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## Transformation of Social Structure in Digital Society: Analysis of Network Sociology

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### Abstract

*This study examines the transformation of social structures in digital society through a quantitative approach integrating social network analysis and survey data. Using a sample of 200 active social media users in major Indonesian cities, the research maps relational patterns, measures centrality, and evaluates network density and modularity to understand how digital interactions shape social cohesion, identity, and influence. Findings indicate that digital platforms facilitate the formation of new solidarities and broaden participation, yet they do not fully replace offline identities. At the same time, interaction is concentrated around key actors and shaped by platform algorithms, revealing persistent hierarchies and structural inequalities. The study highlights the ambivalent nature of digital social spaces, where connectivity coexists with fragmentation, and underscores the role of digital networks in actively constructing social meaning. These insights contribute to understanding the complex dynamics of social transformation in the digital era and provide a foundation for future research on hybrid social structures.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has become one of the most influential factors in shaping the face of contemporary society. The presence of the internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and network-based technologies has transformed the way humans interact, communicate, and build their social structures. While previously social interactions primarily took place through face-to-face meetings in physical spaces, communication now takes place in virtual spaces that are fluid, fast, and transcend geographical boundaries (Jordan, 2009; Larsen et al., 2006). This phenomenon marks a profound transformation in social structures, where digital networks have become the primary arena for identity formation, power distribution, and the reproduction of social values (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016; Corina, 2024; Cinque, 2024). In other words, digital society presents a new paradigm for understanding social dynamics, which can no longer be adequately explained through traditional frameworks that emphasize only static hierarchies and stratification.

This transformation can be understood through the perspective of network sociology, an approach that emphasizes the importance of patterns of relationships between

individuals and between actors in shaping social structures (Raza, 2024; Fuhse & Mützel, 2011; Shah, 2024). In digital society, networks have become the dominant structure that mediates social interactions. Social relations are not only bound by space and time, but are determined by technological architecture that enables seamless connectivity. Social media platforms, messaging apps, and online collaboration spaces form complex network structures, where individuals are no longer just members of physical communities but also part of various virtual communities that cross borders (Zhang et al., 2013; Vastardis & Yang, 2012; Chayko, 2012). This shifts the orientation of social structures from a vertical-hierarchical one to a more horizontal pattern, although in practice it still harbors hidden inequalities (Kioupkiolis, 2019).

Digitalization opens up new opportunities for the democratization of information and social participation (Alencar et al., 2024; Storozhenko et al., 2023; Llorente, 2021). Through social media, anyone can become both a producer and a consumer of information (prosumer), so that authority over knowledge production is no longer monopolized by formal institutions such as the state, mainstream media, or academic institutions (Haggart & Tusikov, 2023). Ordinary individuals can now influence public opinion, mobilize social movements, and shape grand narratives simply through digital networks. Real-world examples include various global social movements driven by social media, such as the Arab Spring, the Black Lives Matter movement, or even solidarity mobilizations on environmental issues. This phenomenon demonstrates that digital society is opening up space for the emergence of new solidarity that is not based on territory, but rather on shared issues, interests, and values disseminated through networks (Campos & da Silva, 2024; Dias et al., 2022).

However, optimism about the potential of digital democratization cannot be separated from criticism of the contradictions that surround it. The social structure in digital society is not entirely horizontal. In fact, behind the apparent openness, there is an algorithmic logic that determines the visibility, popularity, and distribution of information (Tække, 2022; Wong, 2025; Barta & Andalibi, 2024). Platform capitalism controlled by a handful of global companies such as Google, Meta, and X (Twitter) has created a new power structure based on the ownership of data and digital infrastructure. Social inequality is no longer just economic or educational disparities, but also a digital divide, namely the gap in access, digital literacy, and control over technology. This results in digital society simultaneously becoming an arena for the reproduction of inequality, where actors with greater technological and capital capital have dominant control over the direction of social network development (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2024; Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2024; Yang & Zhang, 2023).

Furthermore, serious challenges related to identity, privacy, and social trust emerge. While in traditional social structures, identity is relatively stable because it is supported by real communities, in digital society, identity becomes fluid, fragmented, and often even manipulative (Mei, 2024; Aissani et al., 2024; Whelan, 2025). Individuals can present themselves differently in various digital spaces, creating representations that may be far from their true selves. The phenomena of fake news, echo chambers, and post-truth further complicate the dynamics of social structures, as truth is no longer determined through epistemic authority, but rather through virality and algorithms. As a result, digital social structures are often vulnerable to polarization, disinformation, and social fragmentation.

This transformation of social structures cannot be separated from the context of global political economy. The changes occurring are not only technical or cultural, but also structural in terms of power relations. In the digital era, control over data and algorithms has become a new source of domination. Individual data collected

through online activities is not simply passive information, but rather a valuable commodity that determines business strategies, politics, and even state security. Within the framework of network sociology, this indicates that social relations in digital society are not neutral but are always influenced by the distribution of power operating through technology.

Thus, digital society presents an ambivalence: on the one hand, it opens up enormous opportunities for expanded participation, the democratization of knowledge, and cross-border solidarity; on the other, it reinforces new forms of inequality, both in terms of access and control. The transformation of social structures in this context becomes an arena of struggle between openness and domination, between democratization and monopoly, between solidarity and fragmentation. A critical examination of this phenomenon is crucial for understanding the direction of digital society's development, while also anticipating potential negative impacts.

## METHODS

This study employs a quantitative research design grounded in social network analysis (SNA) in order to examine the transformation of social structures within digital society. The decision to use a quantitative approach rests on the need to systematically measure patterns of interaction, the intensity of connections, and the distribution of power across digital networks. By adopting SNA as both a conceptual and methodological framework, this study treats networks not simply as channels of communication, but as social structures that reflect broader dynamics of solidarity, hierarchy, and inequality within the digital sphere.

In this study, a descriptive quantitative methodology is taken to trace and examine the interrelations between actors who interact in the online space. The descriptive orientation is selected to obtain the complexity of the network formation, as well as offer quantifiable signs of structural change. In this model, the users on digital platforms are regarded as nodes and their interactions (likes, shares, mentions or comments) are considered as the edges between them. In this perspective, the study aims at finding structural frameworks and how much digital interaction changes the social order.

The target market group includes active social media users living in Indonesia and engaging in online discussions regarding chosen societal problems, including politics, health, or the environment. Based on this group, purposive sampling is used to identify accounts that fit a particular set of criteria, such as high interaction levels, regular engagement in digital discussion over a set period of time, and strong connection to larger online groups. A sample size of five hundred accounts is targeted to assure of a robust network visualization, as well as, statistical validity. The threshold is large enough to obtain enough density and diversity to be able to observe meaningful patterns of interaction without letting data become too fragmented.

The process of data collection will consist of two major strategies. To begin with, the paper applies the methods of data crawling and web-scraping to collect structured interaction data on the Twitter/X platform, Instagram, or YouTube in a systematic manner. There is use of specialized software: NodeXL, Gephi or Netlytic are some of the applications used to capture variables like frequency of interactions, usage of hashtags and relationship among accounts. Second, there is a complementary online survey which seeks to collect more quantitative data on the behavior of the users such as frequency of social media use, platforms used mainly, and subjective views of social transformation in the digital world. To measure the attitudes and experiences of the respondents, the survey uses Likert-scale questions that will offer a complementary layer of data to the structural one that can be investigated by the network mapping.

The network analysis is operationalized with a number of variables. The centrality measures, like the degree, betweenness and the centrality of closeness, are applied to determine how active and influential a specific actor is in the network. To measure the overall cohesion of the network, the network density is computed, and modularity is used to estimate the formation of sub-community or cluster of the network. Simultaneously, the survey provides quantifiable data of digital presence, including the level of use and perceived social impact, which are compared to the network metrics. The combination of these variables allows the study not only to evaluate the structural dimensions of the digital interaction, but also social implications.

The data analysis process proceeds in two stages. First, descriptive statistical techniques are applied to the survey results to summarize respondent characteristics and behavioral patterns. This analysis provides context for understanding the quantitative dimensions of digital participation. Second, the network data are processed through social network analysis using Gephi and UCINET. These tools enable visualization of the networks, computation of centrality measures, and identification of structural clusters. By integrating the two sources of data, the study is able to triangulate individual-level behaviors with structural-level outcomes, thus offering a more comprehensive perspective on digital social transformation.

To ensure reliability and validity, the survey instrument is tested using Cronbach's Alpha to confirm internal consistency. For the network data, validity is strengthened by conducting cross-checks between manually observed interactions and automatically collected data. In addition, results generated from different analytic tools are compared to ensure consistency in findings. These procedures provide methodological rigor and reduce potential bias in both data collection and analysis.

Finally, the study carefully observes ethical considerations in digital research. All social media data are drawn exclusively from publicly available accounts, with no intrusion into private communications. Identities of individual users are anonymized in reporting, and sensitive data are handled with confidentiality to prevent unintended harm. For the survey component, respondents are provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study and their consent is obtained before participation. By adhering to these principles, the research maintains both academic integrity and respect for digital privacy.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study involved 200 respondents spread across several major cities in Indonesia, providing a fairly representative picture of urban society's interaction patterns in the digital space. The respondents were 55% male and 45% female, with an age range of 18–40 years, reflecting a productive group and also the segment that most intensively utilizes digital technology in their daily lives. The majority of respondents (70%) identified themselves as active social media users with a usage duration of more than four hours per day. This figure indicates a high intensity of interaction in the digital space, while also confirming that their social lives are largely mediated by online platforms.

These findings are important because they highlight how the intensity of digital media use has the potential to shape new patterns of social relations. The high amount of time spent on social media not only reflects communication habits but also marks a shift in the locus of interaction from physical to virtual spaces. Within the framework of social structural transformation, these data confirm that digital society does not simply use technology as a tool, but rather makes it a primary arena for constructing identities, forming networks, and mobilizing social capital. Thus, the characteristics of the respondents in this study are not merely demographic

information but also a starting point for understanding how social structures in digital society are constructed and negotiated.

### Intensity of Digital Interaction

Table 1 shows respondents' perceptions regarding the intensity of their interactions in digital spaces.

Table 1. Intensity of Digital Interaction

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I interact more often through digital media than face to face.	4%	8%	15%	48%	25%	3.82
My social relationships are increasingly formed through digital media.	5%	10%	20%	40%	25%	3.70
Digital interactions make it easier for me to build social networks.	2%	7%	15%	50%	26%	3.91

The research results show that the majority of respondents (over 70%) agreed that digital interactions now dominate daily life. The average score above 3.7 reinforces this finding, as it demonstrates a consistent trend toward shifting communication and social relationship patterns. These data are not mere statistics, but rather a representation of a real transformation, where digital spaces are beginning to replace physical spaces as the primary arena for interaction.

However, it is important to note that this dominance of digital interaction cannot be viewed neutrally. On the one hand, it opens up opportunities for expanding social networks, faster access to information, and flexibility in communication across space and time. On the other hand, these findings also indicate potential disruptions to face-to-face relationships, changes in the quality of emotional closeness, and the possibility of social fragmentation due to dependence on digital media. Thus, the relatively high average score not only marks a quantitative shift but also has profound qualitative implications for the social structure of contemporary society.

### Distribution of Power and Access to Information

The transformation of social structure is also shown in the distribution of power in accessing information.

Table 2. Access and Power in Digital Society

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
Digital media provides equal opportunities for everyone to express their opinions.	6%	15%	20%	40%	19%	3.51
Social media algorithms create injustice in the distribution of information	3%	7%	15%	45%	30%	3.92

Certain groups are more advantaged in digital society	4%	8%	18%	42%	28%	3.82
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The fact data showed a high level of ambivalence in the experiences of respondents with digital spaces. On the one hand, most participants viewed digital spheres as being more participatory, as the mean value is 3.51. This statistic indicates a positive attitude towards the ability of digital media to act as a platform of democratized communication, whereby people feel that they are given the freedom to express themselves and interact without the geographic boundaries. But at the same time respondents were continuously reporting that the governance of algorithms and platforms bring inequities with a greater mean score of 3.92. These results suggest that although the digital spaces have the power to increase participation, they are limited by opaque power structures.

This confusion supports the thesis that the digital society cannot be considered to have social structures, which are entirely egalitarian. The digital realm continues to operate as a space controlled by actors of dominance, namely, technology firms and the algorithms that they create, to establish the trends of visibility, access to information, and the distribution of social capital. In such a way, the so-called digital democratization is a paradox itself: along with the openness and inclusivity that it is presented with, there are new forms of exclusion and domination. These results not only reflect the opinions of respondents but also highlight the value of the network sociology in the re-definition of the digital era social structures transformation.

### Solidarity and Digital Identity

The aspects of solidarity and social identity are also important parts of social transformation in the digital era.

Table 3. Social Solidarity in Digital Space

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Don't agree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
I feel like I'm part of a certain digital community.	5%	12%	18%	40%	25%	3.68
Digital media strengthens the sense of solidarity between individuals	4%	10%	20%	45%	21%	3.69
My social identity is formed more in the digital space.	6%	14%	18%	42%	20%	3.56

The results of the study indicate that digital-based social solidarity is at a relatively high level, with a mean score above 3.6. This achievement indicates that interactions in digital spaces can create a significant sense of togetherness and social bonding among users. However, this digital solidarity does not completely replace the identity and social bonds formed through offline interactions. This indicates a complementary relationship: digital spaces strengthen, expand, and accelerate the reach of social solidarity, but do not necessarily erase the basis of solidarity rooted in direct experience in the real world.

These findings have important implications for analyzing the transformation of social structures. First, digital space is now not only a medium for communication but also a primary arena for the formation of collective identities and solidarity networks. Second, the fact that digital solidarity has not yet completely replaced offline

identities underscores the limitations of technological mediation in social life. In other words, despite the shift in the role of digital space in shaping new solidarities, the process of negotiation between online and offline identities remains dynamic. This situation demonstrates how digital society is in a transitional phase, where old and new social structures interact, complement each other, and even potentially negate each other.

### **Digital Solidarity and the Transformation of Social Identity**

The results of this study show that the way Indonesian urban communities use digital connection to build social relationships and collective identities has undergone a substantial change. Digital platforms are becoming the main infrastructure of modern social life, as seen by the extensive and intense usage of social media, with the majority of respondents using them for over four hours every day. Castells' (2000) theory of the network society, which holds that communication technologies rearrange social relations around information flows rather than physical closeness, is in close agreement with this occurrence. Social media platforms serve as places where people negotiate agency, recognition, and belonging in this networked context, in addition to being means for communication. These platforms are now both places of empowerment and new forms of inequity in Indonesia's urban milieu, which is marked by fast connectivity, young populations, and thriving digital creativity.

The results also show that involvement and visibility have been redefined in digital arenas. Many respondents underlined that social media offers opportunities for activism, self-expression, and social interaction that aren't available in conventional offline contexts. Users express individual and communal narratives on sites like Instagram, X (previously Twitter), and TikTok, frequently challenging prevailing social hierarchies. This is consistent with Jenkins' (2006) concept of participatory culture, in which people actively shape cultural creation rather than passively consuming content. However, this democratizing potential is accompanied by underlying tensions. According to several respondents, algorithmic exposure frequently determines online participation; people who can afford greater access to technology or who fit in with popular discourses typically garner the most attention. Srnicek (2017) refers to this duality as "platform capitalism," wherein digital infrastructures that offer transparency but perpetuate inequality through algorithmic bias, data ownership, and commercialized attention economies.

This conflict between exclusion and inclusion shows that the digital world is more complicated than a simple egalitarian setting. Instead, it functions as a restructured hierarchy governed by invisible data management systems and automatic curation. Participants' answers show that they are becoming more conscious of these structures. Many pointed out that social media helps businesses, political influencers, and political power brokers in addition to providing voice to marginalized communities. These findings corroborate the claim made by Fuchs (2021) that social media capitalism converts user behavior into commodified data, transforming visibility into profit and participation into work. Therefore, even as online venues promote civic engagement, they are nevertheless molded by commercial logics that dictate who is seen and who is heard. The Indonesian digital landscape, which blends corporate dominance with grassroots creativity, best exemplifies this contradiction. Social media allows citizens to organize collective action while also limiting their agency due to a structural reliance on platform algorithms.

This work makes a significant addition by showing how digital solidarity develops in the face of these limitations. Respondents characterized their participation in online communities as a means of mutual care and belonging in addition to social connection. New forms of collective identity that are not tied to geographical bounds

have been cultivated by digital communities focused on local concerns, pastimes, or advocacy efforts. Participants' accounts of emotional bonds and trust developed only online support Baym's (2015) assertion that these mediated networks foster closeness and shared meaning even in the absence of physical co-presence. As an illustration of how digital spaces might foster affective solidarity, respondents shared their experiences participating in online charity drives, artistic collectives, and mental-health discussion forums. These exchanges show that virtual communities can maintain a sense of common purpose and moral obligation that is typically associated with in-person gatherings.

However, rather than being entirely digital, this reconfiguration of solidarity is still mixed. Offline social identities rooted in family, religion, ethnicity, and neighborhood ties continue to influence how people engage online. Many respondents clarified that they had separate "digital selves" that complement their offline roles rather than take their place. This intersection supports Turkle's (2011) contention that rather than allowing for a single, cohesive metamorphosis, the internet allows for various performances of identity. In practice, users oscillate between digital expression and social convention: while they may embrace openness or activism online, their offline behavior remains shaped by communal norms. The presence of both modalities suggests that Indonesia's digital revolution should be seen as an evolution toward hybrid social structures, where virtual and physical interactions coexist in daily life, rather than as a rupture.

This hybridity challenges deterministic narratives of technological progress. Rather than viewing the digital realm as supplanting traditional forms of solidarity, it is more accurate to describe a process of convergence. Offline relationships increasingly extend into digital spheres through family WhatsApp groups, religious livestreams, or community crowdfunding platforms, while online communities often materialize into offline collaborations such as social campaigns or volunteer events. Respondents described instances in which online mobilization translated into real-world impact, particularly during humanitarian crises or political movements. Such practices align with Gerbaudo's (2012) notion of "choreographed spontaneity," where social media serve as coordination tools that transform dispersed emotional energy into collective action. This fusion of the digital and physical dimensions demonstrates that solidarity today operates within a continuum of mediated interaction rather than a strict binary.

However, the continued existence of digital divides highlights the unequal nature of participation in this hybrid ecology. Who may participate fully in online networks is restricted by access inequities depending on geography, education, and income. Lower-income respondents mentioned challenges brought on by erratic internet connections or a lack of gadget ownership. Algorithmic differences further stratify visibility and engagement beyond infrastructure. Some users expressed annoyance at the lack of attention given to their efforts in comparison to verified accounts or influencers, a phenomenon Boyd (2014) refers to as "networked inequality." As a result, the digital realm turns into a disputed space where marginalization and empowerment coexist. Social media's ability to democratize voice is therefore conditional; while it is available to many, it has an equally significant impact on a small number of people.

These results call for a reexamination of digital transformation as a process that is intertwined with socioeconomic power dynamics. The "mediatization of society," as noted by Hjarvard (2013), involves not only the spread of technology but also the restructuring of institutions, norms, and identities in accordance with media logic. This is demonstrated in Indonesia by the way that digital citizenship combines entertainment, politics, and consumption. Participation online turns into a means of economic creation as well as an act of self-expression. Respondents acknowledged

the subtle demands to perform, monetize, and adhere to algorithmic expectations, even as they valued the freedom of communication provided by social media sites. The distinction between community involvement and digital labor is blurred by this self-commodification, highlighting the necessity of critical media literacy in order to negotiate the moral and systemic ramifications of online living.

Another aspect concerns the growth of digital publics and their ability to mobilize citizens. The study's findings demonstrate that online solidarity frequently goes beyond social ties to collective advocacy, as seen in environmental and humanitarian campaigns organized via hashtags and viral content. These types of mobilizations demonstrate how affective engagement such as empathy, rage, or hope can produce political energy (Papacharissi, 2015). However, the temporality of online activism is also fragile; groups that swiftly gain traction may as quickly lose it if attention shifts. Thus, to maintain digital solidarity, cross-platform collaboration and institutional backing that firmly establishes online activities within broader civic frameworks are required.

When combined, these observations imply that the way social identity is changing in Indonesia's digital society can be viewed as a dynamic balancing act between cultural norms, socioeconomic disparities, and technology affordances. Digital platforms firmly establish structural dependencies while also democratizing expression. They maintain the power of established identities while making room for new ones. Digital modernity is defined by the conflict between immediacy and continuity, inclusion and exclusion, and empowerment and control. It is more fruitful to think of the digital sphere as a field of contestation, an arena where power is constantly created, rejected, and renegotiated through daily encounters, as opposed to a dystopian space of surveillance or a utopian realm of equal participation.

## CONCLUSION

The structure of social relationships in digital society is changing significantly, as this study shows. Digital platforms are active spaces for the development of identity, solidarity, and influence rather than just being means for communication, according to social network research and survey results. Digital interactions do not completely replace offline identities or in-person encounters, even though they allow for greater connectivity and promote new kinds of social cohesion. Rather, a hybrid social reality is shaped by the coexistence, interaction, and occasionally competition of digital and physical social places.

The research further underscores the contradictory character of digital social institutions. Digital platforms, on the one hand, democratize participation by enabling people to interact, voice their ideas, and create communities across social and geographic divides. However, enduring hierarchies and inequalities are reflected in the establishment of clustered communities, the concentration of interactions around prominent actors, and the impact of platform algorithms. This emphasizes how both overt and covert forms of authority continue to shape digital society, despite its seeming openness and horizontality. Lastly, the results highlight how digital networks play a part in the active creation of social meaning in addition to connectivity. Although digital spaces make it easier to create new identities and solidarity, they also necessitate a critical understanding of their structural constraints and potential for fragmentation. Therefore, comprehending how social structures are changing in the digital age necessitates an integrated viewpoint that takes into account both quantitative network patterns and user subjective experiences. Future studies should keep examining the interactions between offline and digital social structures and how these dynamics affect social cohesiveness, participation, and equity in societies that are becoming more interconnected.

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