr*. Second, construction of awareness and understanding of the meanings that appear in a gay man in this study when communicating intimately using *Grindr* application medium is for socialization and to know each other among gay men. Before the advent of *Grindr* technology, the gay socialize with each other by visiting forum or introduced by fellow gay men. A gay man can also sense that a man is gay or not by relying on radar called *gaydar*, however the construction of their experience is different after using *Grindr* app. Gay people can easily get to know each other and establish social contacts without any errors of their prediction of orientation of the potential mates. Third, interpretation of commitment forged by urban gay men before or after being involved in an intimate communication activity mediated by *Grindr* in this study is a commitment called by the term "open relationship". This type of commitment is found when a gay couple is in a relationship with

a lot of gay men at once. This open relationship system emphasizes the freedom of couples to have a sexual partner with other than the partner, sometimes even sex partners are invited to have sex with the partner (threesome). This is done to prevent boredom and is believed to add to the harmony in relationships that are built. There are three informants in this study that established a monogamous commitment and three other that established an open relationship.

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