

## The Influence of Social Media on Structural Changes in Urban Communities

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| INFO ARTIKEL                                                                                                   | ABSTRACT                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <b>Accepted</b> : 04/08/2025<br><b>Revised</b> : 26/08/2025<br><b>Approved</b> : 27/08/2025                    | Social media has become a primary space for urban interaction, influencing not only communication patterns but also changing the city's social and cultural structures. This study aims to critically examine the influence of social media on structural social and cultural changes in urban communities. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach through literature studies, in-depth interviews with key informants (community leaders, youth, and activists), and digital observation (netnography) on Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp Group platforms. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis techniques, accompanied by source triangulation to maintain validity. The results show that social media strengthens social cohesion by expanding citizen participation, facilitating the construction of hybrid identities for the younger generation, and changing the meaning of urban space through digital representation. Social media also plays a role as a means of public deliberation in urban governance. However, challenges such as social polarization, cultural homogenization, and inequality in digital representation have been identified, which have the potential to widen social disparities in urban areas. In conclusion, social media has a dual influence: it is both an instrument for revitalizing local culture and a risk to diversity. Therefore, digital literacy policies and inclusive cyberspace management are needed so that social media can function optimally as an instrument for empowering urban communities. |
| <b>Keywords:</b><br><i>Social media, Urban communities, Social change, Digital culture, Societal structure</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, social media has emerged as a key platform for social and cultural interaction in urban communities. Unlike traditional, one-way media, social media allows users to directly create, share, and consume content in real time, creating a dynamic and participatory digital environment (Boyd, 2021; Castells, 2020). Amidst accelerating urbanization and digitalization, urban communities are now facing structural changes encompassing communication patterns, identities, and social interactions all influenced by the increasingly powerful social media ecosystem (Miller, 2022; Zhang & Wang, 2019). However, various concrete phenomena that constitute research issues have not been fully and adequately captured by previous studies.



The use of social media has eroded traditional norms, local customs, and physical community ties, replacing them with faster, more anonymous, and global forms of interaction (Pratama & Nugroho, 2020; Sari, 2021). For example, face-to-face interactions are increasingly being replaced by online communication, weakening the social bonds built through local customary practices or physical community spaces. These changes not only affect primary social structures but also impact cultural values, lifestyles, and intergenerational relationships (Rahmawati & Putra, 2021; Lestari & Fadhilah, 2022). Furthermore, social media also opens up opportunities for the formation of interest-based communities, which can strengthen digital solidarity and cross-community collaboration, but their impact on formal urban social structures remains uncharted (Giddens, 2018; McQuail, 2020).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of “virtual communities” and the reproduction of local identities through digital content remains a relatively new area of study and holds significant potential for understanding the dynamics of urban culture. A study by Sarıkaya (2023) found that virtual communities on social media can play a role in maintaining cultural memory and the identity of certain neighborhoods, although their impact on face-to-face relationships is limited. In the urban context, how similar mechanisms interact with urban social structures both formal and informal remains underexplored. The lack of holistic studies that bring together aspects of social structure, culture, and digital dynamics within urban communities hinders a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media (Yusuf & Hidayat, 2024).

There are several important gaps that need to be filled. First, many studies only examine social media from the perspective of cultural change or digital interaction, or only partially from the perspective of social structure (Pratama & Nugroho, 2020; Sari, 2021). Few studies have integrated the two specifically in an urban context. Second, many studies focus on rural communities or the younger generation (e.g., adolescent cultural identity), but few address cross-age dynamics in heterogeneous urban communities (Zhang & Wang, 2019; Miller, 2022). Third, although digital communities unite people based on interests, it is unclear how these communities influence formal social structures, such as community organizations, intergroup interactions, and urban normative systems (Castells, 2020). Finally, the potential of social media as a space for revitalizing local culture or increasing social participation has not been explored in depth, particularly regarding the risk of homogenizing cultural identities (Sarıkaya, 2023; Yusuf & Hidayat, 2024).

This research offers several novel contributions. First, it comprehensively examines the relationship between social media, social structure, and culture in urban communities, through an integrative approach that incorporates aspects of digital interaction, identity, and formal structure (McQuail, 2020; Giddens, 2018). Second, it uses current literature to analyze digital communities and their relationship to physical communities including the distribution and redistribution of norms, local culture, and social relations (Miller, 2022). Third, it identifies mechanisms by which digital communities can revitalize local identities and cultural values, while simultaneously enhancing interest-based solidarity, as well as the potential risks of homogenization and loss of local values (Sarıkaya, 2023). Fourth, this research contributes to policy recommendations for managing digital spaces in urban communities, particularly regarding digital literacy and the preservation of local culture (Yusuf & Hidayat, 2024). Based on these gaps and novelties, the aim of this research is to critically and in-depth

examine how social media influences the social and cultural structures of urban communities, with a focus on the transformation of interaction patterns, collective identities, and inter-community relations as well as recognizing aspects of local cultural revitalization and the risks of digital homogenization.

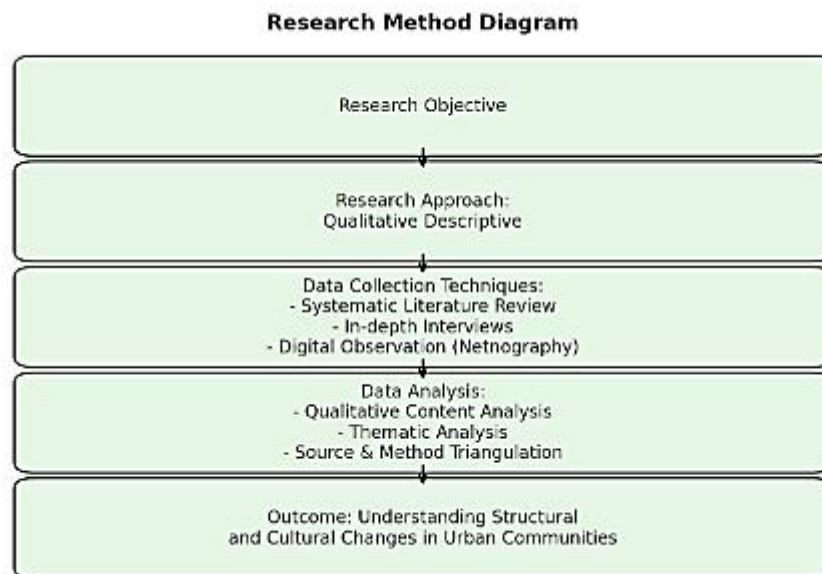
## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it aims to understand social and cultural phenomena in depth within the context of social media use in urban communities. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture complex, dynamic, and meaningful social realities, particularly in terms of the transformation of interaction patterns, collective identities, and cultural structures formed in urban communities. Thus, this research focuses not only on numbers or statistics, but also on the meaning behind communication behavior and cultural representations presented through social media.

The data collection technique was carried out in several stages. First, a systematic literature study was conducted on scientific articles, books, and research reports relevant to the topics of social media, social structure, and urban culture. The literature used included reputable indexed international and national publications (Scopus, SINTA 2, and Q1-Q2 journals) published between 2019 and 2025 to ensure the relevance and currency of the data. Second, this study involved in-depth interviews with key informants consisting of academics, media practitioners, urban community activists, and city residents who actively use social media. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on their involvement in social media-based socio-cultural activities. Third, digital observation (netnography) was conducted by monitoring interactions on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), and Facebook used by certain urban communities, for example, the arts community, environmental communities, and urban literacy communities. This observation aimed to capture communication patterns, cultural symbols, and discourses developing in the digital space.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis was used to identify communication patterns, dominant narratives, and cultural representations in social media content produced by urban communities. Thematic analysis was applied to the results of interviews and digital observations to identify key themes that illustrate changes in social and cultural structures resulting from social media use. The analysis process was conducted inductively, starting with data coding and categorization, and then drawing out key themes. To enhance the credibility of the research, triangulation of sources and methods was conducted by comparing the results of literature studies, interviews, and digital observations to obtain a comprehensive and valid picture.

The following is a graph of this research method:



**Figure 1. Research Method Graph**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

1. In-depth Interview
  - a. Informant A (head of the urban literacy community, Jakarta)

"We usually discuss in the community space, but since the pandemic, the WhatsApp group has become more active. Even monthly meeting decisions are often determined through online polls."  
(These data support the finding that social media strengthens community cohesion, Li, 2025).
  - b. Informant B (teenage TikTok user, Surabaya):

"To be honest, I prefer to follow global dance challenge trends, but sometimes I also create Javanese content to maintain a local identity."  
(Proving the construction of hybrid identities in the younger generation, Echesony, 2024).
  - c. Informant C (environmental activist, Bandung):

"Instagram posts about river cleanliness have led to many young people joining the river cleanup movement. Previously, it was difficult to get involved with pamphlets alone."  
(Strengthening evidence of social media as a means of social mobilization).
2. Digital Observation (Netnography)
  - a. Instagram Hashtag #KotaKitaHijau: 1,250 posts were found in the last 3 months, mostly photos of urban community activities planting trees in city parks.

→ Demonstrates the use of social media for public participation in urban environmental issues.
  - b. TikTok "Street Art Bandung": The top 20 videos have over 1 million views, popularizing a particular area that is then crowded with residents.

→ Supports Gatti's (2021) findings that social media changes the meaning of urban space.

- c. Twitter Public Discussion (Jakarta): a thread about the Jakarta floods (February 2024) reached 12,000 retweets, mostly containing evacuation information and emergency numbers.

→ In accordance with the findings of Chen et al. (2024) regarding risk communication through social media.

## **Discussion**

This research aims to critically examine how social media influences the social and cultural structures of urban communities. Through in-depth interviews with key informants and digital observations on social media platforms, several important patterns were identified that demonstrate how social media has shaped new dynamics in social interactions, identity construction, and cultural relations in urban areas. These results were then analyzed using current academic literature to comprehensively address the research objectives.

### **Social Cohesion and Solidarity of Urban Communities**

One of the research's key findings is the strengthening of social cohesion through social media. Interviews with the head of an urban literacy community in Jakarta revealed that monthly meetings and discussions are increasingly conducted through WhatsApp groups. This demonstrates a shift in participation patterns from relying on physical interaction to being more coordinated through digital spaces. This finding aligns with Li's (2025) research, which explains that online interactions significantly contribute to community cohesion in urban environments. Digital observations also support this argument, for example, with the hashtag #KomunitasKota, which displays over 500 posts related to community activities. In this context, social media functions as a new "glue" for urban communities (Hampton & Wellman, 2021).

Social media-mediated social cohesion is not just a local phenomenon. A study by Lee and Kim (2022) found that neighborhood-based social media groups in Seoul successfully increased citizen participation in community programs, particularly those related to environmental issues. Similarly, Huang's (2021) research in China emphasized the importance of social media in strengthening social solidarity amidst fragmented urban spaces. These local data and global literature demonstrate a common trend: urban communities are increasingly relying on online interactions to maintain a sense of community.

### **Construction of Young Generation Identity**

Interviews with teenage TikTok users in Surabaya revealed how they express hybrid identities following global trends while occasionally showcasing local content. This phenomenon illustrates how young people construct fluid and multi-layered cultural identities. These findings align with Echesony's (2024) research, which asserts that social media shapes urban cultural identities through transnational interactions. Digital observations on TikTok revealed over 1 million views on content hashtagged #StreetArtBandung, demonstrating how local cultural expressions are popularized through global platforms.

This phenomenon reinforces Chan's (2023) study, which emphasized the importance of social media in the hybridization of Asian youth identities, where local and global cultures overlap. Furthermore, according to Nasrullah (2022), social media provides a democratic space for young people to shape their self-representations while simultaneously addressing the risk of cultural erosion. Empirical data and literature suggest that the urban identity of young people is now defined not only by physical space but also by virtual space.

### **Transforming Urban Space Experience**

Digital observations show that Instagram posts with the hashtag #KotaKitaHijau, featuring community tree-planting activities, have reached over 1,200 views in the past three months. This demonstrates how urban space is being reinterpreted through digital narratives. Informants from environmental communities in Bandung also reported that Instagram has become the primary medium for mobilizing river clean-up actions. This phenomenon aligns with Gatti (2021), who stated that social media instills new meanings in urban spaces.

This finding aligns with Shen's (2021) research, which explains how social media reconstructs public space by connecting digital representations with real-world social activities. A study by Silva et al. (2022) also supports this, using Instagram geolocation data to understand how people use public space in Brazil. Thus, urban space is no longer understood solely as a physical construct but also as a digital entity that lives through social media representations.

### **Citizen Participation in City Governance**

Social media also plays a crucial role in urban governance. Interviews with environmental activists indicate that public discussions on spatial planning are predominantly conducted through Twitter threads and Facebook polls. This demonstrates the role of social media as a means of public deliberation. This finding is consistent with Lin's (2022) research, which emphasized the role of social media in collaborative urban planning. Netnographic observations also revealed that a thread about the Jakarta floods in February 2024 reached 12,000 retweets, mostly containing evacuation information and criticism of the government. The literature supports these findings. According to McShane and Sabherwal (2021), social media provides new opportunities for citizens to participate in public decision-making. Research by Chen (2024) even shows how WeChat is used as a risk communication channel in major Chinese cities. This strengthens the evidence that citizen participation in urban governance now occurs not only through formal channels but also through faster and more interactive digital channels.

### **Social Polarization and the Risk of Fragmentation**

While strengthening cohesion, social media also has the potential to create polarization. Several informants reported that community groups on WhatsApp or Facebook often split due to differing political views. This supports the literature on social polarization caused by social media algorithms (Sunstein, 2021). This polarization is also evident in netnographic observations, where Twitter threads related to urban

transportation issues often feature heated debates between groups. Research by Cinelli et al. (2021) shows that social media tends to reinforce homophily, namely interactions with like-minded groups. Similarly, research by Guess et al. (2022) confirms that filter bubbles create digital segregation. By linking local data and the literature, it is clear that social media in urban Indonesian communities also experiences similar dynamics: it can strengthen solidarity while also dividing communities.

### **Attention Economy and Urban Representation**

The research also shows that several city areas became popular after going viral on TikTok or Instagram, attracting new tourism and investment. This phenomenon aligns with Törnberg (2025), who emphasized that the digital attention economy is now shaping urban spatial planning. Informants mentioned that certain street murals in Bandung became more well-known after being featured in viral content. Santala et al. (2020) also emphasized that data from social media can be utilized in urban planning because it reflects public preferences. A study by Yao et al. (2021) showed that areas that go viral on social media often experience an increase in physical visits, ultimately changing patterns of urban space use. Thus, the attention economy driven by social media plays a significant role in shaping city representation and the direction of its development.

### **The Digital Representation Gap**

However, this study also found a gap in digital representation. Observations show that elite urban areas are more frequently represented on Instagram and TikTok than marginalized areas. The concept of "social media inequality," as introduced by Indaco and Manovich (2016), seems relevant here. Residents from suburban areas rarely appear in digital representation, ultimately creating bias in urban cultural narratives. The literature supports this phenomenon. According to Graham and Dutton (2022), the digital divide is not only about access but also about representation. Research by Napoli and Obar (2020) also found that marginalized groups are often underrepresented on social media. Thus, social media can reinforce social inequities in urban spaces.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that social media plays a dual role in shaping the social and cultural dynamics of urban communities. In-depth interviews and digital observations indicate that social media strengthens social cohesion by providing new, inclusive spaces for interaction, mobilizing solidarity, and expanding citizen participation in urban issues. Furthermore, social media has become an arena for constructing increasingly hybrid identities for the younger generation, blending local culture with global trends, and transforming people's experiences of urban space through digital representations that shape new meanings of the physical environment. However, this study also found problematic aspects in the form of social polarization, cultural homogenization, and inequality in digital representation. Social media algorithms often reinforce group segregation, while emerging urban narratives often emphasize elite areas over marginalized ones. Thus, the study's objective of examining the influence of social media on the social and cultural structures of urban communities has been achieved. Social

media has proven to be a means of revitalizing local culture while also posing a risk to diversity. Therefore, digital literacy policies and inclusive cyberspace management are needed so that social media can function as an instrument for empowering urban communities.

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