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From Words to Wisdom: Hermeneutic Analysis of Social Media Detox Narratives in Javanese Culture

Suryo Ediyono[1*], Reza Sukma Nugraha[1], Bernadus Wibowo Suliantoro[2]
[1]Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia, [2]Universitas Atma Jaya, Indonesia

Abstract This study examines social media detox as a response to spiritual crisis in the digital age. A significant research gap exists as prior studies have neglected its philosophical-cultural dimensions. The main objective is to interpret social media detox as a modern spiritual practice rooted in the Javanese philosophy of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. Using a qualitative narrative case study, data were obtained from six blogs detailing detox experiences. The data were analyzed through a hermeneutical lens, specifically the theories of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, to explore the symbolic meanings. The results indicate that social media detox can be understood as a contemporary form of *laku prihatin* (self-restraint). Participants seek to control digital desires, such as addiction and social comparison, which are obstacles to achieving *urip sejati* (true life). This act symbolizes the struggle to attain inner tranquility (tentrem) and return to one's true self, a quest at the core of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. These findings demonstrate that traditional wisdom remains relevant in addressing modern challenges.

Keywords: *Social media detox, Javanese philosophy, Manunggaling Kawula Gusti, Hermeneutics, Spiritual practice*

[*]**Corresponding Author:**
Suryo Ediyono
ediyonosuryo@staff.uns.ac.id

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of technology today has changed various lifestyles and habits. For example, the use of social media has long created a new way of communicating that is different from conventional communication. Through social media, two individuals can talk even though they are separated remotely using only a device. It also affects changes in individual identities and mindsets, so that it can potentially cause social, psychological, and cultural problems. Problems that arise from the excessive use of social media include the emergence of individual comparisons, dissatisfaction with one's own condition, and excessive consumption of information available in the mass media. One of the responses that has emerged to this problem is the social media detox movement. As a social movement,

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it collectively gathers awareness related to a value that must conventionally (Hariyanto et al., 2024; Pamungkas et al., 2024; Suprapto et al., 2024).

In an academic context, research on social media detox looks more at psychological and social aspects. However, such works have mainly ignored a pivotal dimension of the phenomenon, its philosophical and cultural roots. The spiritual and introspective driving forces, with a particular reference to traditional wisdom, for this practice are largely uninvestigated. This lack of a philosophical-cultural perspective presents a significant gap, as it overlooks the deeper motivations for seeking inner harmony and self-control in an increasingly digitized world. By investigating these forces, we can uncover a more holistic understanding of human behavior and demonstrate the enduring relevance of traditional wisdom in addressing contemporary challenges. As such, the current study aims to fill this notable gap in the research field by reframing social media detox as not an external opting out of social media but an internal psychological withdrawal and a form of modern-day spiritual endeavor. Exploring the aspects of culture that shape this behavior, we hope to offer a more layered and complex explanation of why, today, people in modern society are drawn toward removing themselves from the equation. This perspective aligns with previous works on culture and language, describing the modern phenomenon with the wisdom of the previous generation (Pamungkas et al., 2024; Purnomosidhi, 2002; Suprapto et al., 2024).

This study aims to bridge this research gap by establishing a link between traditional thought and contemporary phenomena. We argue that social media detox, as a deliberate pause from the digital world, can be interpreted as a modern manifestation of *laku prihatin*—a spiritual practice within the philosophy of Manunggaling Kawula Gusti. This study will conduct a hermeneutical analysis of personal narratives from a corpus of blogs. Drawing on the interpretive philosophies of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, our approach will treat these narratives as rich cultural texts, allowing us to move beyond a literal description of their experiences and into a deeper interpretation of their symbolic and existential meanings. Through this philosophical lens, we will specifically analyze how the participants' struggles with digital addiction and social comparison reflect the Javanese concept of *hawa nafsu* (desires). We will also interpret their narratives of finding inner peace and authenticity as a modern pursuit of *tentrem* (inner tranquility) and *urip sejati* (true self). The ultimate goal is to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Javanese wisdom in addressing the challenges of modern humanity and to provide a novel philosophical framework for understanding human behavior in the digital age.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by two main theoretical models that connect Javanese philosophy with cultural critique and modern analysis. Based on Javanese philosophy, the first framework helps to make sense of the spiritual and ethical apprehensions animating the social media detox frenzy. The other framework, cultural hermeneutics, provides the tools essential for interpreting personal stories' more profound symbolic significance.

2.1. The Philosophy of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* as Javanese Life Values

The concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, a profound spiritual teaching in Javanese culture, literally translates to "the union of the servant and God." This philosophy does not suggest a literal merging of the human and the divine, but rather a state of inner perfection achieved by aligning the self with the universal will (Pamungkas et al., 2024). It is a quest for *urip sejati* (true life), which is attained through purifying the mind and spirit from worldly desires and attachments (*hawa nafsu*). This philosophical journey is embodied in the practice of *laku prihatin*, a form of spiritual self-restraint or asceticism. As a core value of Javanese life, *laku prihatin* is a disciplined effort to control one's inner and outer self to achieve inner tranquility (*tentrem*) (Suprapto et al., 2024).

The philosophy of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* is a syncretic tradition transmitted through generations via various cultural media, including folklore, literature, and rituals. The *Kidung Rumeksa ing Wengi*, a mantra that synthesizes Islamic and Javanese cultural elements, exemplifies this phenomenon, demonstrating how spiritual teachings can evolve and be re-contextualized to remain relevant across different eras (Pamungkas et al., 2024). This fluidity and adaptability make the philosophy a powerful

lens through which to analyze contemporary behaviors. The central struggle in this philosophy is the continuous battle against the five human desires (*hawa nafsu*), which are seen as hindrances to achieving spiritual enlightenment and union with the divine.

In modern life, the principles of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* are highly applicable. The digital age, emphasizing consumerism, social validation, and the accumulation of followers and "likes," can be seen as a new battlefield for the *hawa nafsu*. The constant pursuit of online validation and the pressure to perform a curated digital self are modern desires that pull individuals away from their authentic selves (*urip sejati*). Social media detox can thus be viewed as a contemporary iteration of *laku prihatin*, a conscious act of spiritual withdrawal aimed at controlling digital desires and achieving inner harmony and authenticity.

2.2. Hermeneutical Reading of Culture

Drawing on a Gadamerian and Ricoeurian philosophical tradition, cultural hermeneutics offers a methodological framework to understand subjectivity as the meaning of human experience and cultural texts. This approach is rooted in the assumption that knowledge is a recurring act of deciphering signs, symbols, and narratives in a particular historical and cultural context. It transcends the literal meaning of a text or object to reveal its deeper symbolic meaning. In this investigation, blogs are understood as cultural "texts", symbolic representations of experiences and practices of more generalised life-transitioning processes of spirituality, digital culture, and social mobility. This method was also successfully used to examine the deep cultural sense of meaning in Javanese culture, like the linguistic and symbolic complexity of the *Tedhak Siten* ceremony (Hariyanto et al., 2024).

Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical theory especially stresses the dialectic of explanation and understanding. This two-part process includes analyzing the story's structure (explanation) and interpreting the story's more profound meaning and personal value (understanding). Adopting this approach, we can decipher how bloggers employ particular language and metaphors to talk about their experience of detox, but in doing so also point to motivations deeper than just a matter of 'psychological' convenience. Thus, the stories of social media detox are not just accounts of behavior, but symbolic stories of an inner search for meaning. This interpretation allows us to link the personal, individual narratives to a broader philosophical culture. It shows how modern people still manipulate traditional wisdom to cope with contemporary problems (Pinontoan et al., in press).

An important instrument in our hermeneutical model, Ricoeur's model interpretation constitutes an expansion from the initial reading to a more profound discovery of the text's semantic sense (Hariyanto et al., 2024; Pamungkas et al., 2024). Stage 1: Structural analysis. The first stage is a structural analysis in which we identify and analyze the linguistic and rhetorical means of the bloggers. This step, referred to by Ricoeur as the phase of "explanation," enables us to comprehend the literal and structural moments of their narrative. The next level of interpretation is "comprehension," when we work to understand the surface of the text and then its meaning. This would be done by reading stories in the spirit of the Javanese cultural universe and the religion of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. Using this two-phase model, we aim to move beyond an adumbrative account of detoxification and supply a deeper analysis of its cultural and spiritual meaning. The aim is to demonstrate how these narratives, in line with the traditional Javanese mantras or folklore, are therefore not simply stories, but bearers of a more profound cultural wisdom that assists in the individuation of individuals in post-modernity (Pinontoan et al., in press).

Through a lens of cultural hermeneutics, the social media detox personal narrative is revealed to be part of an emerging narrative composition where an individual's narrative is one of authenticity and spirit balance. We interpret their narratives of "disconnection," "peace," and "self-discovery" as modern forms of *laku prihatin* and the pursuit of *urip sejati*. It creates a strong framework for reconciling modern cultural phenomenology, a traditional philosophical system, and a richer reading of a contemporary spiritual practice.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study used interpretive content analysis to examine cultural and philosophical aspects of social media detox. This weighing of one's life is the fateful process of humanistic research, which

is to understand the subjective human experiences and interpret their profound meaning in a social and cultural context. The fundamental basis for this research is strongly informed by hermeneutics. This philosophy is well equipped to deconstruct cultural texts and to expose the motivational structures that underlie social activity.

3.1. Corpus

The dataset in our study consists of 6 personal blog accounts written by Indonesians who have recorded their process of social media detox. These blogs were purposively chosen as the primary data to replace IDIs. This rationale is appropriate considering the nature of blog writing, which is both autobiographical and introspective in content and superbly suited for hermeneutical interpretation.

The six blogs were identified according to the following criteria: (1) each narrative offers a complete, time-sequenced record of the detox, expressing the motivations, triumphs and tribulations, and perceived benefits; (2) the authors are not otherwise public citizens or mental health professionals, thereby providing a less mediated and more real-time portrayal; and (3) the narratives are published, broadly available accounts that can be considered in the light of other shared cultural and political experiences in the era of digital communication. The key features of the six blogs in our corpus are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Features and Rationale for Data Selection

Author	Features and Rationale for Selection	Blog Link	Date of Retrieval
Farhanuddin	A student detailing his struggle with social media addiction that disrupted his daily schedule and sleep.	https://www.kompasiana.com/farhanblog/6362595e470fea15d1089842	October 28, 2022
Alifatus	A student who focuses on the psychological impact of social comparison and feelings of inadequacy (*overthinking*).	https://www.kompasiana.com/putrialifa06/6559e2b1110fce5b0f2b9943	November 19, 2023
Lianda	A blogger who frames her detox as a form of *self-care* and a way to protect her inner peace from negative energy.	https://liandamarta.com/2017/12/20/detox-social-media/	December 20, 2017
Gozaliq	A digital creator who took the radical step of permanently deleting his social media accounts.	https://ghozaliq.com/kehidupan-tanpa-media-sosial/	September 10, 2022
Wiradhini	A social media specialist who consciously chose to detox from her personal accounts while still managing professional ones.	https://wirasuryadhini.blogspot.com/2020/06/alasan-berhenti-sementara-main-instagram.html	June 29, 2020
Sampai Nanti	A digital creator who offers a holistic reflection on his 30-day detox.	https://sampainanti.com/off-dari-media-sosial/	February 10, 2022

These diverse narratives provide a comprehensive and multifaceted view of the social media detox experience, making the corpus robust for a detailed hermeneutical analysis.

3.2. Procedure

This study relied on a qualitative and interpretative perspective based on the hermeneutic principles for the data collection and analysis. Our study's primary data were the blogs submitted for detailed analysis.

First, all six blogs were closely and repeatedly read to develop a deep understanding of the authors' experiences. Having done so, we read not so much for content as for repetitions, thematic motifs, metaphors, words, and phrases used by the authors to describe their affect or mental state.

Second, the information was classified from themes found within the descriptions. This inductive approach of thematic analysis enabled us to identify five themes, including (1) Interior agitation and loss of control, (2) Social comparison and feeling unworthy, (3) The contemporary spiritual asceticism, (4) Re-establishing the equilibrium and the authenticity, and (5) The testimonial elevation of the digital identity.

Last but not least, the heart of the interpretation was an interpretation-work based on hermeneutics. We utilized Paul Ricoeur's model, which focuses on two stages: an “explanation stage” and a “comprehension stage” (Pinontoan et al., in press). This “explanation” stage meant careful reading of the narratives for their literal content, narrative features, and symbolic language. This was then succeeded by the phase of "comprehension", where we left the garment of superficial description derogatively behind. In this phase, we reconceptualised the themes of quitting an app or deciding to write using a diary as modern metaphors for a transcendent spiritual journey, tying them to the Javanese philosophies of laku prihatin and urip sejati. The hermeneutical technique— which has been involved in interpreting other cultural texts such as traditional Javanese mantras— was found effective as a solid system for logically connecting the subjectivities of bloggers to more abstract philosophical concepts of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (Pamungkas et al., 2024).

4. Results

The narratives of the six bloggers documenting their social media detox experiences serve as a rich source of qualitative data. Through a thematic analysis, five central themes emerged, reflecting a consistent pattern of inner struggle, spiritual awakening, and the quest for a more authentic life in the digital age. This section begins with our thematic findings (Table 2), followed by a detailed narrative analysis of each theme from the philosophical perspectives of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* and cultural hermeneutics.

Table 2
Thematic Analysis

Number	Data	Thematic Analysis	*Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* Perspective	Hermeneutical Perspective on Data
1.	"I find it hard to manage my daily schedule; everything is a mess. I am falling behind on assignments, and I even have trouble sleeping." (Farhanuddin, 2022, para. 5)	Inner Crisis, Loss of Control	Loss of life's balance.	Symbol of the loss of spiritual orientation.
2.	"But on the other hand, I have been poisoned by the negative impacts of social media, so I had no choice but to force myself to disappear from social media for 30 days." (Sampai Nanti, 2021, para. 3)	Modern Self-Restraint (*Laku Prihatin)*	Self-restraint in the digital age.	Symbol of a digital fast (Ricoeur).
3.	"On social media, many people post about their achievements, accomplishments, materials, etc. Their posts make me overthink. I know social media is a place for image-building... but it still often makes me feel insecure and left behind." (Alifatus, 2023, para. 1)	Social Comparison, Insecurity	Shifting focus from true life to illusory life.	Expression of self-alienation.
4.	"It feels so peaceful, truly peaceful. Life without the noise of social media... In the morning, I no longer need to tire myself out opening every social media to check notifications." (Gozaliq, para. 15)	Return of Balance, Authenticity	Achievement of inner peace.	Evidence of meaning achieved (Gadamer).

5.	"I still have much homework to do. So now I really need to focus, focus, focus!" (Lianda, 2017). "I ended up having many to-do lists and even installed a Todoist app, which then helped me to improve my life." (Sampai Nanti, 2021, para. 4)	Return of Balance, Authenticity	Harmony between spiritual and material dimensions.	Narrative of restoration (Ricoeur).

4.1. Inner Crisis and Loss of Control

This theme reflects the authors' personal battle with addiction, stress, and a sense of being overwhelmed by digital life that is common to many people. Stories often tell of feelings of internal chaos, that digital activity interferes with regular schedules and sleeping patterns, and life as a whole. It was hard to have a programme in my day, everything was chaotic," writes one author. "I am having to work late into the night, I missed some tasks, I even had trouble sleeping during the day," (Farhanuddin, 2022). Another account speaks of being "poisoned" by the toxicity of social media platforms (Sampai Nanti, 2021). Viewed from *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, this inner turmoil is obvious evidence of imbalance between the self (*kawula*) and the digital universe (makrokosmos). The compulsive actions and failure to disengage are seen as one's inability to control one's passions and desires or *hawa nafsu* (lust), the main barriers to gaining harmony in spiritual life. These stories are interpreted as accounts of estrangement, a fundamental separation from self. The fact that there is what some have derisively called "screen time" at these vortexes of the digital encourages not just a spot of self-examination but also a creature comfort satirical reading of the events and the accompanying pledge to lead a better life, having teetered on this borderline between morality and existential malaise with reference to, you know, immediately going to bed. This "mess" they talk about is a metaphor for a life no longer moored to a higher priority or an inner form of organization.

4.2. Social Comparison and Insecurity

These narratives also often stress how social media fosters a climate of comparison that makes people feel under pressure and develop low self-esteem. Alifatus (2023) says, "On social media, many people share their achievements, successes, and stuff that they had like…" It usually makes me feel underconfident and second-best compared to others. This motif addresses the struggle between the true self and the lure of an artificial, social identity. In Javanese thought, this is a primal struggle between the dichotomy of *urip sejati* (real life) and *urip semu* (unreal life). Social media, the filtered feeds and overly polished and idealistic capture of success, creates a world of urip semu that distracts people from the reliable residual meaning resting within. In hermeneutical terms, the sense of "insecurity" is not just a feeling about oneself; it represents symbolically something happening in the world we inhabit, in which value is increasingly accorded to the affirmation of others and not to the wisdom of one's own thought. The thoughts of overthinking itself and that of being "left behind" are interpreted as "symptom[s] of a cultural condition in which the 'self' is measured not in terms of intrinsic worth, but in [the] occupation of a place on the social totem," a far cry from the Javanese value of seeking sufficiency and peace in oneself.

4.3. Modern Spiritual Asceticism

The authors consistently frame social media detox as a deliberate, spiritual practice, not just a casual break. They use terms like "*puasa sosmed*" (social media fasting) and "*memaksa diri*" (forcing oneself), which echo the language of traditional spiritual asceticism. Lianda (2017) explicitly describes her detox as a way to create distance from social media to prevent herself from "leaking" personal stories, a modern form of self-restraint. From the perspective of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, this practice is a contemporary version of *laku prihatin*, a form of discipline and self-denial aimed at purifying the mind and spirit. By voluntarily enduring the initial discomfort and "itching" to check their phones, the authors are practicing self-control to detach themselves from digital desires. Hermeneutically, this practice is a symbolic act of purification. Deleting an app or logging out is not merely a technical action; it is a ritualistic gesture that signifies a conscious decision to cleanse the self from the negative influences of

the digital world. This "*puasa digital*" is an interpretation of the traditional quest for inner purity in a modern context, proving that the human need for spiritual discipline remains constant.

4.4. Restoration of Balance and Authenticity

The most profound finding is the sense of restoration and authenticity that follows the detox period. Authors report a significant reduction in stress, a clearer mind, and an ability to focus on meaningful offline activities. Gozaliq (2019) states, "It felt truly calm. Life without the noise of social media." This feeling of "calmness" (*tentrem*) is a core value in Javanese philosophy, representing a state of spiritual equilibrium where the mind and heart are at peace. It directly results from engaging in *laku prihatin* and re-establishing the harmony between the internal and external worlds. From a hermeneutical standpoint, the experiences of "reclaiming time," "reading books," and "paying attention to the surroundings" are not just mundane activities. They are narratives of restoration where the authors reconstruct a more authentic self and a more meaningful reality. The a-ha moment of realizing they can be productive and find joy without digital validation is a textual representation of achieving a more profound understanding (*pamahaman*) of what constitutes a truly balanced and authentic life.

4.5. The Existential Dilemma of Digital Identity

This final theme highlights the complex paradox of modern life. While detaching from social media brings spiritual and mental benefits, it also poses a significant challenge to professional and social existence. Gozaliq (2019) describes losing his network and business opportunities after permanently deleting his accounts. This dilemma, also mentioned by Sampai Nanti (2021), represents a modern existential conflict: how can one find inner peace and authenticity without becoming irrelevant in a world where digital platforms increasingly mediate identity, community, and livelihood? This paradox is a crucial point of synthesis between traditional and contemporary thought. This dilemma is a narrative of a transitional crisis, where the individual must navigate the tension between the spiritual and social selves. The experiences highlight that the quest for *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* in the 21st century is no longer a simple retreat from the world but a more complex endeavor of finding harmony within a "dual existence", maintaining inner balance while strategically engaging with the digital world. The journey is not about escaping reality but redefining one's place.

5. Discussion

This research is designed to investigate social media detox as a modern spiritual practice, reading it as a contemporary embodiment of the Javanese philosophy of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*. This study connected tradition with a new cultural practice, a hermeneutical interpretation of six blogger narratives. By using a qualitative, interpretive frame, the research attempted to illustrate that unplugging from the virtual is a reflective attempt not only to fall in line with the psychology of the age of digital revolution, the social tide of the day, but a conscious expression of a spiritual quest to find equilibrium, a self-efficacy or a “return to the natural order” of being. The study concludes that attaining inner peace and meaningful existence, as the essence of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, can still be a driving force in the massively mediated and technologised 21st century.

The stories we have told, from the depths of personal despair, the trap of social comparison, and the habit of denial, are compelling arguments supporting our most important conclusion. It is not just the bloggers who experience issues like feeling like they have a “jiggling” schedule and are “constantly playing catch-up” either. They are the remnants of a new human condition, fractured by endless digital overload (Hariyanto et al., 2024). In this article, which is part of research that we are conducting, we argue that the Javanese philosophy provides a sound basis for intervention. The philosophy of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti*, the arrival of the people of Gusti/God into spiritual unity, offers a way of viewing these contemporary challenges not as technical problems but as spiritual ones. However, the stories behind the puasa sosmed and reclaiming free time prove that people tend to inherit practices of self-discipline, a contemporary laku prihatin, when they struggle to stay in charge of their lives and spiritual growth.

Moreover, this work is strongly supported by the academic background. Under these circumstances, a hermeneutical reading, with special attention to Ricoeur’s explanation and understanding model,

emerged as an appropriate way for reading blogger narratives as cultural texts. This approach enabled us to go beyond a verbatim account of the experiences and interpret their philosophical significances. Heritom is an appropriate method for interpreting cultural and spiritual meaning, as shown in Javanese culture studies (Pamungkas et al., 2024; Pinontoan et al., in press). The finding that the bloggers' seemingly secular action of "detox" could be understood as a search for inner harmony and authenticity clearly supports the effect of the method and credibility of findings. The convergence between the bloggers' self-reports and the philosophical assumption that worldly wisdom is not a vestige of the past but a living tradition from which present-day beliefs and behaviors spring provides evidence of ancient wisdom's continued influence on modern life.

This study has two implications. Two, it provides a new way of conceptualizing the global digital well-being movement, using it to galvanize the more traditional non-Western spiritual philosophies. Rather than simply describing social media detox as a psychological or sociological phenomenon, this essay presents it as a powerful form of spiritual self-care. Second, this study shows the pertinence of the Javanese way of thinking, which is compatible with the post-modern condition. It is evidence that ancient wisdom still might have something to offer a world filled with hyper-connectivity and bytes. The results indicate that two of the main ideas in Javanese thought, like balance and harmony, may serve as an invaluable basis for construing a better perspective on, and approach to, the complexities of digital life and technology use.

We recommend further studies of this line of research by extending this to other cultural contexts in a comparative analysis. The issue of whether the social media detox trend in other cultures, such as Western or other Asian cultures, can be interpreted through their spiritual heritages is a topic for future research. A better understanding might embrace an interdisciplinary approach integrating qualitative narrative analysis with quantitative data about digital habits. A longitudinal study of the same group of participants who tested before, during, and after their social media fast may also provide further insights into the intervention's long-term psychological and spiritual impact.

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