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The Role of Peer Group Communication in Shaping Lifestyle and Behavior of Migrant University Students

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Abstract. Migrant university students experience major social and behavioral changes as they transition into independent living away from parental supervision. During this period, peer group communication becomes a central factor influencing students' perceptions, attitudes, and daily behaviors. Informal interactions among peers, such as social gatherings, leisure activities, and everyday conversations, serve as important channels through which values and lifestyle norms are shared and reinforced. This study aims to examine the role of peer group communication in shaping the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students, particularly in relation to social adjustment, financial practices, and academic engagement. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using content analysis of six news articles that report on the lived experiences of migrant students in Bengkulu. The analysis focuses on communication patterns within peer groups and the behavioral responses that emerge from continuous social interaction. The findings indicate that peer communication strongly influences students' understanding of social acceptance and freedom, often encouraging conformity to group norms. In many cases, this results in increased consumptive behavior, reduced self-regulation, and declining academic performance due to social pressure. However, the study also reveals that peer communication can generate positive outcomes when group interactions promote supportive and reflective dialogue. In such environments, students demonstrate improved adaptability, emotional awareness, and responsible decision-making. Overall, peer group communication plays a dual role as both a source of social pressure and a medium for personal development among migrant university students.

Keywords: *Peer Communication, University Students, Lifestyle, Social Influence.*

INTRODUCTION

University students are at a critical stage of development characterized by academic demands, social exploration, and increasing independence. This transition becomes more complex for migrant university students who live away from their families and familiar social environments. In such conditions, students are required to manage their academic responsibilities, social relationships, and personal lifestyles independently. The absence of direct parental supervision often places peer groups at the center of students' daily lives, making peer communication a dominant influence on behavior, decision-making, and social adjustment.

In higher education contexts, communication among peers functions as more than simple information exchange. It serves as a process through which values, norms, and behavioral expectations are constructed and reinforced. Through frequent interaction, students develop shared understandings of what is considered acceptable or desirable behavior within their social

groups. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory explains that individuals evaluate themselves by comparing their attitudes and behaviors with those of others. For university students, especially those living away from home, peer groups become a primary reference point for such comparisons, shaping lifestyle choices and social conduct.

Research conducted in Indonesian universities, including institutions in Bengkulu, highlights the importance of communication patterns in students' social adaptation. Yuliani and Ratna (2025) found that communication plays a crucial role in helping students integrate into new social environments, particularly for those who experience cultural and social differences. Their study emphasizes that peer communication influences how students negotiate identity, belonging, and social acceptance within campus life. These findings are particularly relevant for migrant students who must quickly adapt to new social settings while managing academic pressures.

Peer communication also has a significant impact on students' academic behavior. Alimni et al. (2025) demonstrated that students' learning experiences are closely linked to their social interactions and communication environments. Supportive peer communication can enhance motivation, resilience, and engagement in academic activities. Conversely, negative peer influence may contribute to decreased academic focus, procrastination, and stress. This dual effect highlights that peer communication can function as both a supportive resource and a source of pressure, depending on the norms promoted within the group.

In the context of Bengkulu, studies focusing on migrant students further reveal distinct communication dynamics that influence lifestyle and behavior. Sari (2025) examined communication patterns among migrant students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu and found that peer interaction strongly affects students' daily habits, including time management, social activities, and consumption behavior. Students often adjust their behavior to align with peer expectations in order to maintain social harmony and acceptance. This adjustment process, while beneficial for social integration, may also lead to excessive socializing and financial strain when not balanced with personal responsibility.

The influence of peer communication extends beyond individual behavior and affects students' psychological well-being. Santrock (2018) explains that emerging adulthood is a period when individuals rely heavily on peer relationships to regulate emotions and develop autonomy. For migrant students, peer groups often replace family support systems, making communication within these groups especially influential. When peer communication emphasizes positive values such as responsibility, mutual support, and academic commitment, students are more likely to develop adaptive coping strategies. However, when communication reinforces hedonistic or consumptive lifestyles, students may experience internal conflict, stress, and difficulty maintaining academic discipline.

Furthermore, the university environment functions as a social system where communication patterns shape students' sense of belonging and persistence. Tinto (1997) argues that social and academic integration is essential for student success in higher education. Effective peer communication contributes to a supportive learning environment, while negative social pressure may lead to disengagement and maladaptive behavior. For migrant students in Bengkulu, whose social networks are often limited to peers, the quality of communication within these networks becomes a determining factor in their academic and social outcomes.

Despite the growing number of studies on student behavior, research that specifically examines peer group communication among migrant university students in Bengkulu remains limited. Many existing studies focus on academic performance or general social adaptation without exploring the underlying communication processes that drive behavioral change. Understanding how peer communication shapes perceptions, lifestyle choices, and behavioral regulation is therefore essential for developing effective interventions and support systems within universities.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the role of peer group communication in shaping the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students. By examining communication patterns and social interactions within peer groups, this research seeks to provide insights into how students negotiate social pressure, adapt to independence, and balance academic and social demands. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of communication-based strategies that support healthy student lifestyles and academic success, particularly within the context of higher education in Bengkulu.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peer Group Communication in University Contexts

Peer group communication refers to the exchange of messages, values, and social cues among individuals of similar age and social status. In university settings, peer communication becomes one of the most influential forms of social interaction, as students spend a significant amount of time with their peers both inside and outside academic environments. According to Santrock (2018), peer relationships during emerging adulthood play a central role in shaping social behavior, emotional regulation, and identity development. For university students, especially those living away from home, peer groups often replace family as the primary source of social support and guidance.

Communication within peer groups does not only involve verbal interaction but also includes nonverbal cues, shared activities, and collective decision-making processes. Through repeated interaction, peer groups establish norms that define acceptable behavior. These norms are transmitted and reinforced through everyday communication, making peer groups powerful agents of social influence.

Social Influence and Conformity

One of the most influential theories explaining peer influence is Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which posits that individuals evaluate their own attitudes and behaviors by comparing themselves with others. In social environments where group belonging is highly valued, individuals are more likely to conform to group norms. For university students, conformity often manifests in lifestyle choices such as social activities, spending habits, and time management.

Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) found that peer acceptance and friendship quality are closely related to students' motivation and behavioral outcomes. Students who perceive strong social pressure from peers may prioritize social approval over academic responsibilities. This tendency is particularly evident among migrant students who seek social acceptance in new environments. Peer communication thus functions as both a social guide and a source of pressure that shapes students' behavioral decisions.

Peer Communication and Student Lifestyle

Lifestyle refers to patterns of behavior related to daily activities, consumption, and social engagement. In the university context, lifestyle choices are strongly influenced by peer communication. Informal discussions about leisure activities, fashion, food, and social events contribute to the normalization of certain behaviors. Becker (1992) explains that habitual behavior is often shaped by social environments, where repeated exposure to certain practices makes them appear natural and acceptable.

Empirical studies show that peer communication can encourage both healthy and unhealthy lifestyles. Supportive peer interaction may promote positive habits such as collaborative learning and emotional support. However, peer groups that emphasize excessive socializing and consumption may encourage behaviors that lead to financial strain and

academic difficulties. This dual nature of peer communication highlights the importance of understanding group norms and communication patterns.

Migrant University Students and Social Adjustment

Migrant university students face unique challenges related to social adjustment and independence. Living away from family support systems requires students to adapt quickly to new social and academic environments. Tinto (1997) emphasized that successful integration into academic and social communities is essential for student persistence in higher education. For migrant students, peer communication plays a crucial role in facilitating or hindering this integration.

Local studies conducted in Bengkulu provide important insights into these dynamics. Yuliani and Ratna (2025) examined communication patterns among students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu and found that effective peer communication supports social integration and identity formation. Their findings suggest that communication competence is essential for students' ability to adapt to new cultural and social environments.

Similarly, Sari (2025) analyzed communication patterns among migrant students in Bengkulu and reported that peer interaction strongly influences students' daily routines, social behavior, and lifestyle choices. Students often adjust their behavior to align with peer expectations in order to maintain social harmony. While this adjustment can support social integration, it may also increase vulnerability to negative peer influence when group norms are maladaptive.

Peer Communication and Academic Behavior

The relationship between peer communication and academic behavior has been widely discussed in educational research. Alimni et al. (2025) found that students' academic behavior is influenced by their learning environment, including social interaction and peer support. Positive peer communication can enhance motivation, engagement, and resilience, particularly during challenging periods. Conversely, negative peer influence may reduce academic focus and increase stress.

These findings align with Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement, which suggests that students' learning and development are directly related to the quality and quantity of their involvement in academic and social activities. When peer communication supports academic engagement, students are more likely to succeed. However, when peer interaction prioritizes non-academic activities, students may experience academic disengagement.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine how peer group communication shapes the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students. A qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social interactions, communication processes, and behavioral meanings within real-life contexts. This approach is suitable for understanding how students interpret social experiences and respond to peer influence during their transition to independent living.

The data for this study were obtained from secondary sources in the form of news articles published between 2021 and 2025 that discuss the experiences of migrant university students in Bengkulu. These articles were selected because they provide detailed narratives related to student lifestyles, peer interaction, financial behavior, and academic challenges. A total of six articles were included based on specific criteria, namely that the content focused on migrant students, addressed issues of social interaction or lifestyle, and was relevant to higher education contexts in Bengkulu. Using recent publications ensured that the data reflected current social and educational conditions.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis. Each article was carefully read to identify information relevant to peer communication and student behavior. Key statements, narratives, and descriptions related to social interaction, conformity, lifestyle choices, and academic engagement were highlighted and organized for further analysis. This method enabled the researcher to examine naturally occurring social phenomena without direct involvement with participants.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis began with an initial reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of the texts, followed by the identification and coding of meaningful units related to peer communication and behavioral outcomes. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories representing recurring patterns across the data. The themes were interpreted by relating them to relevant theories and previous studies discussed in the literature review, allowing for a deeper understanding of how peer communication influences student behavior.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Credibility was strengthened by comparing themes across multiple articles to identify consistent patterns. Dependability was supported by applying systematic procedures during data collection and analysis. Confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and established theoretical frameworks, while transferability was addressed by providing sufficient contextual detail to allow readers to assess the relevance of the findings to similar settings.

Ethical considerations were addressed by using only publicly available documents and respecting the original context of the reported experiences. No direct interaction with human participants was involved in this study. All sources were cited appropriately in accordance with APA guidelines, and the analysis was conducted without altering or misrepresenting the content of the original articles.

RESULTS

The analysis of the selected news articles reveals several recurring patterns related to peer group communication and its influence on the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students. One of the most prominent findings is that peer communication plays a central role in shaping students' perceptions of freedom and social belonging. Students who live away from their families tend to rely heavily on peer interactions as their primary source of social reference. Through frequent communication in informal settings, such as cafés, boarding houses, and social gatherings, students develop shared meanings about what it means to be independent and socially accepted. These shared meanings often influence daily decisions related to social activities, spending behavior, and time management.

The findings also indicate that peer communication frequently contributes to the normalization of consumptive lifestyles. Repeated conversations about social outings, leisure activities, and material consumption create an environment in which frequent spending and socializing are perceived as common and acceptable behaviors. Many students adjust their behavior to align with peer expectations, even when such behaviors exceed their financial capacity. As a result, several reports describe students experiencing financial difficulties, including running out of monthly allowances and relying on loans from friends. This pattern suggests that peer communication functions as a powerful mechanism for reinforcing lifestyle norms within student groups.

Another significant finding concerns the impact of peer communication on academic behavior. The data show that intensive social interaction often reduces the time and attention students allocate to academic responsibilities. Students who prioritize peer-related activities tend to experience difficulties with concentration, delayed task completion, and reduced academic motivation. Communication within peer groups sometimes reinforces attitudes that downplay the importance of academic discipline, particularly when social activities are framed

as essential for maintaining friendships and social status. This dynamic illustrates how peer communication can indirectly influence academic performance by shaping students' priorities and behavioral choices.

Social pressure emerged as a key theme across the analyzed articles. Peer communication often creates implicit expectations that students should participate in group activities to avoid social exclusion. Although this pressure is rarely expressed explicitly, it is conveyed through repeated invitations, shared routines, and collective decision-making. Many students feel obligated to conform to group norms in order to maintain harmonious relationships. This pressure contributes to behavioral conformity, particularly among students who are still adjusting to independent living and seeking social acceptance in new environments.

Despite these challenges, the results also highlight the presence of positive outcomes associated with peer communication. Some students report that social interaction with peers helps them develop independence, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. In supportive peer environments, communication serves as a space for sharing experiences, discussing personal challenges, and learning from others. Students in such environments demonstrate greater awareness of financial management and emotional regulation. These findings indicate that peer communication does not inherently lead to negative behavior; rather, its impact depends on the values and norms promoted within the group.

Additionally, the results show that the effects of student lifestyles extend beyond individual consequences and influence the surrounding community. Several articles describe how students' social behaviors, such as late-night activities and frequent gatherings, affect the comfort of local residents. This finding suggests that peer-driven lifestyle patterns can have broader social implications, reinforcing the importance of understanding student behavior not only as an individual issue but also as a social phenomenon.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that peer group communication plays a dual role in the lives of migrant university students. On one hand, it facilitates social adaptation, emotional support, and personal growth. On the other hand, it can encourage behavioral conformity that leads to financial strain, academic challenges, and social disruption. These results underscore the complexity of peer communication as a social process that simultaneously supports and constrains student behavior. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing strategies that promote balanced lifestyles and constructive peer interactions among migrant university students.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that peer group communication plays a significant role in shaping the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students. Consistent with previous research, the results indicate that students who live away from their families rely heavily on peer interaction as a primary source of social guidance and emotional support. This reliance intensifies the influence of peer communication on students' daily decision-making, particularly in relation to social activities, financial behavior, and academic priorities. These findings align with Santrock's (2018) view that peer relationships during emerging adulthood are central to identity formation and behavioral regulation.

The normalization of consumptive lifestyles observed in this study can be explained through social comparison processes. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory suggests that individuals evaluate their own behaviors by comparing themselves with others in their social environment. In the context of migrant students, frequent communication within peer groups creates shared standards of behavior that define what is considered normal or desirable. When students repeatedly observe and discuss social activities such as hanging out, dining out, or attending events, these behaviors become socially validated. As a result, students may feel compelled to conform to group norms, even when doing so leads to financial strain or conflicts

with personal limitations. This finding supports Becker's (1992) argument that habitual behavior is strongly shaped by social environments and repeated exposure.

The impact of peer communication on academic behavior further highlights the complex relationship between social interaction and student performance. The results demonstrate that intensive peer engagement often competes with academic responsibilities, leading to reduced study time, procrastination, and declining motivation. This finding is consistent with Wentzel and Caldwell's (1997) research, which emphasizes the influence of peer acceptance on academic motivation. When peer groups prioritize social engagement over academic achievement, students may internalize these values and adjust their behavior accordingly. However, this does not imply that peer communication is inherently detrimental to academic success. Rather, its impact depends on the dominant norms within the group.

The presence of implicit social pressure in peer communication emerged as a critical factor influencing student behavior. Unlike explicit coercion, this pressure is often subtle and embedded in everyday interactions, such as repeated invitations or shared routines. Migrant students, who are still adapting to new environments and seeking social belonging, may be particularly sensitive to such pressures. This finding supports Tinto's (1997) assertion that social integration plays a key role in student persistence. While social integration can enhance students' sense of belonging, excessive pressure to conform may undermine individual autonomy and self-regulation.

Importantly, the findings also reveal the positive potential of peer communication. In supportive environments, peer interaction facilitates emotional adjustment, independence, and social learning. Students who engage in reflective and constructive communication with peers demonstrate greater awareness of financial management and emotional control. This result aligns with Alimni et al. (2025), who found that supportive learning and social environments contribute positively to students' academic behavior. It also reinforces the idea that peer communication can function as a protective factor when group norms emphasize responsibility and mutual support.

The broader social impact of student lifestyles identified in this study further emphasizes the importance of communication dynamics. The influence of peer-driven behaviors on surrounding communities suggests that student lifestyle choices are not isolated individual issues but social phenomena shaped through interaction. This finding underscores the need for universities to consider the wider social implications of student behavior and the role of communication in mediating relationships between students and local communities.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the dual role of peer group communication in shaping migrant university students' behavior. While peer communication can promote social adaptation and personal growth, it can also reinforce maladaptive behaviors when driven by negative norms and social pressure. These findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving student outcomes should focus not on limiting peer interaction, but on fostering positive communication cultures within student communities. Universities can play an active role by promoting awareness of peer influence, encouraging reflective dialogue, and creating programs that support balanced social and academic engagement.

By situating peer communication at the center of lifestyle and behavioral analysis, this study provides a nuanced understanding of student life in the context of higher education in Bengkulu. The discussion reinforces the importance of communication processes in shaping student behavior and highlights the need for communication-based strategies to support healthy student development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of peer group communication in shaping the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students by analyzing documented student experiences in Bengkulu. The findings demonstrate that peer communication plays a central role in influencing how students perceive freedom, social belonging, and acceptable behavior during their transition to independent living. As migrant students rely heavily on peer interaction for social support and adaptation, communication within peer groups becomes a powerful force that shapes daily decisions related to social activities, financial management, and academic engagement.

The results highlight the dual nature of peer group communication. On one hand, peer interaction facilitates social adaptation, emotional support, and personal development. Supportive communication environments enable students to develop independence, interpersonal skills, and emotional awareness.

On the other hand, peer communication can also reinforce negative behavioral patterns when group norms prioritize excessive socializing and consumptive lifestyles. Social pressure and conformity, often conveyed implicitly through everyday interactions, encourage students to align their behavior with group expectations, sometimes at the expense of academic responsibilities and financial stability.

This study also emphasizes that the influence of peer-driven lifestyles extends beyond individual consequences. Student behavior shaped through peer communication can affect the surrounding community, highlighting the broader social impact of communication dynamics within student groups. These findings suggest that student lifestyle and behavior should be understood as socially constructed phenomena rather than solely individual choices.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of student behavior by positioning peer group communication as a key factor in lifestyle formation and behavioral regulation among migrant university students. The findings underscore the importance of fostering positive communication cultures within higher education environments. Universities, educators, and policymakers are encouraged to promote awareness of peer influence and to support communication practices that balance social engagement with academic responsibility. By strengthening constructive peer communication, higher education institutions can help students navigate social pressures more effectively and achieve sustainable academic and personal development.

LIMITATION

Despite providing valuable insights into the role of peer group communication in shaping the lifestyle and behavior of migrant university students, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research relied exclusively on secondary data in the form of news articles.

Although these articles offer rich narratives and real-life examples, they may not fully capture the depth of students' personal experiences, motivations, and internal perceptions. The absence of direct interaction with participants limits the ability to explore subjective meanings and emotional responses in greater detail.

Second, the scope of the data was restricted to a limited number of news articles focusing on student life in Bengkulu. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable to all migrant university students in other regions or educational contexts. Differences in institutional culture, socioeconomic conditions, and local social norms may produce different communication dynamics and behavioral outcomes. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying the findings to broader populations.

Third, the analysis depended on the perspectives presented in the selected articles, which may reflect journalistic framing or selective reporting. Certain aspects of student behavior or

peer interaction may have been emphasized or omitted, potentially influencing the interpretation of the data. Additionally, the study did not incorporate quantitative measures that could provide statistical evidence of the relationships between peer communication, lifestyle, and academic behavior.

Future research could address these limitations by employing mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative interviews, surveys, and observational data. Such approaches would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of peer communication dynamics and their impact on student behavior. Expanding the research to include multiple universities and regions would also enhance the generalizability and robustness of the findings.

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