
Transformation of Social Capital in Urban Communities: A Study of Changing Interaction Patterns in the Digital Economy Era

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the transformation of social capital in urban communities as a result of the development of the digital economy and its implications for changing patterns of social interaction. The research background is based on the global shift towards a digital economy that not only affects the economic system but also the structure of social relations in urban communities. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design in an urban community with a high level of digital penetration. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation in physical and digital spaces, and documentation. Then, they were analyzed using an interactive model through data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusions. The results show a shift in interaction patterns from those based on geographical proximity to more flexible and functional digital networks. This transformation affects the forms of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital that now operate in a hybrid space between offline and online. Although the digital economy expands networks and opportunities for social participation, challenges such as shallow relationships, inequality in digital literacy, and the potential for social fragmentation remain. In conclusion, social capital is not experiencing a decline, but rather is undergoing a reconfiguration that requires adaptation and strengthening of digital literacy to maintain sustainable social cohesion in urban communities.

Keywords: Social Capital, Digital Economy, Urban Communities

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has driven a major transformation in the global economic system. The Industrial Revolution 4.0, characterized by the integration of the internet, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms, has transformed the way people work, transact, and interact. The digital economy is now a driving force for growth in various countries, both developed and developing (Ahdan et al., 2025). Economic activities that previously took place conventionally have shifted to virtual spaces through e-commerce, app-based services, and social media. These changes have impacted not only efficiency and productivity but also the structure of social relations. Communication patterns that once relied on physical meetings are now increasingly mediated by digital technology. As a result, social relations have shifted in form and meaning in everyday life. This phenomenon raises questions about how social capital adapts to the global digital economic landscape.

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In a global context, urban communities are the spaces most immediately impacted by digital transformation. Cities, as centers of economic growth and technological innovation, are experiencing significant acceleration in social change. High internet penetration and population density are accelerating the formation of digital platform-based social networks. On the one hand, technology expands access to information and economic opportunities. However, on the other hand, face-to-face social interactions are decreasing in intensity, particularly within local community relationships. This phenomenon has implications for changing patterns of social cohesion, previously built through geographic proximity. Relationships are now more functional and based on economic interests. Therefore, this dynamic needs to be understood as part of the transformation of social capital in the digital economy era.

Social capital conceptually refers to networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation within society. In both traditional and modern societies, social capital plays a crucial role in maintaining social stability and solidarity. Trust between individuals is the primary foundation for building productive social relationships (Mutria & Sri, 2025). However, in the context of global digitalization, the forms and mechanisms of trust formation are changing. Technology-mediated interactions often reduce the depth of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, digital platform algorithms tend to create homogenous social groups through filter bubble mechanisms. This situation has the potential to narrow the space for dialogue between different social groups. Thus, digital transformation not only impacts the economy but also influences the structure of society's social capital (Maya, 2025).

Turning to the national context, Indonesia is one of the countries with the fastest growing digital economy in Southeast Asia. The steadily increasing number of internet users demonstrates the high adoption of digital technology across all levels of society. The development of e-commerce platforms, online transportation services, and digital payment systems has transformed the consumption behavior of urban communities (Suyatna et al., 2024). Large cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung have become centers of national digital economic activity. This transformation has encouraged the emergence of new types of jobs and shifted conventional work patterns. Economic interactions that were previously based on local communities now occur more frequently through online networks. Urban communities are increasingly dependent on digital systems to meet their daily needs. This situation has implications for the developing social dynamics in Indonesia's urban spaces.

Although Indonesia's digital economy offers opportunities for broader economic inclusion, social challenges also emerge. Inequality in technology access persists between certain social groups, creating a digital divide. Furthermore, the intense use of social media and online platforms has the potential to reduce the quality of direct social interactions (Kharisma, 2022). Several studies indicate a trend toward increasing individualism in urban areas. Neighborhood-based solidarity is being replaced by networks based on interests and professions. Urban communities that once had strong social ties now face challenges in maintaining social cohesion (Rodriguez et al., 2024). These changes impact patterns of trust formation and social participation. Therefore, the transformation of social capital in Indonesia is a relevant issue that deserves in-depth study.

Furthermore, the heterogeneous nature of Indonesian urban society complicates the dynamics of these changes. Diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds create complex social networks. In this context, social capital acts as a glue that maintains social integration. However, digitalization presents new forms of interaction that do not always strengthen local community solidarity (Roszko et al., 2025). Platform-based social

relationships are often temporary and transactional. While they expand networks, these relationships do not necessarily build deep trust. This situation indicates a shift from social capital based on physical proximity to virtual proximity. This shift is a crucial phenomenon in understanding the changing patterns of interaction in urban communities.

The transformation of social capital in urban communities is inextricably linked to the underlying economic structural changes. The digital economy encourages flexible work, high mobility, and instant consumption patterns. These dynamics indirectly influence the intensity of individual involvement in community social activities. Participation in neighborhood activities or local organizations tends to decline in some urban areas. Meanwhile, involvement in online communities has increased significantly. This phenomenon indicates a redefinition of social space from physical to digital. Consequently, the forms of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital have undergone adjustments. This underscores the importance of research into changing interaction patterns in the digital economy era.

Based on this description, it is clear that the transformation of the digital economy has broad implications for the social structure and dynamics of urban communities. Shifts in interaction patterns from face-to-face to digital mediation influence how individuals build trust and social networks. In the Indonesian context, the acceleration of digitalization in urban areas reinforces the urgency of studying this phenomenon. In-depth research is needed to identify new forms of social capital emerging amidst these changes. Furthermore, it is crucial to analyze the extent to which this transformation strengthens or weakens community social cohesion. A comprehensive understanding will help formulate social development strategies that are adaptive to the digital era. Therefore, studying the transformation of social capital in urban communities is relevant and strategic in addressing the challenges of the times. The focus of this study is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to understanding changing patterns of social interaction in the digital economy era.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the transformation of social capital in urban communities in the digital economy era. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the meaning, experiences, and dynamics of social interactions constructed by individuals in the context of social change. The research location was determined purposively in urban communities with high levels of digital economy penetration. Informants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, including digital economy actors, local community members, community leaders, and citizens active in digital activities. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation in both physical and digital spaces, and relevant documentation studies. Data analysis used an interactive model that included data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, as well as member checking with informants. The analysis focused on changes in interaction patterns, trust transformation, shifts in social networks, and their implications for social cohesion in urban communities.

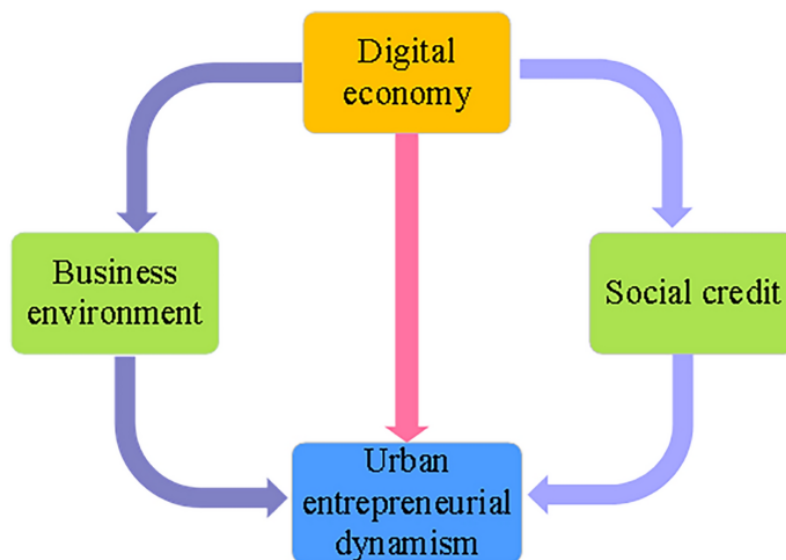


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Diagram

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changing Patterns of Social Interaction in Urban Communities in the Digital Economy Era

The research results show that the intensity of digital platform use in urban communities has increased significantly over the past five years. Informants stated that daily communication occurs more through instant messaging applications and social media than in-person meetings. Coordination of community activities, previously carried out through face-to-face meetings, is now often shifted to online groups. This change occurs due to factors of time efficiency and ease of communication access. Furthermore, the high work mobility of urban communities encourages a preference for flexible communication (Harun & Yigitcanlar, 2025). This condition causes social interactions to become faster but less emotionally deep. Several informants acknowledged that closeness between residents is no longer as intense as before. Nevertheless, digital communication is still considered effective in maintaining basic connectedness among community members. These findings indicate a shift in the structure of interaction from conventional patterns to technology-based ones.

These changes in interaction patterns have not only impacted communication media but also the meaning of social relations themselves. Interactions previously built through routine encounters have now shifted to communication based on specific needs. Social relationships tend to be formed based on functional interests, such as economic transactions or information exchange (Galihleo et al., 2025; Nugroho & Putri, 2024). This situation indicates that instrumental rationality is increasingly dominant in social relations in urban communities. On the other hand, digital space allows individuals to build broader networks without geographical boundaries. This opens up opportunities for cross-regional collaboration that were previously difficult. However, this network expansion is not always accompanied by deeper interpersonal relationships. Some informants stated that online interactions are often temporary. Therefore, changing interaction patterns present new dynamics in the social structure of urban communities.

Furthermore, the study found that physical and digital spaces are now integrated, forming hybrid communication patterns. Community activities often begin

through online coordination before being implemented offline. This integration demonstrates that digitalization does not completely replace face-to-face interactions. Instead, technology serves as a connecting medium that accelerates the communication process. However, the quality of participation in physical meetings varies. Several informants stated that emotional engagement is more pronounced in face-to-face interactions. This indicates that physical spaces still play a significant role in strengthening social cohesion. Thus, changes in interaction patterns are not dichotomous, but rather complementary. This dynamic demonstrates the community's adaptation to the demands of the digital economy era.

Furthermore, changing interaction patterns also affect the distribution of social roles within communities. Individuals with high digital literacy tend to be more active in online communication processes. They often act as information liaisons and coordinators of community activities. Conversely, members less familiar with technology are potentially marginalized. This situation creates a new stratification based on digital capabilities. In the long term, this inequality can affect the balance of social participation. Therefore, the transformation of interactions is not only related to media but also to the distribution of social power. This phenomenon demands attention to aspects of digital inclusivity. Thus, changing interaction patterns have structural implications in urban communities (Fikri & Junaidi, 2024).

Overall, the research findings indicate that changes in interaction patterns are an adaptive response to the development of the digital economy. Urban communities are not completely abandoning old patterns but are combining them with new mechanisms. This shift reflects social flexibility in the face of technological modernization. Despite increased efficiency, the depth of interpersonal relationships faces certain challenges. Therefore, efforts are needed to maintain a balance between online and offline interactions. This strategy is crucial to prevent social cohesion from being eroded by the dominance of virtual communication. Balanced integration of social spaces can strengthen community sustainability. Thus, changes in interaction patterns serve as the foundation for broader social transformation. These findings form the basis for the analysis of changes in social capital in the following section.

Transforming Social Capital: From Local Ties to Digital Networks

The research findings show that social capital in urban communities is shifting in form and orientation. Bonds based on proximity are no longer the sole source of solidarity. Most informants stated that professional networks and online communities now play a significant role in their lives. Trust is built not only through physical interactions but also through digital reputation. Review and testimonial systems on online platforms have become new mechanisms for building trust. This indicates a transformation in social legitimacy mechanisms. However, face-to-face trust remains considered stronger in certain contexts. This shift indicates a duality in the sources of social capital. This transformation broadens the spectrum of urban social networks (Nainggolan & Mesra, 2025).

Regarding bonding social capital, the study found a decline in the intensity of interactions within the neighborhood. Mutual cooperation activities and regular meetings decreased in frequency. However, solidarity did not disappear completely, but rather changed in form. Communication through digital groups allowed coordination to continue even without physical meetings. Emotional bonds were maintained through the exchange of information and online support. This condition indicates that bonding is mediated by technology. This transformation reflects adaptation to time constraints and high mobility. Thus, bonding social capital is not completely weakened but is

reconfigured (Yain et al., 2026). This phenomenon demonstrates the flexibility of the community's social structure.

Meanwhile, bridging social capital shows more significant development. Digital platforms enable individuals to connect with previously unreachable social groups. Networks across professions and regions become easier to build, expanding access to economic resources and information. Collaborations forged through digital spaces increase opportunities for community innovation. However, these relationships are often pragmatic and project-based. The depth of interpersonal relationships within bridging networks tends to be limited. Nevertheless, this network expansion enhances the adaptive capacity of urban communities. The transformation of bridging social capital demonstrates the expansive dimensions of the digital economy.

In terms of linking social capital, technological advances facilitate public access to formal institutions. Digital-based public services expedite administrative processes and communication with the government. Informants stated that participation in social programs is easier through online systems. This situation increases transparency and accountability in vertical relationships. However, the gap in digital literacy remains a barrier for some groups. Those with less skills are at risk of not receiving optimal benefits. Therefore, linking social capital is strongly influenced by technological adaptability. This transformation demonstrates the close relationship between digitalization and institutional structures. Thus, changes in social capital are multidimensional.

Comprehensively, the transformation of social capital reflects the process of adapting to the digital economic structure. This shift does not mean the elimination of old values, but rather their integration in a new format. Social capital now operates in a hybrid space that combines physical and virtual dimensions. Trust, networks, and social norms are experiencing contextual redefinition. The main challenge lies in maintaining a balance between efficiency and depth of relationships. Communities that are able to manage this integration demonstrate greater social resilience. Conversely, unpreparedness to adapt has the potential to lead to fragmentation. Therefore, the transformation of social capital must be understood as a dynamic process. This analysis provides a foundation for assessing its implications for social cohesion.

Implications of Social Capital Transformation on Social Cohesion of Urban Communities

The research findings indicate that the transformation of social capital has complex implications for social cohesion. On the one hand, digital networks expand citizen participation in various social activities. Information about community activities can be disseminated quickly and evenly, increasing opportunities for flexible community engagement. However, the increase in quantitative participation does not always correspond to the quality of engagement. Several informants stated that online participation tends to be symbolic. Physical presence in social activities still carries stronger emotional significance. This situation indicates a difference in the quality of cohesion between digital and physical spaces. Therefore, social cohesion undergoes a transformation in form and expression.

Furthermore, social cohesion is influenced by the level of inclusiveness of digital access. Communities with high digital literacy demonstrate greater adaptability. Conversely, vulnerable groups with less access to technology face the risk of social exclusion. This inequality has the potential to create new social distances within communities. This situation demands local policies and initiatives to strengthen digital literacy. Technology integration must be accompanied by an inclusive, participatory approach. This way, digital transformation does not lead to social fragmentation. Social

cohesion depends on the distribution of access and the adaptive capacity of citizens. This demonstrates the interconnectedness of structural and cultural aspects.

Furthermore, research has found that community solidarity tends to be situational. Social support often emerges quickly in digital spaces when specific events occur. Collective responses to social issues can be mobilized through online platforms. However, this solidarity is not always sustainable in the long term. The intensity of support can decline as public attention shifts (Hilalludin et al., 2025). This situation indicates that digital cohesion is volatile. Therefore, institutional mechanisms are needed to maintain consistent solidarity. A combination of formal structures and informal networks is crucial. Therefore, social cohesion requires systemic strengthening.

Furthermore, the dynamics of social cohesion are also influenced by digital communication culture. Online interactions often give rise to polarized opinions that can disrupt community harmony. Differences in views are more easily escalated in virtual spaces. This situation has the potential to weaken trust among community members. Therefore, digital communication literacy is a key factor in maintaining social stability. Strengthening social media ethics can prevent horizontal conflict. Communities with clear communication norms tend to be more stable. Thus, social cohesion depends not only on networks but also on the quality of interactions. Digital transformation requires strengthening collective values.

Overall, the implications of social capital transformation for social cohesion are ambivalent. The digital economy opens up opportunities for broader collaboration while simultaneously presenting new challenges. Social cohesion can be maintained if communities are able to integrate digital and physical spaces in a balanced manner. This effort requires adaptive and participatory community leadership. Strengthening digital literacy is a crucial strategy for maintaining inclusivity. Furthermore, revitalizing offline activities can deepen emotional closeness among residents. The combination of these two approaches will strengthen the social resilience of urban communities. Therefore, social capital transformation should not be understood as a threat. Instead, it can be an opportunity to build more adaptive social cohesion in the digital economy era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the transformation of social capital in urban communities is a logical consequence of the development of the digital economy, which has changed the patterns of social interaction in society. The shift from face-to-face interactions to digital platform-based communication has reconstructed the way individuals build networks, trust, and social participation. Social capital has not experienced a complete decline, but rather has been reconfigured into a more hybrid form between physical and virtual spaces. Bonding social capital persists through technological mediation, while bridging and linking social capital has expanded through broader access to digital networks. However, these changes also present challenges in the form of potential shallow relationships, inequality in digital literacy, and the risk of social fragmentation. The social cohesion of urban communities depends heavily on the ability of residents to balance online and offline interactions proportionally. Communities that adapt to digitalization tend to have stronger social resilience than less inclusive communities. Therefore, the transformation of social capital in the digital economy era needs to be managed through strengthening digital literacy, revitalizing direct interactions, and participatory social strategies to maintain social cohesion sustainably.

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