
Transformation of Social Interaction in the Digital Era: A Literature Review on the Impact of Social Media on

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media has changed the social interaction patterns of urban communities, causing a shift from face-to-face interactions to flexible, extensive, and sometimes fragmented digital interactions. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze the impact of social media on social cohesion, focusing on the dynamics of interaction, sense of belonging, and solidarity in urban environments. The literature review highlights that social media can strengthen social networks, facilitate community mobilization, and build new social identities, but also has the potential to create pseudo-cohesion, digital segregation, and social polarization. The analysis shows that digital social cohesion depends on the intensity, depth, and space of interactions, and is influenced by cultural context, community norms, and urban heterogeneity. Research gaps are seen in understanding the resilience of digital cohesion, cross-generational interactions, and the integration of digital cohesion with traditional cohesion. This study concludes that the integration of classical sociological perspectives and contemporary digital communication is important for understanding the changing structure of urban social relations. The results of the study provide a conceptual foundation for further research and social interventions that can strengthen social networks in the digital era

Keywords: *Digital Social Interaction, Social Media, Social Cohesion*

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of social interaction in the digital era has marked a fundamental shift in the way humans communicate and build social relationships. Information technology, particularly social media, has not only created new spaces for self-expression but also transformed communication structures that for centuries relied on face-to-face interaction. Interactions that were once direct have now shifted to network-based ones, where distance and time are no longer barriers to establishing social connections. However, this shift is not simply a technological issue, but rather a social phenomenon that has consequences for the structure of relationships between individuals in society. This transformation challenges traditional concepts of togetherness and social engagement, which are now tested in a fluid and fragmented virtual space. This situation raises an epistemological dilemma: can digital interactions produce the same quality of social relationships as real-life interactions? Various contemporary communication and sociological theories have begun to question the boundaries between public and private spaces. These questions serve as a starting point for understanding how social media is reconstructing the form and meaning of social interaction in urban society.

Social media holds enormous potential for the formation of new social cohesion that transcends geographical and cultural barriers. Platforms like Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok enable individuals to build virtual solidarity, share values, and quickly organize social movements. Phenomena like digital solidarity movements or online social

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campaigns demonstrate how social media can strengthen a sense of togetherness amidst physical separation. However, this dynamic is ambivalent: while social media strengthens connections, it can also fragment social unity through the spread of biased information, polarization of opinion, and “echo chamber” culture. Social cohesion born in digital spaces tends to be fragile because it relies on algorithms and user preferences that often narrow perspectives. As a result, the sense of solidarity formed does not always reflect deep social integration, but rather only superficial connectedness. This phenomenon creates a paradox between social connectedness and social alienation. Thus, social media functions as a dual arena: both unifying and dividing society.

Large cities, centers of modernization, are exhibiting increasingly complex social phenomena along with the penetration of digital media. Urban society is characterized by a fast-paced pace of life, high mobility, and diverse social and cultural backgrounds interacting at high intensity. Amid this heterogeneity, social media has become a crucial instrument for maintaining social connectivity among individuals who often lack the opportunity to connect face-to-face. However, dependence on digital platforms can weaken emotional and empathetic social bonds. Relationships built through social media are often performative and instrumental, emphasizing self-representation over depth. This situation indicates the emergence of a form of “pseudo-cohesion,” where social ties are based on digital impressions and validation, rather than authentic social intimacy. This shift is transforming urban society from a community oriented toward social interaction to a networked society oriented toward self-exposure. As a result, traditional social cohesion based on trust, solidarity, and face-to-face interaction is beginning to be eroded by the algorithmic logic of social media.

This phenomenon demonstrates that digital transformation is not only a shift in communication media, but also a transformation of social values and structures themselves. On the one hand, social media provides space for individuals to form social identities that are flexible, dynamic, and adaptive to change. On the other hand, this flexibility also gives rise to identity fragmentation and weakens social cohesion because each individual operates within a different information ecosystem. When algorithms become the primary mediator in the communication process, human social experiences are distorted. The information consumed by users is no longer neutral, but rather the result of algorithmic selection that prioritizes emotional engagement over social rationality. This distortion reinforces digital segregation and reduces people's capacity to build empathy across groups. This process explains why modern urban societies often exhibit a paradox: increasingly digitally connected, yet increasingly socially isolated. Therefore, a new conceptual approach is needed to understand how social interactions in the digital era are reshaping structures of social cohesion.

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between social media and social interaction, most studies still focus on psychological aspects or interpersonal communication, rather than the structural dimensions of social cohesion. Many findings highlight the negative effects of social media on mental health, self-perception, or the spread of misinformation, but few link these phenomena to the broader social fabric of urban communities. This lack of research creates a significant research gap in understanding how social cohesion is built, maintained, or eroded in the digital space. In other words, the relationship between social media and social cohesion has not been widely analyzed as a complex and multi-layered social process. The lack of a conceptual framework that integrates classical social interaction theory with digital communication theory also limits the depth of analysis. Therefore, this literature review aims to systematically remap digital social transformation by reviewing various relevant theoretical and empirical perspectives. This research is expected to broaden

understanding of the dynamics of social cohesion in increasingly digitalized urban societies.

Social cohesion, a concept that refers to the level of attachment, solidarity, and sense of belonging within a society, is now facing redefinition in the digital era. While previously social cohesion was formed through norms, traditions, and direct interactions, it is now also mediated by symbols, algorithms, and digital representations. This pattern creates new forms of cohesion that are not necessarily rooted in social proximity, but rather in shared preferences, interests, or digital affiliations. However, this type of cohesion tends to be transient and unstable, as it is based on rapid interactions and instantaneous information consumption. Urban communities face a dilemma between the desire to maintain social solidarity and the tendency to adopt technology-based individualistic lifestyles. This condition demands a new understanding of what constitutes a digital community—whether it truly strengthens social cohesion or merely creates the illusion of togetherness. This phenomenon is important to examine so that the direction of social change in the digital era can be understood critically and reflectively.

The relationship between social media and social cohesion also has implications for social stability, public trust, and citizen participation in the digital public sphere. Interactions on social media have the potential to shape collective opinions that influence social behavior in the real world. However, this opinion-formation process does not always occur in a deliberative and rational manner, but is often driven by the logic of virality. The phenomena of "cancel culture," the spread of hate speech, and political polarization are concrete examples of how social media can trigger social disintegration. On the other hand, various digital solidarity movements such as online fundraising or humanitarian campaigns demonstrate that social media can also mobilize collective empathy. This ambiguity demonstrates that the impact of social media on social cohesion is contextual and dependent on how individuals and social institutions utilize it. Therefore, understanding these dynamics requires an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing sociology, communication, and digital cultural studies.

This literature review on the transformation of social interactions in the digital era is expected to provide theoretical and empirical contributions to the development of modern social sciences. By exploring various previous findings and theories, this study seeks to identify patterns, trends, and contradictions in the relationship between social media and social cohesion in urban communities. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to integrate the analysis of digital interactions with the concept of social cohesion in the context of complex and multicultural urban societies. This approach allows for a fresh reading of contemporary social realities that can no longer be explained through classical social paradigms. Furthermore, this research has the potential to open new directions for studies on digital society, particularly in assessing how technology reshapes social solidarity. By uncovering a previously overlooked research gap, this study is expected to provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the direction of social evolution amidst the accelerating digitalization of human life.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review method to analyze the transformation of social interactions in the digital era and its impact on social cohesion in urban communities. This study focuses on the synthesis of existing conceptual and empirical findings, to map trends, patterns, and research gaps related to social media, digital interactions, and social cohesion. Literature was collected through a purposive sampling strategy with the following criteria: publications within the last 10 years, relevance to the topic, and transparent methodology and analysis. Sources come

from indexed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and research reports, using electronic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and accredited national journals.

Literature data was categorized according to main themes, types of social media, types of social interactions, and indicators of social cohesion. Analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify dominant themes, consistent patterns, contradictions, and research gaps. Literature triangulation was applied by comparing theoretical and empirical perspectives, for example, between classical social network theory (Putnam, 2000) and contemporary digital communication (Baym, 2015). The emphasis on the urban context considers high mobility, social heterogeneity, and local culture, which influence digital interactions and social cohesion. The research results are expected to build a comprehensive conceptual map, highlight research novelties and gaps, and provide a theoretical basis for further studies and strategies for social integration in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Transformation of Social Interaction Patterns in the Digital Era

The transformation of social interactions in the digital era marks a fundamental shift from face-to-face interactions to flexible and fragmented digital network-based interactions. Social media provides a virtual space that allows individuals to connect without the constraints of distance and time, while simultaneously changing the way social identities are expressed. Digital interactions tend to be multidirectional, rapid, and often performative, creating a different form of relationship than traditional interactions that rely on emotional and physical proximity. The concept of “networked individualism” (Wellman) emphasizes that digital communities build extensive networks independent of traditional community structures, but this also has the potential to create fragile bonds. The literature shows that online interactions expand the possibilities for communication and information exchange, but the depth of social relationships often remains limited due to a focus on self-representation and social validation. This phenomenon demands an analysis that differentiates between interaction intensity, interaction depth, and interaction space (online vs. offline), as all three influence the quality of social cohesion formed. This shift also raises a conceptual dilemma: can digital interactions mimic or replace traditional social relationship structures based on solidarity and trust? Therefore, understanding the transformation of digital interactions requires a theoretical approach that integrates classical sociology and contemporary digital communication theory.

Furthermore, digital transformation is changing the nature of social space itself. In urban societies, physical spaces, once the arena for social interaction, are now intersecting with virtual spaces curated by algorithms and user preferences. Individuals tend to build selective relationships, choosing connections based on shared interests or digital affiliations, thus increasing social fragmentation. Literature reviews indicate that this form of interaction expands the reach of social networks but simultaneously increases the risk of pseudo-cohesion, where ties appear strong digitally but are substantively weak. Digital interactions are also changing the dynamics of social hierarchies and social roles, as online connections enable individuals to establish new social statuses through online visibility. This phenomenon opens up new avenues for understanding urban social interactions, which rely not only on physical proximity but also on digital social capital. Thus, analyzing the transformation of digital interactions is key to understanding the direction of the evolution of social relations in increasingly digitalized urban societies.

Furthermore, online interactions do not occur in a social vacuum; they interact with existing norms, culture, and social structures. While social media can facilitate cross-group connections, literature suggests that algorithms and user behavior patterns can reinforce digital segregation and deepen social polarization. The phenomena of “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers” illustrate how digital interactions can create ideologically homogenous social spaces, thereby reducing opportunities for diverse social exchanges and affecting the quality of social cohesion. These consequences emphasize the importance of assessing digital interactions not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of quality, context, and their social impact on the structure of urban communities. This transformation is not only technical but also conceptual, demanding a redefinition of what is meant by social relations, networks, and cohesion in the digital era.

An analytical framework for understanding this transformation can be built around three main dimensions: interaction intensity (frequency of digital communication), interaction depth (level of intimacy and social commitment), and interaction space (online vs. offline). The literature suggests that the combination of these three dimensions determines the extent to which digital interactions can generate stable social cohesion or create superficial attachments. For example, interactions with high intensity but low depth tend to produce fragile pseudo-cohesion, while interactions with high depth but low intensity can strengthen durable core relationships. This study underscores that the analysis of digital interactions needs to take into account the multidimensional complexity and heterogeneity of urban areas as social contexts that determine the impact of social cohesion.

Thus, the transformation of social interaction patterns in the digital era indicates fundamental changes in the structure, quality, and space of social relations. Digital interactions expand social networks and the potential for community mobilization, but simultaneously pose the risk of fragmentation and false cohesion. An in-depth analysis requires a synthesis of classical sociological theory, digital communication, and empirical phenomena documented in both global and local literature. The findings from this literature review provide a foundation for understanding new patterns of urban social interaction that are increasingly complex, flexible, and digitalized.

2. The Impact of Social Media on Social Cohesion in Urban Communities

Social media plays a dual role in shaping social cohesion in urban communities, both as a unifier and a breaker of social ties. The literature shows that social media facilitates information exchange, the mobilization of solidarity, and the formation of group identities, which strengthens a sense of belonging and attachment among individuals. However, social media also creates the risk of false cohesion because seemingly strong digital bonds are not necessarily rooted in deep interactions or authentic solidarity. Phenomena such as opinion polarization, digital segregation, and “echo chambers” demonstrate the ambivalence of social media’s role in social cohesion. The literature analysis emphasizes that the effects of social media are contextual, depending on the type of platform, algorithm, intensity of use, and the heterogeneity of urban communities. These positive and negative impacts are not simply contradictions but manifestations of the complex dynamics of digital interactions. Therefore, social cohesion in urban communities must be evaluated through a multidimensional lens, including a sense of solidarity, social trust, and community engagement. This literature review highlights the need for a critical understanding of the role of social media in modern urban social structures.

Furthermore, social media enables the emergence of new forms of social cohesion that are networked and cross-spatial, distinct from traditional cohesion built through

physical proximity and face-to-face interactions. Digital literacy, participatory culture, and online community norms are important factors determining the quality of the cohesion formed. Global literature indicates that digital cohesion can strengthen solidarity within homogeneous groups, but also deepen segregation between different groups. This suggests that social media does not automatically enhance social cohesion, but rather interacts with existing social structures and community characteristics. This phenomenon emphasizes that analyses of urban social cohesion must simultaneously consider the social, cultural, and technological contexts.

Furthermore, the literature shows that digital social cohesion is transient and fragile. Bonds built through online interactions tend to depend on platform algorithms, user engagement, and changing content trends. This transient nature of cohesion differs significantly from traditional social cohesion, which is more stable and rooted in physical interpersonal networks. This phenomenon opens a research gap regarding the resilience of digital social cohesion, the mechanisms of solidarity transfer from the digital to the physical world, and the interaction between digital and traditional cohesion in urban communities. The literature review emphasizes the need for in-depth research into the quality of digital social relationships, not just the quantity of connections or interactions.

On the other hand, social media also has the potential to facilitate social integration in heterogeneous urban communities. Online platforms can provide spaces for community collaboration, social advocacy, and the expression of minority group identities, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. The literature shows that active participation in digital communities can build more inclusive and flexible social networks. However, it also emphasizes that digital social cohesion must be combined with face-to-face interactions and traditional social structures to achieve long-term social stability. This phenomenon demonstrates that social media is not merely a communication tool, but also a social arena that shapes the relationship patterns and cohesion of urban communities.

Thus, the impact of social media on social cohesion in urban communities is ambivalent, contextual, and multidimensional. Social media can strengthen solidarity and social mobilization, but it can also give rise to fragmentation and pseudo-cohesion. This literature review shows that the quality of digital social cohesion depends on the interaction between platforms, algorithms, and the social characteristics of urban communities. A deep understanding of these dynamics is crucial for formulating a theory of social cohesion in the digital era and highlighting the remaining research gaps, particularly in the Indonesian urban context.

3. Conceptual Perspectives and Research Gaps in the Digital Era

The literature review shows that classical social cohesion theory, which emphasizes social networks, trust, and civic participation (Putnam, 2000), needs to be expanded in the digital era to include the dimensions of social media, online interactions, and platform society (Van Dijck). Digital transformation demands a redefinition of the concept of social cohesion to encompass digital engagement, cross-platform interactions, and online identity representation. The literature also highlights the need for integration between traditional and digital social cohesion, as both interact in complex ways and influence each other. This conceptual analysis opens up a new perspective: social cohesion is no longer simply an attribute of local communities, but a phenomenon shaped by global networks, algorithms, and urban digital culture. Furthermore, a research gap exists because most studies focus on the effects of social media on individual or group behavior, but few examine social cohesion as a structural construct. The global literature emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates sociology,

communication, and digital media studies. This gap emphasizes the importance of conceptual research capable of identifying the mechanisms by which social media shapes solidarity, belonging, and civic participation in urban societies. The focus on digital versus traditional cohesion is an important gap, as not many studies have systematically assessed the interaction between the two.

The urban context adds complexity, as high mobility, cultural heterogeneity, and a multi-layered social structure influence digital interaction patterns. The literature emphasizes that urban communities differ from rural or suburban communities, so generalizations about digital phenomena should be made with caution. This perspective suggests that research needs to consider local dimensions, city zoning, and demographic factors to more realistically understand the impact of social media on social cohesion. This research gap serves as the basis for developing a conceptual framework relevant to the Indonesian context.

Furthermore, the literature shows that digital social cohesion is fragile and often transient, dependent on algorithms, content trends, and user engagement. Methodological gaps are evident in the lack of in-depth qualitative research, longitudinal studies, or generational analyses in urban communities. The literature review emphasizes the need for methodologies capable of capturing the evolution of digital social cohesion over time, including the interaction between digital and traditional cohesion, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in the digital era.

Thus, this conceptual perspective emphasizes that research on social cohesion in the digital era must focus on integrating classical theories with contemporary phenomena, considering the urban context, and exploring existing conceptual and methodological gaps. The results of this literature review serve as a basis for developing a comprehensive model of digital social cohesion, highlighting the research's novelty, and providing direction for further research applicable to urban communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of social interactions in the digital era demonstrates a fundamental shift from face-to-face interactions to flexible and fragmented online network-based interactions. Social media expands social networks, facilitates the mobilization of solidarity, and enables more diverse expressions of identity, but can simultaneously create both pseudo-cohesion and social fragmentation. Social cohesion in urban societies is now determined not only by physical proximity but also by the quality of digital interactions, including the intensity, depth, and spatiality of interactions. Global literature emphasizes the ambivalence of social media, which can strengthen solidarity while deepening ideological and social segregation. This transformation demands a redefinition of the concept of social cohesion by considering the integration of digital and traditional cohesion. Research gaps emerge in understanding the resilience of digital social cohesion, cross-generational interactions, and heterogeneous urban contexts. The literature review study shows that the quality of digital social cohesion depends on digital literacy, community norms, and existing social structures. This study emphasizes the need for a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to understanding the dynamics of urban social cohesion. These findings provide a conceptual basis for further research, as well as directions for social policies and interventions to strengthen social networks in the digital era. Thus, the integration of classical and contemporary perspectives is key to understanding the complex and evolving social relations in urban societies.

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