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The Influence of Social Media on Community Development: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

Social media has revolutionized the ways in which individuals communicate, share information, and engage civically within communities globally. The rapid rise of platforms like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has had a considerable impact on community development by fostering knowledge exchange, encouraging social involvement, enhancing local governance, and promoting economic growth. This literature review amalgamates empirical and theoretical research published from 2020 to 2026 regarding the role of social media in community development. It highlights both the beneficial and detrimental aspects of social media usage in communities. While it promotes participatory development, social inclusion, emergency response, entrepreneurship, education, and public health messaging, it also poses challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, digital divides, privacy issues, and online divisiveness. The review emphasizes that to fully harness the advantages of social media for development, there needs to be a focus on improving digital literacy, enacting inclusive policies, ensuring ethical governance, and fostering collaborative efforts among stakeholders.

Keywords: Social media, community development, digital communication, civic engagement, sustainable development, literature review.

Introduction

The rise of social media has drastically altered how individuals communicate, cooperate, and engage in community activities. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms facilitate interactive communication, empowering users to not only consume information but also to create, share, and exchange content instantaneously. These digital tools are crucial for fostering community engagement, strengthening social ties, enhancing local governance, creating economic opportunities, and tackling social issues (Putri et al., 2026).

Community development is typically viewed as a participatory approach through which individuals collaboratively identify their needs, mobilize resources, and devise strategies to enhance their social, economic, political, and environmental circumstances. In the digital age, social media has become a vital tool for communities to engage in collective action, share knowledge, and influence public policy through online involvement (Mendoza, 2026).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated reliance on social media for education, health communication, business promotion, humanitarian efforts, and civic participation. Even post-pandemic, digital platforms continue to shape community interactions with governments, development agencies, and each other. Recent studies indicate that social media fosters participatory governance, disaster response, public health awareness, environmental sustainability, and local entrepreneurship, while also exposing communities to misinformation, hate speech, privacy violations, and digital exclusion (Hutton et al., 2026).

Recent academic work increasingly emphasizes that community development is not limited to physical interactions. Virtual communities play a critical role in building social capital, encouraging civic engagement, fostering volunteerism, and facilitating collaborative problem-solving. Social media allows marginalized groups to elevate their voices, engage in decision-making, and gain access to developmental resources that were previously out of reach (Agustin & Rahayu, 2025).

However, the expanding influence of social media has sparked concerns about misinformation, fake news, digital addiction, online harassment, algorithmic biases, and unequal access to technology. These challenges raise significant questions about the sustainability of social media as an inclusive tool for community development (Putri et al., 2026).

Therefore, there is an urgent need to critically evaluate recent literature to comprehend the contributions of social media to community development and to pinpoint the challenges that need to be addressed to maximize its potential for advancement.

Overview of Community Development

Community development is a collaborative process where community members work together to identify challenges, leverage local resources, and implement sustainable solutions to enhance their living standards. It includes various aspects such as:

- Economic growth
- Social advancement
- Political engagement
- Educational progress
- Health improvement
- Environmental preservation
- Cultural continuity

Recent development scholars emphasize the role of digital technologies as key drivers of community development, as they improve communication, increase access to information, enhance citizen involvement, and support collaborative decision-making (Mendoza, 2026). Thus, community development goes beyond building infrastructure to empower citizens through knowledge sharing, digital access, and participatory governance.

Connection Between Social Media and Community Development

The connection between social media and community development is based on communication, engagement, and collective action. Social media supports community development by:

- Enhancing access to information related to development
- Encouraging citizen involvement in governance
- Aiding community mobilization efforts
- Promoting local businesses and entrepreneurship

- Fostering volunteerism and fundraising activities
- Improving disaster preparedness and communication during emergencies
- Facilitating educational collaborations
- Raising awareness about public health and environmental concerns

Research on disaster communication reveals that social media helps communities coordinate emergency responses, share confirmed information, rally volunteers, and assist recovery efforts before, during, and after crises (Hutton et al., 2026). Additionally, systematic reviews indicate that digital communication strengthens participatory development by fostering dialogue among governments, civil society, and community members, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability (Mendoza, 2026).

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory outlines how new ideas, technologies, and innovations are shared among members of a social system over time. Initially formulated by Everett Rogers, this theory is still pertinent today, particularly in how social media speeds up the sharing of developmental information within communities.

In the realm of community development, social media allows for the swift dissemination of information about public health initiatives, environmental protection, agricultural advancements, educational resources, disaster readiness, and civic participation. The interactive features of digital platforms enable community members to not only receive information but also engage in discussions, assess, and tailor innovations to meet local needs. Recent evaluations show that online community networks play a significant role in influencing technology adoption, collaborative learning, and knowledge exchange, thereby speeding up the diffusion of innovation within communities.

This theory is especially relevant since opinion leaders on social media—such as community influencers, local groups, religious figures, and government entities—often guide public acceptance of developmental efforts through ongoing online interactions.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that media users actively choose communication channels to fulfill their individual and social needs rather than simply absorbing information passively.

In the context of community development, individuals utilize social media to gather information, cultivate social connections, engage in civic discussions, find educational opportunities, promote businesses, and access government services. Recent systematic studies indicate that the motivations behind social media use across various digital platforms include seeking information, social interaction, forming personal identity, and participating in community engagement.

Thus, social media acts as a vital communication framework that helps communities address their informational, economic, educational, and participatory needs.

Social Capital Theory

The Social Capital Theory describes how relationships, trust, social networks, and reciprocity foster cooperation among individuals for their mutual advantage.

Social media plays a role in fostering both bonding social capital (connections among close community members) and bridging social capital (ties with individuals and organizations outside the immediate community). Through online platforms, citizens share knowledge, mobilize resources, organize volunteer efforts, and collaborate to tackle community challenges.

Recent studies indicate that digital communities enhance collective identity, build trust among participants, support collaborative learning, and promote civic involvement, all of which are essential for sustainable community development.

Participatory Communication Theory

Participatory Communication Theory highlights the importance of dialogue, inclusion, empowerment, and collaborative decision-making in developmental processes. In contrast to traditional one-way communication, this approach enables citizens to actively engage in development initiatives. Social media exemplifies this method by allowing community members to express their views, report local issues, monitor government actions, and engage in policy debates. Recent systematic reviews indicate that participatory and dialogic communication strategies are crucial for effective community-based development programs as they foster cooperation among governments, civil society, and local communities.

Empirical Literature Review

Social Media and Citizen Participation

Citizen participation is widely acknowledged as a key indicator of successful community development. Numerous studies have shown that social media enhances civic engagement by facilitating interaction between governments and citizens. A systematic review by Si and Wang (2026) revealed that social media fosters public value co-creation during crises by enhancing information sharing, strengthening collaboration, and encouraging citizen involvement in emergency response and recovery efforts. The study concluded that public participation through digital platforms improves government accountability and community resilience.

Likewise, Mendoza (2026) found that digital communication strategies promote dialogue between policymakers and citizens, leading to increased transparency, accountability, and sustainable community growth. Participatory communication emerged as one of the most effective methods for achieving lasting behavioral and social transformations. These findings imply that social media has shifted citizens from being passive receivers of development information to active participants in community decision-making.

Social Media and Community Education

The educational function of social media has significantly expanded in recent years. Christianti et al. (2025) conducted a systematic review analyzing social media as a community-based e-learning platform. Their findings indicated that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube greatly enhanced collaborative learning, knowledge sharing, learner engagement, and community involvement. However, the review also pointed out ongoing challenges such as gaps in digital literacy, privacy issues, and distractions related to social media use.

Similarly, Asmaningrum et al. (2026) found that integrating social media positively impacted learning outcomes in STEM education by promoting peer interaction, collaborative learning communities, and knowledge exchange. These results suggest that social media

plays a vital role in educational development by fostering inclusive learning environments beyond traditional classrooms.

Social Media and Economic Development

Social media has increasingly emerged as a valuable tool for promoting entrepreneurship, small businesses, and local economic growth. Recent research indicates that digital platforms allow entrepreneurs to market their products, reach broader audiences, connect with customers, and create online business communities at a low cost. Online networking also facilitates knowledge sharing, innovation, and the adoption of digital business practices, especially among small and medium enterprises. Community-based businesses benefit further from peer recommendations, customer feedback, and digital marketing tools that enhance local economies and promote self-employment.

Social Media and Disaster Management

Social media plays a crucial role in community development, especially during emergencies and disasters. Recent studies show that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and X allow governments, humanitarian organizations, and citizens to quickly share critical information, coordinate rescue efforts, mobilize volunteers, and assist in recovery. Additionally, social media enables two-way communication, empowering affected individuals to express their needs and receive prompt support. These functions enhance community resilience by bolstering preparedness, response, and recovery strategies during crises.

Social Media and Social Inclusion

Digital communication has created more opportunities for marginalized groups to engage in development initiatives. Recent findings show that women, youth, individuals with disabilities, rural communities, and minority groups are increasingly using social media to advocate for their rights, access educational materials, participate in governance, and organize community projects. Digital platforms foster collaboration that mitigates geographical barriers and broadens access to social and economic opportunities. However, the literature points out that disparities in internet access and digital skills persist, hindering the full inclusivity of these advantages.

Negative Impacts of Social Media on Community Development

While social media has improved communication and community involvement, recent studies suggest that its improper use could impede sustainable community progress. Key challenges include the spread of misinformation, digital disparities, cyberbullying, privacy issues, social division, and overreliance on online platforms.

Misinformation and False Reports

A significant risk associated with social media is the rapid circulation of inaccurate or deceitful information. Due to the swift dissemination of data on digital channels, false content can shape public opinion, erode trust in institutions, and obstruct community development efforts.

Research demonstrates that problematic social media usage correlates with increased sharing of unverified content, especially during political events, health crises, and natural calamities. Such misinformation often causes confusion, undermines public trust in authorities, and delays effective community responses.

Moreover, health communication studies show that false information spread through social media contributes to poor health choices, vaccine skepticism, and skepticism towards scientific facts. Scholars recommend enhancing digital literacy and fact-checking mechanisms to mitigate these adverse impacts.

Hence, although social media aids information exchange, inadequate oversight and limited media literacy may diminish its utility as a community development tool.

Digital Gap and Social Marginalization

Despite the global increase in internet access, unequal digital technology availability remains a significant barrier to inclusive community advancement.

The digital divide encompasses variations in internet connectivity, access to digital tools, affordability, and digital competencies. Individuals in rural areas, low-income households, and marginalized groups often encounter difficulties in accessing social media and other digital communication tools.

A review by Ewuoso (2025) concluded that digital inequality contributes to capability deprivation by restricting individuals' participation in education, governance, healthcare, employment, and community development endeavors. The review stresses that digital inclusion should be a fundamental element of sustainable development strategies.

Consequently, without addressing digital inequality, the advantages of social media will continue to be unevenly distributed among communities unless addressed by governments and development organizations.

Online Polarization and Echo Chambers have been recognized as a growing issue in recent literature. Echo chambers are formed when social media algorithms repeatedly present users with information that confirms their existing beliefs while restricting exposure to differing perspectives. This trend exacerbates ideological divisions, hampers constructive discussions, and hinders collaborative problem-solving opportunities. Hartmann et al. (2025) observed that personalized algorithms contribute to the fragmentation of online communities and reinforce ideological disparities, potentially undermining community cohesion and hindering collective engagement in development endeavors. Therefore, for effective community development, digital platforms should promote balanced information exposure and respectful public discourse.

Research Gaps

Despite extensive research on the relationship between social media and community development, there are critical gaps that need to be addressed.

Firstly, the majority of studies have focused on developed nations, with limited investigation into the impact of social media on community development in developing countries, notably in Africa. It is crucial to conduct more context-specific research to grasp the unique socioeconomic, cultural, and technological factors shaping African communities.

Secondly, many studies utilize cross-sectional research designs, which hinder the assessment of social media's long-term effects on community development. Longitudinal studies are essential for gaining a deeper insight into how digital engagement influences sustainable development over time.

Thirdly, there is a scarcity of research exploring the influence of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, algorithmic recommendation systems, and generative AI on community participation and development outcomes.

Moreover, there is a lack of evidence on effective strategies to combat misinformation, digital exclusion, and online polarization while maintaining the developmental benefits of social media. It is imperative for future research to evaluate interventions that enhance digital literacy, strengthen fact-checking mechanisms, and foster inclusive digital engagement.

Conclusion

The literature review underscores the pivotal role of social media in contemporary community development. From 2020 to 2026, scholarly findings consistently demonstrate that digital platforms facilitate citizen engagement, bolster social connections, enhance educational opportunities, support entrepreneurship, improve disaster readiness, and promote collaborative governance.

However, the review also underscores significant challenges that jeopardize the sustainability of these advantages. Issues such as misinformation, digital disparity, cyber threats, algorithmic prejudices, and online divisions continue to undermine effective community involvement and social unity.

In summary, the developmental impact of social media heavily relies on how communities, governments, civil society groups, and tech companies manage digital communication spaces. Investing in digital literacy, ensuring inclusive internet access, promoting ethical platform governance, and adopting evidence-based communication strategies are crucial to maximize the positive contributions of social media while mitigating its negative impacts. Continued research is necessary to delve deeper into these issues, particularly in developing countries where social media adoption is rapidly increasing, and its potential to support sustainable community development remains significant.

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