

Technology, Social Fragmentation, and Polarization in Building Inclusive and Effective Social Networks in Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of dependence on technology and the phenomenon of social fragmentation and polarization to build inclusive and effective community social networks. As technology, especially social media, develops, relationships between community members often become more superficial and less emotional, which can hinder the creation of deep solidarity. Increasing social polarization and fragmentation reduce members' opportunities to interact across groups, exacerbate social tensions, and weaken the ability of community leaders to manage relationships between members. This study uses a literature review approach to explore theories related to social communication, social capital, and leadership in communities. The results show that although technology enables broader connectivity, face-to-face interaction remains important for strengthening emotional bonds and building effective social networks. Fragmentation and polarization worsen the quality of relationships in communities, making it difficult for leaders to unite divided members. Efforts are needed to reduce social tensions by creating inclusive spaces for all groups. In conclusion, technology needs to be used as a complement to build social networks, not as a substitute for direct communication, so that solidarity between members can be maintained.

INTRODUCTION

Building a strong social network is an important element in many aspects of life in the current era of globalization and technological, including in the realm of community leadership. The existence of social media and digital platforms has made it easier for individuals to connect, share information widely, and work together more efficiently without geographical restrictions (Infante & Mardikaningsih, 2022). The shift from face-to-face to virtual interaction often reduces the depth of the social relationships formed. This causes the relationships formed to often feel more superficial and not as strong as those built through direct interaction (Darmawan et al., 2018). Effective community leadership focuses on creating deeper and more meaningful bonds, which strengthen relationships between members and increase a sense of solidarity and social support. This phenomenon shows that even though technology provides a means of connecting more widely and quickly, community leaders need to find ways to maintain deeper social values so that the social networks that are built can last and provide a positive and sustainable impact for the community (Nahon, 2015).

At a more specific level, a special phenomenon in community leadership is related to a leader's ability to manage and facilitate interaction between members to create a strong sense of togetherness. Community leaders who succeed in leading structurally and inspiring have an impact on increasing active participation, inclusiveness, and collaboration which are the foundations for creating deeper and more sustainable social relationships (Novita et al., 2022). Successful leaders are able to encourage individuals to collaborate and share ideas with each other. They are able to utilize various approaches, from joint activities to face-to-face meetings, to strengthen mutual trust and build social networks that form the basis for long-term effective collaboration. For example, in communities with diverse backgrounds, good leaders must be able to utilize this diversity as a strength, creating a space where all members feel valued and connected (Darmawan et al., 2018a). Leaders must be able to balance these differences and organize activities that can embrace all parties. This proves that successful community leadership depends heavily on the leader's ability to adapt the approach according to the needs and existing social dynamics.

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One of the main issues for building strong social networks within communities is the increasing reliance on technology, especially social media (Francescato, 2018). While technology enables greater connectivity, it often reduces the quality of interactions between community members (De Blasio & Selva, 2019). Research shows that while social media facilitates communication, relationships formed through digital platforms tend to be shallower and less meaningful than face-to-face relationships (Wellman, 2001). This reliance on virtual communication can lead to feelings of isolation or loneliness even though many people are connected online, hindering the creation of strong emotional bonds within the community (Turkle, 2011). This is a big problem for community leaders who aim to create strong solidarity among their members.

Communities consisting of various groups with different backgrounds often face challenges in maintaining harmony and solidarity among members. Social fragmentation and polarization are frequent problems, especially in communities that lack a strong foundation for mutual understanding and cooperation. Amidst differences in political, cultural or religious views, community leaders can find it difficult to unite divided members, making building strong social networks even more difficult (Putnam, 2000). Research shows that in some cases, groups within communities are more likely to form networks that are limited to their own group and neglect interactions with other groups that have differences (Klein, 2015). This phenomenon can exacerbate social tensions and reduce the sense of community.

The lack of active participation from community members is also a major obstacle to building effective social networks (Nahon, 2015). Many communities face the reality that despite having a large number of members, only a small proportion are involved in community activities. This suggests an imbalance between the potential of the community and the reality on the ground, where involvement is limited to a small group of individuals, while the majority of other members tend to be passive or even disconnected from the ongoing community dynamics. This low participation can be caused by various factors, such as lack of motivation, social fatigue, or lack of opportunities to engage in activities relevant to members' needs (Bourdieu, 1986). This makes it difficult for the community to build strong and mutually supportive social relationships, as many members are isolated or do not feel they have a meaningful role in the social network. As a result, solidarity within the community is weak, and support between members is less effective.

It is important to observe phenomena related to community leadership and strong social networks as the impact of these issues can affect the solidarity and well-being of community members in the long run. Over-reliance on technology, social fragmentation and low levels of active participation can worsen relationships between members, further hindering the creation of supportive communities. In an increasingly connected yet fragmented world, understanding how social networks form and evolve is critical to ensuring that communities remain inclusive, productive spaces that can provide the support their members need, especially in the face of complex social and economic challenges (Putnam, 2000). If these issues are not observed and addressed, communities may experience a decline in the quality of social relationships resulting in a diminished sense of solidarity and belonging, which are essential for creating positive social change.

The urgency to observe and study the issues of technological dependency, social polarization, and lack of participation in the community is increasing with the development of an increasingly complex and diverse society. In the dynamics of globalization, communities often face the challenge of building strong relationships amidst differences in culture, ideology, and technology. If issues of technological dependency, social polarization, and lack of participation are not addressed, community leadership may lose its ability to create effective and impactful social networks. Research and understanding of this phenomenon is therefore important, both to provide insights for community leaders and to design strategies that can strengthen social cohesion in the larger society (Wellman, 2001). Addressing these issues improves the internal dynamics of communities, and contributes to the strengthening of broader social structures.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the effect of technology dependence on the quality of social relationships within the community, and how it can hinder the creation of strong solidarity among members. It also aims to understand the impact of social fragmentation and polarization within the community on leaders' ability to build inclusive and effective social networks, and how these conditions affect support among members.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a literature study approach that aims to explore and analyze various relevant references on community leadership and social network building. This approach allows researchers to explore the various perspectives in the scientific literature on the challenges and problems of building strong social networks.

Through the literature review, this research will examine articles, books, and reports on related topics, and analyze theories and models that have been developed by experts in the fields of social, communication, and community leadership. For example, research by Castells (2010) on network society will serve as the basis for identifying how technology affects social relations in communities. By examining various theories and models that have been developed by experts, this research aims to gain a clearer picture of how these challenges can be overcome and how community leaders can build stronger and more effective social networks.

In this literature review approach, researchers will also discuss social phenomena that exist within the scope of globalization and social differences that affect relationships between community members. Based on the literature review, social fragmentation is often an obstacle to building effective and inclusive social networks. Putnam's (2007) study on "bowling alone" provides important insights into the decline of social trust and community participation in the modern era. This literature will help analyze how polarization and social tensions hinder community leaders to strengthen solidarity among members. Through the literature review, this research seeks to understand the more complex dynamics of social relations in communities that have various cultural and ideological backgrounds.

The literature study method also includes an analysis of various leadership and social theories that have been proposed by previous researchers, such as social capital theory by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1990), which provides a perspective on how social networks can strengthen solidarity between individuals in the community. The researcher will identify various relevant leadership models to understand how community leaders can build and maintain strong and inclusive social networks. By integrating the results of this literature study, it is hoped that this research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges community leaders face to create sustainable social ties.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Effect of Technology Dependence on the Quality of Social Relationships and Solidarity in Communities

The dependence on technology to build community social networks has become an increasingly growing phenomenon along with the rapid development of digital technology. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram, as well as instant messaging applications,

have enabled individuals to connect and communicate with others in different parts of the world. Although technology makes it easy to interact, it also has a negative impact on the quality of social relationships formed within the community (Nahon, 2015). According to Turkle (2011), digital interactions are often unable to produce the same emotional depth as face-to-face interactions, which is essential for building strong relationships. Dependence on technology makes relationships between community members often superficial, because the communication that takes place does not allow for the rich non-verbal expressions that often play a role in strengthening social bonds.

Most interactions that occur on social media are asynchronous, where responses from community members do not occur directly and can be influenced by the limitations of the technology itself (De Blasio & Selva, 2019). This causes a feeling of alienation or isolation even though many people are connected online (Darmawan et al., 2021). A study by Wellman (2001) shows that even though social media expands communication networks, the relationships formed within them tend to be weaker and less intimate. The limitations in the ability to feel and understand each other's emotional nuances through text or images alone make this communication inadequate for building strong intimacy. As a result, solidarity among community members becomes more difficult to form because interactions occur more often only at the surface level.

Dependence on technology can also reduce opportunities for direct interaction that allow community members to build trust and empathy for one another. For example, face-to-face communication allows for direct involvement in social activities, which can strengthen a sense of togetherness and solidarity. As Putnam (2000) explains, direct interaction and participation in shared activities are essential for strengthening social capital, which is a network of relationships that can help individuals achieve common goals. Without this direct interaction, it is difficult for community members to get to know each other better and develop a sense of trust, which is the foundation of strong solidarity (Francescato, 2018).

This phenomenon is also related to how social media often creates "echo chambers," which are spaces where individuals only interact with people who have the same views or interests. This is because the algorithms of social media platforms present content that matches users' preferences and reinforcing existing views. This situation exacerbates social polarization and reduces the possibility of constructive dialogue between community with different views (Sunstein, 2001).

This polarization hinders the creation of an inclusive social network, where each individual feels valued and accepted (Nahon, 2015). When community members only interact with similar groups, this can narrow their view of other different members, which ultimately hinders the creation of solidarity based on mutual understanding and cooperation.

Technology also has the potential to exacerbate the problem of alienation in communities. Although social media provides a platform for sharing information and communicating, virtual presence cannot replace the human need for physical presence and direct interaction. For example, many community members feel lonely even though they have thousands of friends on social media because they don't get the emotional support in real life. Many people experience the social paradox of feeling digitally connected but emotionally lonely. According to research by Cacioppo and Patrick (2008), social isolation can have negative impacts on individuals' mental and physical well-being. This is a serious concern for communities that rely on technology to build social networks because loneliness and social isolation can reduce solidarity among community members.

Although technology can be a useful tool for expanding social networks, over-reliance on it can reduce the quality of relationships. Digital communication often tends to be superficial and lacks the deeper emotional aspects that should be the foundation of building solidarity within the community. Therefore, it is important for community leaders to consider ways to integrate technology into social networks without replacing the face-to-face interactions necessary to build strong solidarity (De Blasio & Selva, 2019). For example, physical activities such as face-to-face meetings or social events involving community members can be a more effective way to strengthen emotional bonds between individuals (Bourdieu, 1986). In this case, technology should be used as a complementary means that supports stronger social relationships, not as a substitute.

Overall, dependence on technology to build community social networks can worsen the quality of relationships between members and hinder the creation of strong solidarity. While technology offers advantages in terms of ease of communication and expanding social networks, it also brings challenges in terms of building more emotional and intimate relationships. It is important for the community to balance the use of technology with more intense face-to-face social interactions, in order to create stronger social networks and support the creation of sustainable solidarity.

The Impact of Social Fragmentation and Polarization on the Formation of Inclusive Social Networks in Communities

Social fragmentation and polarization within communities can have a significant impact on a leader's ability to build an inclusive and effective social network. Social fragmentation refers to the separation or increasingly sharp differences between groups in society, while polarization refers to the increasing sharp differences of opinion between individuals or groups in the community (Nahon, 2015). When a community is fragmented, there are often barriers to building networks that involve all members, because these groups tend to focus more on their internal relationships and ignore interactions with other groups (Putnam, 2007). This reduces the opportunity for leaders to create social networks that connect all members of the community, especially if they are trapped in narrow social boundaries and cannot work together beyond existing differences.

Social polarization in a community can also reduce a leader's ability to rally support among members. When community members are divided into groups with very different views, whether in terms of politics, culture, or ideology, mutual trust and openness between groups diminishes (Winter, 2011). Mutual trust, which is the foundation of healthy social relationships, tends to decline when differing views are accompanied by stereotyping, prejudice and rejection of other communities. Community leaders facing social polarization often face major challenges in uniting opposing views and reducing tensions between separate groups. Research by Iyengar et al. (2012) shows that in polarized communities, it becomes increasingly difficult for individuals to form relationships that transcend their differences, further reducing the solidarity and collaboration necessary to build effective social networks.

The greater impact of social polarization on communities can be seen in the way members interact with each other. As polarization increases, individuals are more likely to seek confirmation of their own views from like-minded groups and avoid interaction with groups with different views. This makes matters worse by creating an environment that is not inclusive and hinders the creation of open channels of communication between different groups. According to research by Sapiro (2011), polarization can lead to a decline in social participation and involvement in joint activities, which in turn weakens social networks in the community. In fragmented communities, members tend to feel more isolated from each other, reducing opportunities to build better social bonds and exacerbating existing social tensions.

In community leadership, social fragmentation and polarization make the leader's task more complex. Community leaders are faced with the challenge of creating a space where all groups feel valued and accepted, even if they have different views (Francescato, 2018). This requires high diplomacy skills and the ability to manage conflict and create space for dialogue. Bourdieu (1986) argues that effective leaders must be able to manage social capital in the community, namely the various forms of relationships and existing social resources, in a way that creates a broader and more inclusive network. Leaders who are unable to overcome polarization or fragmentation will find it difficult to build solidarity among different members, because they cannot connect individuals from different backgrounds in one intact social network.

Social fragmentation and polarization also affect members' motivation to participate in community activities. When members feel isolated or unwelcome by other groups, they tend to be less involved in joint activities, which are very important for strengthening social networks. As Coleman (1990) explains, active participation in community activities increases social capital which enables the creation of mutually supportive relationships between members. However, if members feel divided or unappreciated, they are more likely to withdraw and reduce their contribution to the social solidarity needed to keep the social network strong. In these conditions, community leaders face the challenge of creating a sense of inclusiveness that encourages the active participation of all members (Nahon, 2015). Leaders need to show sensitivity to diversity and design activities that bring different groups together impartially.

The impact of social fragmentation and polarization can also reduce the capacity of communities to address common problems and achieve common goals. When social networks are fragmented, communication between groups is hampered, which has an impact on the collaboration needed to solve the problems faced by the community. For example, in the face of disaster or social crisis, a divided community may find it difficult to work together effectively. Without strong social networks and mutual trust, collective action is hampered by a lack of understanding and willingness to cooperate across groups. As Putnam (2000) argues, communities with low social capital tend to be more vulnerable to greater problems due to a lack of a sense of togetherness and solidarity. The absence of this sense has the effect of hindering the common goal being achieved. This emphasizes the importance of leadership that can reduce fragmentation and polarization, so that social networks in the community can function effectively to face common challenges.

Overall, social fragmentation and polarization in communities can undermine a leader's ability to build an inclusive and effective social network. Tensions arising from differences of opinion can hinder the creation of the solidarity needed to support collaboration between members. Successful community leaders must be able to overcome these obstacles by creating space for dialogue and inclusiveness, as well as building trust between different groups. Without an effective approach to polarization and fragmentation, social networks in the community will not develop optimally, which in turn reduces the community's ability to work together to achieve common goals.

CONCLUSION

Dependence on technology to build community social networks can affect the quality of relationships between members by creating more superficial and less emotional communication. Although technology enables broader connectivity, it often reduces the depth of interaction needed to build strong solidarity. Limited digital communication in terms of non-verbal expression and direct interaction risks making relationships within communities less strong, which in turn hinders the creation of effective social networks. This is exacerbated by the phenomenon of social fragmentation and polarization within communities, which creates gaps between members and reduces opportunities to build inclusive relationships. Polarization, whether related to differences in political views, culture, or ideology, exacerbates tensions within communities and hinders the creation of the mutual trust necessary for solid solidarity.

Increasing polarization makes community leaders face the challenge of uniting separate groups and working together for a common goal. When social fragmentation hinders interaction between members, active participation in community activities decreases, thus reducing the social capital that can strengthen social networks. In these conditions, community leaders must have the skills to manage conflict and build open communication, in order to embrace all members and reduce existing tensions. The inability to bring these groups together will hinder the achievement of common goals that require collective contributions from all members of the community. Without efforts to overcome fragmentation and polarization, communities will not be able to build effective social networks that are needed to face common challenges and strengthen long-term solidarity.

As a suggestion, it is important for community leaders to use technology as a means of communication, as well as prioritize face-to-face interaction to form deeper emotional bonds. Although technology can expand social networks, leaders need to ensure that digital platforms are used as a complement that strengthens relationships, not as a substitute for direct communication. In addition, to reduce social fragmentation and polarization, community leaders must encourage dialogue between different groups, create space for diversity, and strengthen mutual respect. Effort to embrace differences and build trust between separate groups are essential to establishing an inclusive and effective social network. With a more holistic and inclusive approach, communities can overcome existing challenges and strengthen solidarity, which ultimately improves the ability to collaborate to achieve common goals.

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