

Boosting Sidoarjo youth engagement via participatory communication and targeted capacity building

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Abstract Youth participation in community-based social organisations such as Karang Taruna remains uneven, despite the substantial proportion of young people within local communities. Sidoarjo Regency represents a socially transitional area characterised by strong urban-communitarian dynamics and cultural complexity, with individuals ranging from 15–29 yrs old forming a strategic demographic group for social development. This study examined the effectiveness of empathy-based participatory communication in strengthening youth social participation through a Research Capacity Building (RCB) approach, focusing on Karang Taruna in Sidoarjo Regency. A qualitative participatory action research design was employed, involving in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 30 purposively selected informants, including youth members, community leaders, and facilitators. The research was conducted across three villages—Gisikcemandi, Masangan Kulon, and Bungurasih—representing diverse socio-cultural contexts. A four-week intervention comprised participatory communication training, social leadership development, and direct involvement in community-based activities. Data were analysed thematically. The findings reveal four interconnected themes: (1) participatory communication patterns within Karang Taruna, (2) the internalisation of empathy values through egalitarian and dialogical interactions, (3) the role of empathetic interventions in enhancing youth confidence, engagement, and critical awareness, and (4) contextual challenges and opportunities in sustaining participatory communication practices. The integration of empathy-based communication with the RCB approach strengthened collective learning, intergenerational dialogue, and sustained social participation. This study concludes that empathy-based participatory communication, when embedded within a research capacity building framework, contributes to the development of a sustainable ecosystem of youth social participation and community-driven social change.

Keywords: capacity building; empathy; participatory communication; youth

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INTRODUCTION

Demographically, Sidoarjo Regency has a substantial youth population, particularly within the 20-24 age group. (164.33 thousand individuals, 8.21%) and the 25-29 age group (155.63 thousand individuals, 7.77%) as of mid-2024. This demographic composition positions individuals aged 15-29 as the core youth population, constituting a strategic social base for enhancing youth participation, advancing socio-economic development, and fostering local innovation (BPS Kabupaten Sidoarjo, 2025). Sidoarjo was selected as the research site as it represents a region undergoing significant socio-economic and spatial transformation, characterised by rapid urbanisation, evolving community structures, and increasing cultural diversity. These conditions create a complex social environment that provides a pertinent setting for examining participatory communication strategies grounded in empathy and youth capacity building. At the very least, these youth are the nation's future leaders. National leaders have character that refers to values, attitudes, behaviours, and leadership styles that grow and develop from the social, cultural, and historical context of a community (Bridge, 2020). The phenomenon that occurs among youth in Karang Taruna (Youth Organisation) currently shows a lack of interest and active involvement. Many youths feel that Karang Taruna is not relevant to their needs or interests. Karang Taruna activities are considered boring or too formal and not adaptive to the lifestyles of the younger generation. Leadership is a problem for stakeholders in both formal and informal institutions because of a leadership crisis caused by gaps in capacity building methods for community development, because knowledge transfer methods aimed at improving individual or group capabilities are often overlooked. Research conducted by Searle and Barbuto found that the role of leaders, especially leader behaviour in organisations, is often overlooked (Searle & Barbuto, 2011). Meanwhile, Decuyper Pircher and Verdorfer Armin examined the influence of leader behaviour at the macro and micro levels within work teams (Decuyper & Pircher Verdorfer, 2022). Both studies concluded that (a) servant leadership behaviour significantly influences team performance, and (b) servant leadership characteristics facilitate individual and team behaviour within organisations (Sofia, 2017).

Building a socially capable and empowered society requires a generation of youth with a mindset oriented toward sustainable social change and active community involvement, particularly groups that play strategic roles in local village and urban dynamics (Hudnall & Kopecky, 2020; Pebrunto & Radianto, 2021). In Indonesia, community-based youth organisations such as Karang Taruna hold significant potential to foster social participation, local innovation, and empathy-driven development (Rodhiyah & Pujianto, 2023). However, active youth engagement is often constrained by top-down communication patterns, limited spaces for horizontal dialogue, and insufficient application of empathetic approaches to social issues faced by communities (Hidayat et al., 2023). In this study, participatory communication emerges as an approach capable of promoting active involvement, strengthening social relations, and building collective awareness at the community level. Research exploring empathy-based participatory communication strategies and systematic youth capacity building is essential to maximise the role of Karang Taruna as agents of social change, enhance sustained social participation, and drive local innovation relevant to the needs of Indonesian communities (Suko Widodo & Kristama, 2024).

Youth social participation in communities such as Karang Taruna is increasingly challenging amidst rapid social change. Therefore, empathetic interventions based on Social Mind Change encourage social engagement through an empathy-based participatory communication approach. Research Capacity Building (RCB) is a systematic effort to improve the ability of individuals, groups, or institutions to design, implement, analyse, and use research results effectively and sustainably (Hews et al., 2023). This research understands the dynamics of community communication, identifies challenges and opportunities, and designs a more effective approach to strengthening the social capacity of youth at the local level through quality non-formal education.

This study is grounded in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 and Asta Cita (Prabowo' Presidential Vision) 4, which emphasise quality education and human resource development for youth involved in Karang Taruna through a participatory communication approach (Radianto et al., 2021), as evidenced by various previous studies.

Table 1. Overview of previously studied youth-oriented participatory communication interventions

| Previously studied interventions | Research title | Description | Authors |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Public perception | Communication strategies in building the image of Karang Taruna Berbek Village, Sidoarjo through Instagram | Public perception of digital communication strategies used to shape the organisational image of Karang Taruna Community | (Safitri & Arkansyah, 2022) |
| Community collaboration | Participation of Karang Taruna organisations within the community environment of Jati Village, Sidoarjo | Community development through collective action and participatory engagement | (Rachmawati Fidia Cahyani Sugistin & Wahyu Eko Pujianto, 2023) |
| Village social capital | Analysis of participatory communication of village government toward youth in maintaining social capital in Kedundung Island Village | Effective participatory communication as a mechanism for sustaining village social capital | (Sulastri & Pratama, 2022) |

Source: Adapted from Safitri & Arkansyah (2022); Rachmawati et al. (2023); Sulastri & Pratama (2022)

As summarised in Table 1, previous studies on youth-related participatory communication in Sidoarjo have primarily focused on digital image-building strategies, community-based collaboration, and the role of participatory communication in sustaining village-level social capital. However, these studies have tended to emphasise descriptive or organisational dimensions, with limited attention devoted to empathy-based participatory communication and systematic youth capacity building as integrated strategies for strengthening sustained youth social participation.

The urgency of this research lies in analysing community-based participatory communication strategies that can enhance youth social participation within Karang Taruna in the Sidoarjo. The concept of participatory communication enables young people to understand processes of mass communication, dynamics of interaction, and shifts in social attitudes and behaviours resulting from communicative interventions (Servaes, 2016; Wijayanti et al., 2022). Although previous studies have examined youth participation and the strengthening of community-based organisations, research that specifically explores empathy-based participatory communication in the context of Karang Taruna in Sidoarjo remains limited. Furthermore, the relationship between the internalisation of empathetic values, the enhancement of youth social participation, and the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing community-level interventions has not been systematically examined. This gap constitutes the central focus of the present study, as a deeper understanding of empathy-based communication strategies is essential for fostering sustained social participation and locally grounded innovation.

This study strengthens the participatory communication capacity of Karang Taruna youth through a Research Capacity Building (RCB) approach. RCB is a systematic effort to improve the ability of individuals, groups, or institutions to design, implement, analyse, and effectively use research results. The aim of this study is to analyse the forms and patterns of participatory communication within empathy-based intervention programs implemented by Karang Taruna in Sidoarjo, the process of internalising empathetic values in community activities, and how empathy-based communication interventions enhance the social participation of Karang Taruna members, including the challenges and opportunities in implementing such strategies at the community level.

METHODOLOGY

The research method used is qualitative with a participatory case study approach (participatory action research)(Brazier et al., 2025). This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of communication strategies to increase the social participation of Karang Taruna through research capacity building (RCB) interventions in Sidoarjo Regency. Sidoarjo Regency was selected as the study site because it represents a transitional socio-cultural context characterised by the coexistence of traditional communal values and increasingly intensive processes of

modernisation. Geographically and socially positioned between the urban centre of Surabaya and rural coastal-agrarian areas, Sidoarjo exhibits hybrid social structures and a high degree of community heterogeneity, making it a relevant setting for examining participatory communication strategies and empathy-based interventions. The research was conducted following a four-week intervention comprising participatory communication training, social leadership strengthening, and direct engagement in community activities. The fieldwork took place from 16 to 18 June 2025 in Gisikcemandi Village, from 8 to 10 July 2025 in Masangan Kulon Village, and from 22 to 24 July 2025 in Bungurasih Village.

The qualitative approach was carried out using methods through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with purposive sampling techniques (Graf et al., 2022; Porter et al., 2020), which involved Karang Taruna members, community leaders, and facilitators. The objectives were to identify forms and patterns of participatory communication among Karang Taruna youth, analyse the process of social empathy formation based on the dynamics of community communication and evaluate the effectiveness of empathy interventions in increasing Karang Taruna participation and social engagement. To identify supporting and inhibiting factors in the development of participatory communication skills as a strategy for community social change. Sampling: This study used a purposive sampling method, selecting three villages representing different social and geographical characteristics in Sidoarjo Regency.

Gisikcemandi Village (Coastal Village): Located in Sedati District, this village is characterised by a coastal community, a large proportion of whom work in fishing, aquaculture, and other informal sectors. The community's social conditions are generally strongly rooted in a collectivist culture, but access to education and training is difficult. The Karang Taruna (youth organisation) in this village is active in environmental and economic empowerment activities.

Bungurasih Village (Urban Village): This village is in Waru District, close to the urban area and the Purabaya (Bungurasih) Bus terminal. Its residents enjoy better access to education and information, and come from more diverse social backgrounds. The Karang Taruna in this village is active in youth development, the digitalisation of social activities, and the organisation of community events.

Masangan Kulon Village (Agro Village): Located in Sukodono District, most of the population works in agriculture and family micro-enterprises. Traditions of cooperation and family ties remain strong. The village youth organisation (Karang Taruna) is frequently involved in local cultural preservation and community economic development (Rodhiyah and Pujianto 2023).

The intervention was conducted over four weeks and consisted of participatory communication training, reinforcement of social leadership values, and the implementation of community-based activities, with the participants composed at Table 2. At the end of the fourth week, a post-test was administered to measure changes in levels of social participation and to assess participants' responses to the communication strategies employed across the two initiatives. Data were analysed using thematic analysis within a participatory case study and Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework.

Data collected from in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participatory observations were transcribed verbatim and analysed iteratively. The analytical process involved data familiarisation through repeated reading, data reduction through open and axial coding to eliminate redundancy and focus on analytically relevant data segments, and the clustering of codes into categories and core themes. Analytical rigour was ensured through methodological and source triangulation, member checking, and sustained researcher engagement throughout the intervention process. Data dependability was strengthened using consistent data collection protocols, systematic documentation of analytical decisions (audit trail), and peer debriefing to ensure coding consistency and interpretive coherence.

Table 2. Informant background based on roles and social positions by village

| Village | Informant category | Social role and position | Informant background | Informants |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|------------|
| Gisikcemandi Village | Key informant | Head of the youth organisation | Adult youth with leadership experience, responsible for organisational coordination and acting as a liaison between youth groups and village authorities | 1 |
| | Facilitators | Youth organisation mentors | Senior community members with social authority and long-term experience in youth empowerment and community facilitation | 5 |
| | Community figures | Informal community leaders | Socially influential actors who function as cultural references and participate in collective decision-making | 3 |
| | Youth members | Active and junior members | Adolescents and young adults involved in social activities, mutual aid practices, and local traditions | 4 |
| Bungurasih Village | Key informant | Head of the youth organisation | Adult youth managing organisational activities and mediating youth interests within an urban social context | 1 |
| | Facilitators | Organisational and youth facilitators | Actors with organisational experience and extensive social networks, including digital-based community engagement | 5 |
| | Community figures | Local stakeholders | Informal and semi-formal leaders providing social legitimacy and community support | 2 |
| | Youth members | Active and junior members | Youth from heterogeneous backgrounds, accustomed to digital media and urban-oriented social initiatives | 4 |
| Masangan Kulon Village | Key informant | Head of the youth organisation | Adult youth coordinating community activities rooted in local culture and community-based economic practices | 1 |
| | Facilitators | Youth organisation mentors | Senior actors serving as intergenerational mediators and custodians of local social values | 4 |
| | Community figures | Local stakeholders | Influential social actors embedded in traditional agrarian structures | 2 |
| | Youth members | Active and junior members | Youth strongly embedded in collective labour traditions and agriculture-based community activities | 6 |
| Total | – | – | Informants represent diverse roles, social positions, and village contexts | 30 |

Source: Author Compilation (2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Data collection was conducted from 16 - 18 June 2025, in Gisikcemandi village, from 8 - 10 July in Masangan Kulon village, and from 22-24 July 2025, in Bungurasih village, following a four-week intervention that included participatory communication training, social leadership strengthening, and direct participation in community activities. Research data were obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with members of the Karang Taruna youth organisation, community leaders, and facilitators from the three villages. Data analysis was conducted thematically to identify key themes related to participatory communication strategies, youth social participation, research capacity building, and community empowerment. Ten informants participated in in-depth interviews and 20 FGDs with community leaders and facilitators, for a total of 30 respondents. Data analysis was conducted thematically to identify key themes related to participatory communication strategies (Moleong, 2021), youth social participation, research capacity building, and community empowerment.

The informants came from the villages of Gisikcemandi, Bungurasih, and Masangan Kulon. They were members of the Karang Taruna youth organisation, led by a chairperson. The community leaders were elected village officials, while the facilitators were elected village officials.

This study involved 30 informants from three villages representing diverse roles, age groups, and social positions. The demographic and organisational profiles of the informants are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Profile of research informants

| No. | Initials | Village of origin | Age (Years old) | Status/occupation |
|-----|----------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | AL-G | Gisikcemandi | 34 | Chairman of the youth organisation |
| 2 | SW-G | Gisikcemandi | 30 | Public figure |
| 3 | SH-G | Gisikcemandi | 50 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 4 | WA-G | Gisikcemandi | 40 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 5 | EL-G | Gisikcemandi | 48 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 6 | RF-G | Gisikcemandi | 25 | Youth organisation members |
| 7 | IP-G | Gisikcemandi | 16 | Youth organisation members |
| 8 | R-G | Gisikcemandi | 35 | Public figure |
| 9 | DE-G | Gisikcemandi | 39 | Public figure |
| 10 | S-G | Gisikcemandi | 42 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 11 | NS-BU | Bungurasih | 36 | Chairman of the youth organisation |
| 12 | RS-BU | Bungurasih | 29 | Youth organisation members |
| 13 | ML-BU | Bungurasih | 20 | Youth organisation members |
| 14 | FB-BU | Bungurasih | 46 | Public figure |
| 15 | IB-BU | Bungurasih | 59 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 16 | MU-BU | Bungurasih | 47 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 17 | AP-BU | Bungurasih | 35 | Fasilitator Organiasi |
| 18 | SN-BU | Bungurasih | 18 | Youth organisation members |
| 19 | BS-BU | Bungurasih | 17 | Youth organisation members |
| 20 | DA-BU | Bungurasih | 48 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 21 | A-MK | Masangankulon | 25 | Chairman of the youth organisation |
| 22 | FS-MK | Masangankulon | 27 | Public figure |
| 23 | WS-MK | Masangankulon | 35 | Public figure |
| 24 | AL-MK | Masangankulon | 38 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 25 | Y-MK | Masangankulon | 40 | Youth organisation facilitator |
| 26 | RR-MK | Masangankulon | 18 | Youth organisation members |
| 27 | V-MK | Masangankulon | 16 | Youth organisation members |
| 28 | R-MK | Masangankulon | 16 | Youth organisation members |
| 29 | D-MK | Masangankulon | 17 | Youth organisation members |
| 30 | MA-MK | Masangankulon | 32 | Youth organisation members |

Source: Primary field data, 2025

Based on the results of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), four main themes were identified through thematic analysis, namely: (1) participatory communication patterns in Karang Taruna, (2) internalisation of empathy values, (3) empathic interventions and social participation, and (4) challenges and opportunities in participatory communication strategies. A summary of themes, categories, and illustrative quotations is presented in Table 4.

Thematic analysis of empathy-based participatory communication in Karang Taruna

This research data analysis was conducted based on themes to understand communication patterns, internalisation of empathy values, and social participation in Karang Taruna (youth organisation). The main themes identified include the forms and patterns of participatory communication in empathetic intervention programs, the process of internalising empathy values in community activities, and the impact of empathy-based communication interventions on increasing members' social participation (Phillip et al., 2025; Zhu et al., 2021). Furthermore, the analysis also considered the challenges and opportunities that arise in implementing empathy-based participatory communication strategies at the community level. Each theme was analysed descriptively to illustrate actual practices, social dynamics, and the role of youth in

building solidarity and community capacity in the three research villages: Gisikcemandi, Bungurasih, and Masangan Kulon.

Table 4. A summary of themes, categories, and illustrative quotations is presented

| Main theme | Category | Brief description | Quote / reference |
|--|------------------------------|--|---|
| Participatory communication patterns in Karang Taruna | Forms & mechanisms | How communication is conducted (face-to-face meetings, WhatsApp groups, deliberation) and collective decision-making mechanisms. | "Now, if there is a Karang Taruna Bungur activity, the invitation is often via WhatsApp. It reaches all members quickly, even those working outside the city." (NS-BU, 36 years); Putra, Hidayat, & Heriniazwi 2025 |
| | Interaction dynamics | Role of empathy, mutual respect among members, and distribution of voice in participatory forums. | "Deliberation in Karang Taruna feels like an open learning space. We not only express ideas, but also learn to listen. I realized good communication is giving space, not interrupting." (EL-G, 48 years) |
| Internalisation of empathy values | Empathy practices | Empathy is enacted through active listening, respecting differences, and embracing diverse ideas in Karang Taruna. | "Seniors give juniors the chance to present their ideas. We learn to respect others' opinions, even if they differ from the majority." (WS-MK, 35 years); RR-MK, 18 years |
| | Value transmission | Empathy is transmitted through egalitarian communication practices and senior-junior interactions based on mutual respect. | "Seniors no longer decide alone; they wait for input from all members. This teaches us to value the opinions of peers and elders." (Y-MK, 40 years); RF-G, 25 years |
| Empathic intervention and social participation | Intervention effects | Empathic communication strategies increase confidence, active engagement, and critical awareness among youth. | "After adopting more open communication, I dared to raise my hand during meetings. Before, I was afraid of being laughed at; now, many support my ideas." (ML-BU, 20 years); Lim 2024 |
| | Social impact | Builds a sense of belonging, stronger collaboration, and sustained engagement in community programs. | "Participation is not just about attending. Empathy shown by seniors motivates me to think about solutions for village problems." (FS-MK, 27 years); Azizah & Lestari 2025 |
| Challenges and opportunities in participatory communication strategy | Communication skills | Challenge: youth are not yet trained in empathic communication; building social trust is difficult. | "Participation in Karang Taruna is not only about showing up but contributing effort and ideas. I used to just listen, now I dare to speak up." (SN-BU, 30 years); Setty 2024 |
| | Social participation | Challenge: sustainability is low; engagement is uneven. | "At first, I hesitated to join activities because I was new. But when my opinion was valued, I became more active in every community activity." (RA-G, 24 years) |
| t | Community strengthening | Challenge: not fully integrating local values with digital networks. | "Digitalisation accelerates idea dissemination, but face-to-face interaction remains crucial to maintain empathic closeness." |
| | Communication transformation | Shift to digital communication reduces empathic intimacy. | "WhatsApp groups connect residents quickly, but deliberation remains essential to feel togetherness and solidarity." |
| | Intergenerational empathy | Potential: cross-generational communication fosters respect and solidarity. | "We used to think young people did not understand, but now I see they also have critical perspectives. Empathy makes us willing to listen seriously." (EL-G, 37 years) |
| | Local culture | Potential: culture-based activities (Petik Laut, art preservation) as entry points for social participation. | "During the Petik Laut tradition, all Karang Taruna members work together, help each other, and aim to make the village the best." (RF-G, 25 years); |
| | Social leadership | Potential: learning leadership and capacity building through organisational experience. | "During <i>gotong royong</i> , I was trusted to lead a small group. I felt happy because my ideas were heard and applied." (WDD-G, 34 years) |

Source: Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, 2025.

Karang Taruna's Participatory Communication Patterns Karang Taruna's communication patterns in three villages demonstrate dynamics that are not merely technical, but also cultural and social. The shift from face-to-face meetings to the use of digital media, particularly WhatsApp groups, marks a transformation in how residents interact and manage participation.

Digitalisation has proven to bring speed and effectiveness to the dissemination of information, but on the other hand, it leaves a gap in terms of intimacy in social relationships. Information delivered digitally may reach an audience more quickly, but it doesn't always have the emotional connection that drives real engagement.

Digitalisation has proven to bring speed and effectiveness to the dissemination of information, but on the other hand, it leaves a gap in terms of intimacy in social relations. Information sent digitally may reach audiences more quickly, but it doesn't always have the emotional connection that can encourage real engagement. For example, digital invitations in PDF format often receive less response, unlike printed invitations that were previously delivered in person and could create a sense of community and encourage attendance. Furthermore, despite the increasing dominance of digital patterns, face-to-face deliberations still maintain their role as strategically valuable inclusive spaces (Putra et al., 2025). The village hall serves not only as a gathering place but also as an arena for social legitimacy where various youth groups can express their opinions.

Physical presence enables egalitarian communication, where even a small voice has the potential to exert significant influence on collective decisions. Thus, deliberation serves not only as a decision-making tool but also as a social practice that reinforces a sense of belonging and strengthens community cohesion (Hänninen, 2025; Ramos et al., 2026). The long-standing culture of cooperation reinforces this communication trait. Citizen participation extends beyond mere attendance or listening to actively contributing ideas and energy, believing that individual contributions will directly impact the common good. In this context, communication is seen not only as an exchange of messages but also as a collective action that preserves social solidarity (Lynn & Przedpelska, 2024). This cultural value is difficult to replace with digital media, which, while efficient, tends to weaken the depth of empathy and intensity of interaction.

The situation in Bungurasih Village exhibits interesting variations. With a more heterogeneous community, the Karang Taruna (youth organisation) is required to be more adaptive. Young people play a crucial role by transforming social media into a productive tool, not just a lifestyle platform. They use it to disseminate information about positive activities, indirectly expanding the reach of participation and shaping Karang Taruna's progressive image. This signals the emergence of the younger generation as agents of change capable of combining traditional values with the potential of digital technology.

This phenomenon reveals the paradox of digitalisation: on the one hand, it increases communication efficiency and expands access, but on the other, it has the potential to erode the depth of social relationships and empathetic values that characterise face-to-face interactions (Collins, 2025; Splichal, 2022). WhatsApp groups can connect residents quickly, but deliberation remains the medium for feeling together and fostering solidarity.

Therefore, Karang Taruna's communication strategy should ideally move toward a hybrid model that balances digital efficiency and the depth of face-to-face interactions (Setiadi et al., 2023). Digitalisation can be utilised for information dissemination, documentation, and promotion, while deliberation forums remain as deliberative spaces that foster empathy, cooperation, and social legitimacy. With this model, Karang Taruna is not only able to adapt to technological developments but also maintain its identity as a forum for togetherness rooted in local culture.

The value of empathy in Karang Taruna is formed and internalised through members' direct involvement in various social activities, both collective and focused on personal interactions. Furthermore, this value is also transmitted between generations through a social learning process, where youth learn from the experiences and examples of more senior members. Through this hands-on experience, youth gain a deeper understanding of the importance of active participation in the community, social responsibility, leadership skills, and self-development.

Their involvement in real-life situations allows empathetic understanding to develop not only conceptually but also through everyday lived experiences, strengthening a sense of caring and solidarity within the community. Empathy practices emerge through active listening, respect for differences, and providing equal space for all members. These activities strengthen social trust, reduce hierarchical dominance, and foster youth engagement.

The value of empathy in Karang Taruna is passed down through the practice of egalitarian communication and respectful cross-generational interactions. This process not only creates a mechanism for horizontal dialogue between seniors and juniors but also fosters a participatory culture in which each member feels valued and encouraged to actively contribute. This practice of communication strengthens social cohesion, fosters collective responsibility, and internalises empathy as a social norm underlying joint decision-making, collaboration, and participatory leadership within the community. This is evident in the quotes from the informants.

Empathy practices in community social interventions, such as Karang Taruna, focus on creating safe spaces for members to express themselves, which increases self-confidence and social engagement. Active listening strategies and respect for members' ideas help reduce hierarchical dominance, fostering inclusive horizontal engagement. Concrete activities such as community service, organising community events, and deliberations serve as experiential learning platforms, allowing members to directly practice empathy and internalise its value through everyday experiences. The value of empathy is transmitted through egalitarian interactions and the habituation of cross-generational communication, creating a participatory social structure where youth feel valued, seniors are respected, and active listening skills develop. With consistent practice, empathy becomes a cultural norm that supports youth's continued participation in social activities.

However, challenges remain, including initial hesitation among youth in expressing ideas due to previous hierarchical experiences and the tendency of seniors to maintain traditional dominance (Setty, 2024). Conversely, egalitarian interactions and activities based on local culture provide effective channels for cultivating empathy, while horizontal cross-generational dialogue strengthens social cohesion and encourages active participation. The implication is that internalising the value of empathy creates independent, reflective, and participatory youth, ready to contribute to community strengthening. Karang Taruna serves as a social laboratory, where empathy is not merely a moral value but a concrete practice that fosters a critical, collaborative, and proactive generation of young people engaged in participatory social development.

Empathetic interventions implemented within the Karang Taruna context have proven effective in increasing youth social participation in three villages. Communication strategies based on empathy include active listening, respect for diverse ideas, and providing equal space for all members, helping youth gain confidence in expressing their views. This application of empathy also encourages active engagement, as every member's voice is considered in the deliberation process. Furthermore, these interventions stimulate critical awareness; youth do not simply follow existing decisions but begin to question, analyse, and offer alternative solutions to community problems (Lim, 2024). Thus, the impact of empathetic interventions in Karang Taruna not only strengthens social cohesion but also contributes to the formation of a more independent, reflective generation of young people capable of participating in social change. In this study, Karang Taruna Bungurasih, located in an urban-peri-urban environment, presented heterogeneous communication challenges. Empathetic interventions empowered young members to express their ideas, even if they differed from the majority.

These findings indicate increased youth self-confidence, where empathetic interventions affirm that communication practices are not exclusive to senior youth group members, but rather serve as an egalitarian space that provides equal opportunities for all participants. In Masangan Kulon, an agrarian culture that values togetherness makes empathy a social glue. Empathetic interventions provide space for juniors to be included in agenda-setting. This demonstrates how participation is beginning to be understood more broadly than simply being present. Senior empathy motivates active involvement in problem-solving.

This demonstrates that empathetic interventions can reduce traditional hierarchical dominance while strengthening intergenerational communication. The Gisikcemandi coastal community demonstrates empathy expressed through collective solidarity, particularly in community service activities.

This demonstrates how a sense of belonging is key to engagement. One aspect of this empathy is fostering a collective awareness of the importance of togetherness and recognising shifting perspectives on the younger generation. Thus, empathy in Gisikcemandi not only strengthens social cohesion but also serves as an instrument for transforming the perspectives of the older generation. Those who previously viewed young people as mere implementers now begin to recognise the capacity, ideas, and leadership of the younger generation as crucial to collective decision-making. This shift in mindset creates a more equal space for dialogue, fosters mutual trust, and encourages a more inclusive culture of participation (Lin & Kant, 2021).

The results of a study in three villages indicate that empathetic interventions have strategic, multidimensional effects on socio-communicative dynamics. First, the interventions increase self-confidence, with junior members boldly expressing their opinions, despite previously being passive. Second, the interventions encourage active engagement, as seen in middle-aged youth who actively contribute solutions and take full roles in collective processes. Third, the interventions foster critical awareness in senior members, who begin to value youth perspectives and reduce the hierarchical dominance that has dominated interactions (Liao, 2024).

Variations in village characteristics demonstrate modulation in the manifestations of empathy. In Bungurasih, the interventions emphasise courageous speech in heterogeneous contexts; in Masangankulon, the focus is on balancing traditional respect and egalitarian practices; Meanwhile, in Gisikcemandi, the intervention emphasised collective solidarity and intergenerational openness. Thus, empathetic interventions not only build horizontal and equal communication but also internalise the values of social participation relevant to the cultural context of each village, while strengthening social capacity and community cohesion (Azizah & Tri Lestari, 2025).

The main challenge in communication skills is that young people are not accustomed to interacting with empathy, making building social trust difficult. Interactions within Karang Taruna provide a space for young members to learn to express their opinions, appreciate differences, and understand other perspectives.

The analysis demonstrates that communication skills and social leadership within Karang Taruna develop primarily through direct experience, cross-generational interactions, and active participation in collective initiatives. Such experiential engagement fosters a participatory climate that values every voice, including those of quieter or less assertive members, thereby promoting equitable and inclusive participation (Pollack et al., 2023; Sinare et al., 2025). Youth engagement extends beyond mere presence, constituting a collective practice that cultivates responsibility, solidarity, and active social involvement. Cultural and practical activities, such as art performances, agricultural events, community service, and the Petik Laut tradition, act as participatory learning platforms where young people develop decision-making skills, collaborative capacities, and internalise socially relevant values through lived experience (Sundari, 2024). Leadership emerges not through formal instruction, but via hands-on involvement in organising and coordinating activities, guided in a non-dominant and facilitative manner by senior members, enabling youth to harmonise personal initiative with collective goals (Greenwood et al., 2023).

These empirical observations carry significant theoretical implications. First, they support the view that youth leadership and engagement are inherently experiential and practice-based, reinforcing participatory leadership theory by illustrating that effective leadership is cultivated through active involvement rather than formal teaching alone. Second, the findings show that participatory communication functions as a mechanism for social learning and value internalisation, demonstrating that hands-on engagement fosters empathy, communal responsibility, and collective awareness. Third, highlighting inclusive environments that recognise all participants, including quieter members, extends social participation theories by

emphasising the importance of equitable engagement and mutual recognition in sustaining collective action (Vagal et al., 2020).

The findings theoretically enrich participatory communication scholarship by affirming that digitalisation does not fully replace the role of face-to-face interaction in fostering empathy and the internalisation of social values, particularly within vertical relationships with local authorities (Che et al., 2025). Whereas earlier literature has tended to emphasise the acceleration of information dissemination through digital technologies, this study demonstrates that relational and dialogic dimensions remain foundational to meaningful participation. The integration of digital media and direct dialogue (Zhang et al., 2024). suggests that participation is hybrid rather than substitutive; accordingly, participatory communication theory should be repositioned from a model centred on information distribution towards one grounded in the co-construction of meaning through intersubjective experience.

The study also offers a conceptual contribution to the development of empathy as a structural component of community social capital. Intergenerational empathy cultivated through local cultural practices (Putro, 2023) indicates that social cohesion is sustained not only by institutional networks or organisational structures, but also by affective bonds that reinforce the continuity of youth participation. In this respect, the study extends dominant structural-institutional approaches to youth participation by advancing a relational-affective framework in which empathy operates as a mechanism for building trust, solidarity, and sustained social learning.

Positioning Karang Taruna as a dynamic social laboratory further contributes to community development scholarship by shifting the perspective from youth organisations as merely implemented entities to arenas of social transformation. Communities cannot be assumed to be inherently harmonious; rather, they contain ongoing tensions between social integration and latent conflict. Within this context, Karang Taruna functions as a space for articulating interests, negotiating meaning, and producing social solidarity. Participatory leadership, empathy, and reflexivity therefore operate not simply as normative ideals, but as social mechanisms that mediate generational fragmentation and asymmetrical local power relations through communicative practices within a hybrid digital-face-to-face ecosystem. This formulation advances community development theory from a functionalist orientation towards a relational-dialectical approach that conceptualises community organisations as generative spaces for the formation of young social agents, who are not merely recipients of social values, but reflective actors engaged in the reproduction and transformation of social structures through participatory communication practices.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that Karang Taruna functions as a socio-communicative arena in which institutional structures, youth agency, and power relations interact to shape practices of social participation. Through empathy-based participatory communication, interactions that were previously hierarchical shift toward more dialogical patterns, enabling the negotiation of meaning, the strengthening of collective ownership, and sustained youth engagement. The integration of the Research Capacity Building (RCB) approach enhances youths' reflective and discursive capacities, allowing participation to move beyond symbolic involvement toward the production of community-based social knowledge. In this context, social participation is understood as an ongoing communicative process embedded in collective learning practices, participatory leadership, and institutionalised social action. This study makes a conceptual contribution by positioning empathy as a structural component of community social capital, demonstrating that social cohesion is sustained not only through organisational structures but also through intergenerational affective bonds cultivated in local cultural practices that reinforce ongoing youth participation. It advances structural-institutional perspectives towards a relational-affective framework in which empathy operates as a mechanism for trust-building, solidarity, and social learning, while positioning Karang Taruna as a dynamic social laboratory and space of transformation. Through participatory leadership and reflexive communication within a hybrid digital-face-to-face ecosystem, the organisation mediates generational

fragmentation and unequal local power relations, thereby shifting community development theory from a functionalist orientation towards a relational-dialectical approach that views community organisations as generative spaces for forming reflective and transformative young social agents.

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