Research Article

Colloquial Language Use in Public Informational Signs

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Abstract: The presence of colloquial expressions in public signage commonly referred to ba- hasa gaul has increasingly become a linguistic hallmark in various tourism and recreational ar- eas in Indonesia. This study investigates the use of informal language on public signage at Pantai Kelan, Bali, and analyzes such linguistic choices that reflect social dynamics, youth identity, and evolving modes of communication in public space. Grounded in sociolinguistic perspectives, the research highlights the role of signage as not only a medium of information, but also a space for constructing shared meaning and fostering engagement through culturally resonant expressions. This qualitative research employed observational and documentation methods. It focused on twelve public signs installed at Pantai Kelan. Data were collected through field observations, photographic documentation, and subsequent transcription and analysis of the linguistic forms. The analysis fo- cused on identifying dominant lexical patterns, stylistic choices, and communicative functions of the language used. The signs were then interpreted with reference to their potential cultural, social, and interactional implications within the broader framework of linguistic landscape studies. The findings indicate that the use of bahasa gaul in signage serves multiple purposes: capturing atten- tion, expressing local identity, evoking humor, and connecting with a predominantly young and digital-native audience. Rather than being perceived as informal or inappropriate, such language use contributes to the effectiveness of public communication in specific contexts. The study con- tributes to the growing body of literature on language in public space and emphasizes the impor- tance of cultural relevance and sociolinguistic awareness in designing public signage that is both meaningful and impactful.

Keywords: Communication; Identity; Language; Signage; Slang

1. Introduction

In the contemporary sociolinguistic landscape of Indonesia, the use of language in public spaces has undergone significant transformation. It mirrors the rapid changes in communication practices driven by globalization, urbanization, and digitalization. Public spaces ranging from governmental buildings, commercial zones, tourism areas, to digi- tal interfaces have increasingly become sites of linguistic display where identities, ide- ologies, and power structures are negotiated and represented through language choice and style. Signage, banners, billboards, murals, and other semiotic artifacts are no longer merely functional instruments for conveying information, but have evolved into symbolic representations of cultural, social, and economic realities. The phenomenon is particularly salient in urban centers and tourism zones where the mixture of local and global languages, as well as formal and informal registers, reveals the dynamic nature of linguistic practices in public domains.

The increasing presence of bahasa gaul (colloquial or slang language), English bor- rowings, and even alay language a distinctive form of youth internet slang characterized by phonetic manipulation and stylistic exaggeration has redefined the linguistic land- scape of Indonesia's public sphere. These linguistic forms do not only reflect generational identity and digital subculture; it also challenges traditional norms of language propriety and

standardization. For instance, studies conducted in Surakarta and Yogyakarta illus- trate the shift from formal Indonesian toward expressive and creative variants in signage, especially within youth-oriented commercial and leisure settings. Similarly, observations in public signage in Bali reveal the intersection of cultural preservation and tourism marketing, where multilingual signage Indonesian, Balinese, and English of- ten serves commodifying and ideological functions. The widespread diffusion of dig- ital culture through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter has further acceler- ated the blurring of linguistic boundaries. It embeds slang and online registers into offline public communication.

Despite the creative and expressive potential of these new forms, the proliferation of non-standard, informal, and hyper-stylized language in public signage has raised critical questions about linguistic appropriateness, educational impact, and cultural values. The central issue lies in the tension between linguistic innovation and communicative clarity. While bahasa gaul and alay forms are often appreciated by younger de- mographics for their playfulness and subcultural affiliation, they may also be misinter- preted, marginalized, or even stigmatized by other linguistic communities The ten- sion is particularly visible in multilingual spaces where language use intersects with tourism, education, and governance. On one hand, informal registers may foster inclusiv- ity and relatability; on the other, they may contribute to semantic ambiguity and a per- ceived erosion of language norms.

To address this concern, linguistic landscape studies have proposed a more critical and integrative framework to evaluate language use in public space not solely based on grammatical standardization but through its socio-pragmatic function, ideological stance, and semiotic significance. It involves analyzing language in public texts that constructs social identities, negotiates power, and reflects broader discourses of modernity, digital- ization, and cultural hybridity. Such an approach is crucial for cities and re- gions in Indonesia where tourism and local identity coexist. It often leads to the strategic use of language for branding, inclusivity, or resistance. Furthermore, integrating public perception and community engagement into language planning could help balance be- tween creativity and communicative functionality.

Specifically, this study proposes a contextualized linguistic analysis of signage in public spaces by focusing on the types of language used (Indonesian standard, regional languages, foreign languages, slang, alay), the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the signs, and their socio-pragmatic functions. By mapping these elements across diverse urban and tourism spaces in Indonesia, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence of linguistic diversity and its implications. It also explores the ideological underpinnings embedded within the language choices whether reflecting capitalist mar- ket strategies, youth identity, local resistance, or cultural preservation. This multilayered analysis aims to bridge the gap between normative linguistic expectations and the reali- ties of public language use shaped by digital and urban influences.

Numerous recent studies have highlighted the transformation of linguistic behavior due to the growing influence of digital platforms and urban lifestyle. Hendrastuti, for example, demonstrate signage in Surakarta that combines bahasa Indonesia with regional expressions and English to project modernity and openness, while still retaining local identity. Meanwhile, the study by Fatmahwati on language use in Pekanbaru shows the contestation between local language pride and the increasing dominance of foreign lexicons in commercial signage. In another context, research by Kusumawati on alay language in public signage reveals how this stylized youth language disrupts conven- tional readability. However, it is embraced by specific demographic groups as a marker of digital-savvy identity. On the digital front, Hamidah dkk. Study on TikTok content illustrates that linguistic trends from online discourse rapidly spill over into offline usage, influencing language norms in unexpected ways. Furthermore, Wulansari's analysis of multilingual signage in Bali emphasizes the ideological and commercial motivations behind language choice particularly in tourism-centered economies.

Building on these insights, the study aims to formulate a model of public language use that accounts for linguistic variation, pragmatic intent, and sociocultural function. It introduces the concept of critical linguistic readability, which refers to the capacity of a sign not only to be legible in the conventional sense, but also interpretable within its so- ciocultural and ideological context. The model allows for the inclusion of expressive or non-standard language. It provides the aligns with the communicative purpose and au- dience expectations. At the same time, it encourages the development of more inclusive guidelines for language planning that respect creativity while ensuring public intelligibil- ity. The proposed approach

is not prescriptive but descriptive-analytical, intended to in- form future public language policies and raise awareness of linguistic citizenship in con- temporary Indonesia , , .

The primary objective of this study is to analyze and map the linguistic forms and variations found in public signage within urban and tourism contexts, with specific atten- tion to the interplay between formal and informal registers, standard and non-standard language, and mono/multilingual practices. The study seeks to identify not only the lin- guistic characteristics, but also the sociopragmatic, ideological, and communicative func- tions of the signs. The novelty of the research lies in its interdisciplinary integration of linguistic landscape analysis, digital discourse influence, and local identity politics, as well as its inclusion of non-traditional data such as alay language and bahasa gaul in pub- lic signage topics often overlooked in normative linguistic studies , . Further- more, by drawing connections between offline signage and online language behavior, the study offers a unique contribution to understanding the continuity between digital and spatial discourse. The scope of the research covers multiple regions in Indonesia, focus- ing on semiotic artifacts located in public-facing zones such as city centers, shopping ar- eas, tourism destinations, and street-level visual spaces

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

The phenomenon of language variation in public spaces, particularly involving non-standard and colloquial expressions, has garnered scholarly interest in recent years. One prominent study by Wulansari examines public signage across Bali, highlighting the use of multilingual expressions on commercial signboards. The multilingual expression on signage across Bali shows the combination between Indonesian, English, and Balinese. The linguistic strategy reflects both the commodification of culture and a deliberate at- tempt to engage people in a tourism-driven economy. Such signage does not merely func- tion as directional or informational tools, but represents ideologically charged artifacts of popular culture that blur the lines between formal linguistic norms and vernacular youth codes. The study becomes crucial in positioning public signage as a discursive site that reflects changing sociolinguistic landscapes, especially in urban or touristic localities.

In parallel, several studies have emphasized the influence of digital media on the pro-liferation of slang in both online and offline communication. Hamidah et al. provides an analysis of the impact of social media platforms on the formation and usage of bahasa gaul. It suggests that exposure to social networks, especially TikTok and Instagram, has accelerated the normalization of hybrid slang in public interactions. Notably, it includes lexical blending, borrowing, and abbreviation practices such as ngabers, sobat misqueen, or receh banget. Her study presents a thematic categorization of such slang and draws links between media trends and linguistic innovation. It aligns with other findings that show the digital realm functions as a dynamic incubator of youth language which later permeates physical spaces, including signage and graffiti.

A complementary investigation by Shabrina et al. focuses on the role of social media to create language style of Indonesian in communication. Social media affects a lot of ways in communication especially for younger people. It emphasizes several factors namely advertisement, prestige, and their environment. The advertisement modifies lan- guage with aim to close to younger customers. It influences people with the way they ex- press their language. Prestige relates to the lifestyle of people. Most of them feel that they are not trendsetter when they are unable to communicate with bahasa alay. Meanwhile, the environment refers to the surrounding that influences a speaker. Young people have their way to communicate with the group and it is only them who recognize the meaning. Her work reinforces the position that slang in public spaces is not merely decorative but deeply interwoven with identity politics and online engagement practices.

 Further evidence of this linguistic shift is provided in the study by Magfiroh et al., who explores the influence of social media on the use of non-standard Indonesian. Her ethnographic findings across several urban areas suggest that public signage is in- creasingly adopting informal registers as a marketing tactic to bridge relatability. She records the presence of casual expressions like mager? gofood aja or rebahan? santuy di sini in some of posts on social media such as Tiktok, Instagram, Twitter, and also What- App. These expressions, initially popularized in memes and tweets, are seen to migrate into the public sphere as a conscious strategy of linguistic appropriation. Her analysis points to a breakdown in conventional boundaries between formal and informal, reflect- ing a broader democratization of language fueled by digital literacy and peer-to-peer me- dia.

The study by Rejeki offers a valuable contribution to sociolinguistic inquiry by documenting the linguistic landscape of commercial signage in Malioboro, Yogyakarta. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research identifies eight distinct lan- guages Indonesian, English, Mandarin, Javanese, Dutch, Arabic, Japanese, and Sun- danese on 311 commercial signs. The dominance of Indonesian (60.13%) reflects com- pliance with national language policy, while the significant presence of English (32.15%) and other foreign languages indicates globalization's impact on public linguistic choices. These findings highlight the interplay between national identity, local heritage, and global market dynamics. The study recommends further research on orthographic accuracy and semantic appropriateness of public signage as a means to support the integrity of Bahasa Indonesia in the public sphere.

The study by Hendrastuti explores the linguistic diversity manifested in public spaces across Surakarta, revealing the interplay between local identity and broader socio- cultural influences. Analyzing 1,638 public signs, the study classifies language use into four categories: Indonesian, regional languages, foreign languages, and mixed-language signs. The findings demonstrate that while Indonesian remains dominant, the visibility of Javanese and foreign languages (notably English and Mandarin) illustrates a dynamic ne- gotiation of linguistic space shaped by tourism, education, and commercial globalization. The mixed-language phenomenon underscores the creative adaptation of multilingual practices in branding and communication. This research contributes to the understanding of linguistic landscapes in urban Indonesia, especially regarding identity representation and language contact in everyday settings.

Fatmahwati investigates the adherence to standard Indonesian in public sig- nage within Pekanbaru, highlighting both linguistic awareness and regulatory enforce- ment challenges. The study categorizes 171 signs across government and commercial sec- tors, evaluating language usage based on compliance with language policies stipulated in Law No. 24/2009. Results reveal that while government signage predominantly conforms to linguistic norms, commercial signs frequently employ non-standard, mixed, or foreign elements. The widespread use of English, often without translation, reflects globaliza- tion's influence and the prioritization of market aesthetics over linguistic integrity. This study underscores the need for stronger policy implementation and public linguistic edu- cation to uphold the prestige of Indonesian in public domains. It contributes significantly to sociolinguistic discourse on language planning and symbolic power in multilingual ur- ban spaces.

Taken together, these seven studies provide a strong foundation for understanding the sociolinguistic dynamics of slang in Indonesian public spaces. They highlight lan- guage in public signage that is no longer constrained by normative rules, but instead ac- tively engages with popular culture, digital trends, and youth identity. Whether as a mar- keting strategy, a form of identity assertion, or a reflection of digital linguistic innovation, the use of bahasa gaul in public has evolved into a legitimate form of expression that shapes and is shaped by broader societal currents. Moreover, they collectively emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the phenomenon namely intersecting linguistic studies, cul- tural theory, digital media analysis, and semiotic landscapes. These insights reinforce the urgency and relevance of further investigating the implications of informal language use in the public domain.

3. Materials and Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the use of slang (ba- hasa gaul) in public spaces. It focuses on linguistic variation and social implications within the urban context of Bali. The research paradigm aligns with ethnographic and so- ciolinguistic perspectives in which public language serves as a site of both communica- tion and identity negotiation. The approach is selected to uncover deep meanings behind the language choices visible in public signage and to analyze those choices that reflect broader sociocultural trends and power relations. The study emphasizes observation and documentation of naturally occurring language in public domains such as street banners, shop signs, murals, and social-media-linked advertisements in physical spaces. For this study, the data source was taken from public signages of Kelan beach, Badung. The method is suitable for capturing both linguistic forms and visual semiotics. It enables a holistic interpretation of public discourse practices.

The data collection process involved a combination of photographic documentation, field notes, and categorization of public sign texts at Kelan beach, Badung. The location was selected since there were various public sign with slang (bahasa gaul). Totally, there were twelve public signs in the beach and for this study, it was chosen three data to be an- alyzed

further. Each text was classified based on linguistic features such as lexical choice, syntactic structure, spelling variation, and stylistic markers that denote slang usage. The researcher also considered the placement, audience address, and multimodal features of the signage. Observations were conducted over a three-month period to ensure represen- tativeness across different cultural events and temporal patterns. In addition, the study uti- lized a coding scheme to categorize the data into types of slang expressions (lexical inno- vation, phonetic spelling, code-mixing, etc.), communicative function (instructional, pro- motional, or expressive), and degree of formality.

For data analysis, the study employed an interactive model developed by Miles, Hu- berman, and Saldaña . It consisted of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The model allowed the researcher to iteratively refine categories and themes emerging from the data while maintaining empirical grounding. The analyti- cal framework integrates sociolinguistic theory and semiotic analysis to uncover the im- plicit ideologies and social functions of slang usage in public space. Attention is also given to digital culture and social media aesthetics (e.g., playful typography, hashtags, sticker-like visuals) that influence linguistic form in offline signage. The proposed method does not only ensures depth and rigor, but also enables a contextualized understanding of slang functions as a medium of youth identity and semiotic innovation in the public sphere.

4. Results and Discussion

The following section consists of two parts. First, it is the result that describe the sig- nages with its linguistic features. Second, the discussion is presented to elaborate more detail on the analysis of each sign.

4.1. Results

There are three signs that are analyzed in this section. Those three represents the slang language (bahasa gaul) in the public area of Kelan beach, Badung. Each of sign is described based on the linguistics aspect and its meaning.

Figure 1. Banner.

The first public signage in figure 1 analyzed conveys the warning: JANGAN SAM- PAI BEST MOMENT GAK BISA DI FOTO KARENA HP MASIH DI DASHBOARD MO- TOR. The statement illustrates the integration of informal language and youth-oriented slang. It is particularly through the usage of code-switching between English and Indone- sian (Best Moment) and colloquial expressions such as gak bisa instead of the formal tidak bisa. The phrase constructs a casual yet attention-grabbing message, with a simplified syntactic structure to ensure accessibility for a wide demographic especially millennials and Gen Z visitors. The linguistic features highlight the informality of spoken discourse which is adapted to written text in public spaces. Additionally, the utterance functions as a conversational implicature implying a reminder not to leave valuables on a motorcy- cle dashboard while the humorous and emotive tone, combined with relatable imagery of missing a photo opportunity, serves to mitigate the authority of the warning and foster engagement from younger audiences.

Figure 2. Banner.

The second signage on figure 2 presents a culturally embedded warning utilizing hu- mor and stereotyping, which reads ZODIAK YANG SUKA CEROBOH MASUKIN KUNCI KE DALEM JOK: GEMINI, PISCES, LIBRA. The presence of informal lexical items such as masukin (from memasukkan) and dalem (from dalam) reflect relaxed spoken Indone- sian while the reference to astrology indexes popular youth culture. The capitalization of zodiac names directs the reader's attention and aids visual processing. Linguistically, the text blends humor, stereotype, and colloquial phrasing to transform a mundane security reminder into a playful public message. The casual stereotyping appeals to readers' cu- riosity and amusement. It fosters identification or self-recognition based on their astrolog- ical sign. Despite the underlying caution about carelessness especially related to motorcy- cle key handling, the language structure softens the instruction through linguistic mitiga- tion and stylistic playfulness. Thereby, it enhances reader receptivity in a beach context.

Figure 3. Banner.

The third data sample in figure 3 stating MOHON PERIKSA KEMBALI BARANG BAWAAN ANDA SEBELUM HEALING KE PANTAI, demonstrates serious messages that are linguistically softened through the application of popular slang and social media influ- ence. The term healing functions as a semantic loan from English that has undergone se- mantic expansion in Indonesian youth language which is now signifying relaxation or va- cation. The structure combines formal markers such as Mohon with informal colloquial- ism to create a hybrid tone that maintains politeness while appealing to contemporary youth sensibilities. Typographically, the use of uppercase letters and checklist symbols enhances readability and visual prioritization. Moreover, the signage includes an invita- tion to engage on Instagram and TikTok with expressions such as spam like and tidak akan diblock, positioning the board does not merely as a warning device, but also as a so- cial media gateway. The multimodal interaction emphasizes the performative function of language in public signage and reflects the shifting norms of public communication. It is especially when digital culture and offline behavior intersect.

4.2. Discussion

The linguistic phenomena observed in public signage across recreational spaces in Bali reflect a larger sociolinguistic trend wherein informal language especially youth- oriented slang is increasingly normalized in domains previously dominated by formal registers. The use of expressions such as Best Moment, healing ke pantai, or zodiak yang suka ceroboh illustrates the infiltration of contemporary digital discourse and spoken in- formalities into public textual artifacts. The linguistic informality, often manifesting through slang, colloquial spelling, and code-mixing, can be seen as a response to the com- municative needs of specific demographic groups. It is particularly for younger audiences who frequent these public and tourist areas. Language variation is inherently tied to social context and identity performance. In addition, the informality on these signboards do not only fulfills a communicative function but also signals solidarity and inclusiveness toward digital-native communities , .

The presence of youth slang and informal grammar choices in public signboards may also be viewed as a form of linguistic creativity that enhances engagement. By deviating from the normative conventions of formal Indonesian, these messages become more mem- orable, humorous, and personally resonant for their readers. This is evident in the warn- ing to avoid leaving phones on motorcycle dashboards where a routine security reminder is reframed as a playful warning with the potential for social embarrassment (Best Mo- ment gak bisa difoto). The shift from directive to emotive expression aligns with the find- ings of Widada who emphasizes that language in public signage has evolved from purely informative to expressive and persuasive functions. Such transformation is espe- cially salient in recreational or leisure-oriented contexts where audiences are more recep- tive to relaxed tones and humorous cues.

Furthermore, the strategic use of zodiac stereotypes in the second signage reflects the intersection between popular culture and linguistic play. Astrological references have be-

come prevalent in youth discourse. It is especially on social media platforms such as Tik- Tok and Instagram where identity play and humor often overlap. The sign's humorous warning directed at Gemini, Pisces, and Libra readers may not be rooted in actual behav- ioral correlations, but is nevertheless effective in drawing attention through identification and amusement. It aligns with the findings that humor in public signage acts as a mitiga- tion strategy to reduce social distance and increase compliance. In this sense, the signage does not only communicates a preventive message, but also promotes interactional inti- macy through stereotype-based linguistic play.

The inclusion of English lexical items such as healing and spam like represents an instance of semantic borrowing and youth-led lexical innovation. The language practices of Indonesian youth are marked by hybridity and frequent shifts across registers, codes, and modalities. The resemanticization of healing into a term associated with relaxation and leisure reflects global English lexemes that are localized to reflect socio-cultural nu- ances in Indonesian discourse. In this context, language functions do not only as a means of communication, but also as a marker of group identity and participation in global youth culture. Moreover, the imperative structure Mohon periksa kembali barang bawaan Anda coexisting with healing ke pantai illustrates hybridized registers that main- tain politeness while achieving relevance. Such stylistic convergence underscores public texts adapt to linguistic trends while upholding communicative efficacy.

In addition to linguistic hybridity, the multimodal dimension of these signboards must also be acknowledged. These messages are not merely linguistic, it has visually de- signed to engage audiences through typography, emojis, capitalization, and hashtags. The use of uppercase letters for emphasis, checklist symbols for structuring attention, and vis- ual cues to signal digital affordances demonstrates an intentional effort to converge off- line warnings with online participation. As Kress and van Leeuwen assert in their theory of multimodality, textual meaning is co-constructed through interaction between language, layout, and visual symbols. The presence of signboards as physical artifacts in public spaces that simultaneously function as prompts for digital engagement reflects the semiotic expansion of public communication in the digital era.

The phenomenon of using colloquial and digitalized language in public signage re- veals a broader ideological shift concerning the authority and function of language in pub- lic domains. The traditional model of top-down linguistic control in which language in public signage was primarily formal and monologic, is being replaced by a bottom-up, di- alogic, and audience-sensitive approach. This reflects a democratization of public dis- course where public language is no longer imposed, but rather co-shaped by the linguistic habits of its target audience. Language in public spaces is always performative and ideo- logical, reflecting who has the right to speak, what can be said, and how it can be said. In this case, the signs analyzed empower informal discourse styles and foreground youth voices, effectively repositioning the semiotics of public communication from regulation to interaction and identity expression.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of using colloquial or youth-oriented lan- guage commonly referred to as bahasa gaul in public spaces, particularly in the sig- nage landscape of Pantai Kelan, Bali. The findings reveal that such language use is not merely decorative or informal, but rather carries communicative, social, and symbolic functions that resonate with the identity and preferences of contemporary audiences, es- pecially the younger generation and digital-savvy communities. The language forms iden- tified on signage such as healing, best moment, and zodiac-based humor illustrate a deliberate shift in public texts that aim to connect with viewers in more personal and cul- turally relevant ways.

One of the key outcomes of this study is the recognition that signage is no longer lim- ited to conveying standard information or regulation in formal and standardized language. Instead, signs in tourist and recreational areas have become semiotic landscapes where creativity, affect, and personalization converge. It includes the use of internet-based ex- pressions, viral vocabulary, and localized humor that reflect broader trends in Indonesian popular culture and digital communication. These linguistic choices are intentionally de- signed to be engaging, memorable, and relatable, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the messages conveyed. In this way, the use of bahasa gaul functions does not only as a linguistic phenomenon. It is a cultural strategy that mirrors the shifting dynamics of pub- lic discourse.

In addition, the visual and textual composition of the signage such as the integra- tion of stylized typography, emotive illustrations, and casual sentence structures reflects a

transformation in public language planning. It is evident that the producers of these signs aim to foster emotional resonance and audience identification which particularly with tourists and local youth. Rather than enforcing rules or issuing warnings in a rigid tone, the signs communicate values, expectations, and social cues in a language that feels fa- miliar and non-threatening. This aligns with a growing recognition that language in pub- lic space must evolve in response to sociocultural changes, including the increased role of digital media, informal register acceptance, and visual culture in shaping everyday com- munication.

This study contributes to linguistic landscape research by documenting and analyz- ing bahasa gaul that is actively used in public signs to construct meaning, represent iden- tities, and influence behavior. The findings affirm that the inclusion of informal and play- ful language in public signage is a conscious and strategic practice that reflects societal changes, audience expectations, and contemporary modes of expression. It challenges conventional notions of language propriety in public space and opens up discussions on the legitimacy and communicative power of non-standard linguistic forms.

This study also recommends that future public language design consider sociolin- guistic relevance and cultural sensitivity to maintain engagement and inclusivity in shared spaces. Further research is encouraged to explore such signage that is interpreted by di-verse audiences and the way it affects perceptions of authority, politeness, and commu- nity identity. By understanding the evolving forms and functions of language in public signage, stakeholders can better design communication strategies that are effective, adap- tive, and reflective of current social dynamics.

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