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Reclaiming Digital Collectivism: The Digital Enactment of Communal Identity in Kampung Digital Mintorejo, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how residents of Kampung Digital Mintorejo, South Sumatra, utilise social media to enact communal identity and strengthen local empowerment. The study combines Couldry's (2012) "media as practice" framework with Mignolo's (2011) decolonial perspective to understand residents' digital practices as a form of resistance against uniform, top-down narratives of digitalisation. A qualitative approach using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) was applied to 200 Instagram posts from four community accounts representing the village government, the youth organisation, the TPA/TPQ institution, and the local soccer club. The analysis traces semiotic resources, identifies dominant thematic discourses, and synthesises cultural meanings through the lens of digital collectivism. The results reveal four intertwined thematic discourses (transparency, solidarity, religiosity, and creativity)that form a communal empowerment ecosystem. Mintorejo's citizen media practices demonstrate a mode of decolonial communication rooted in communal values rather than merely reproducing technocentric narratives. These findings contribute to the conversation on the decolonisation of communication by showing how local digital practices construct digital identity as a form of social empowerment.

Keywords: Communal identity, decolonisation of communication, digital collectivism, Mintorejo Digital Village, multimodal analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The digitisation of villages is now seen as an indicator of development progress. In Indonesia, this initiative is implemented through the Digital Village program, the Village Information System (SID), and Siskeudes, which are designed to promote

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transparency and accountability in village governance (Antlöv et al., 2016). However, recent studies indicate that the success of rural digital transformation is not determined by the sophistication of the systems, but rather by the extent to which digital practices are rooted in the social lives of residents (Saadah et al., 2026; Susilowati et al., 2024). When detached from its social context, digitalisation becomes merely administrative compliance and loses its transformative power.

The reality in Indonesia highlights this paradox. Instead of empowering citizens, many initiatives actually reinforce top-down power dynamics. Yet, at the grassroots level, expressions of digital citizenship have developed in their own way. The Digital Village of Mintorejo in South Sumatra is a case in point. The digital initiative in Mintorejo grew organically from the residents, not from formal programs. Its uniqueness is evident in the four Instagram accounts managed by the village (@kampung_mintorejo, @karangtarunamintorejo, @tpq_jamiulkhoir, and @mintorejo_united), which complement one another and collectively represent communal life. Here, Instagram is not treated as a personal space, but rather as a collective space where the village's identity is negotiated, celebrated, and maintained together (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Hasugian et al., 2026).

To analyse this phenomenon, the study employs the "media as practice" perspective (Couldry, 2012), which allows social media to be interpreted not as a technological artefact, but as a living, recurring social practice. The study also integrates Mignolo's (2011) decolonial framework to interpret Mintorejo's digital practices as epistemic resistance against a homogenising modernity that disregards local ways of making sense of the world. This interpretation aligns with literature calling for an appreciation of the participatory epistemologies of Global South communities in reconfiguring digital spaces (Makananise, 2024).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Studies on village digitalisation and e-government in Indonesia still tend to focus on technical aspects such as the effectiveness of information systems, administrative transparency, or the efficiency of public services. Such an approach treats digital media as a managerial tool and fails to view it as a space for social practice. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how villagers use social media to build, maintain, and represent their own digital communities, particularly in villages where digitalisation initiatives emerge from the grassroots.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building on this gap, this study addresses three questions: (1) what semiotic resources are most prominent in the Instagram posts of four Mintorejo community accounts; (2) what dominant thematic discourses emerge from these media practices; and (3) how the digital

practices of Mintorejo residents can be interpreted as both communal empowerment and decolonial resistance to top-down digitalisation narratives. The aim of the study is to analyse how communal identity is enacted digitally through everyday media practices in the Mintorejo Digital Village.

This study employs a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, viewing digital practices as socially constructed through intersubjective meaning-making (Couldry, 2012; Crotty, 1998). Using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), 200 Instagram posts from four Mintorejo community accounts were manually analysed to preserve sensitivity to local meanings often overlooked by computational methods (Kress, 2010; Liu et al., 2024). The inductive analysis identified diverse visual-textual codes related to administration, community participation, cultural expression, religiosity, sports, and collective activities, which frequently appeared simultaneously within a single post. These posts function not merely as informational content but as multimodal social events integrating visuals, text, symbols, and interaction contexts (Kress, 2010). Unlike conventional one-way e-government communication, administrative content in Mintorejo is often accompanied by citizen engagement and contextual visual documentation (Bertot et al., 2010). The coding process produced four dominant thematic discourses, while the reliability test results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
The synthesis of visual-textual codes into thematic discourse

Code	Thematic Discourse
Child Participation Cultural Expression Festivity Local Arts	Creativity
Faith Practice Islamic Education Moral Values Religious Events	Religiosity
Communal Work Sports Volunteerism Youth Engagement	Solidarity
Administrative Info Institutional Messaging Public Announcements	Transparency

* Results of the author's analysis (2025)

These four discourses, namely creativity, religiosity, solidarity, and transparency, are described below as the elements that form a communal empowerment ecosystem.

Digital Transparency and Grassroots E-Governance

In Mintorejo, transparency is not implemented as a one-way dissemination of information, but as a dialogic practice between local institutions and residents. Administrative posts are often accompanied by visual documentation, activity narratives, and spaces for interaction through comment sections. Residents can provide feedback, ask questions, and confirm their involvement in various village activities. These findings indicate that effective digital transparency depends not only on the availability of information but also on its ability to foster meaningful communication within the community (Aldiabat et al., 2025; Nurlinah et al., 2025). Instagram serves as a grassroots e-governance platform that enables residents to participate in monitoring and disseminating public information.

Solidarity and Community Action

Solidarity in Mintorejo is fostered through community service, sports, volunteerism, and youth engagement. The emerging narrative emphasises collective identity over individual achievements. Through the repetition of daily practices, social media functions as an extension of offline social spaces that strengthen residents' sense of connection (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Pulera, 2023). Youth, particularly through Karang Taruna and sports communities, emerge as key actors who organise participation while fostering communal pride (Ahmad & Setyawati, 2024).

Religiosity as Cultural Meaning

Religiosity is represented as a shared cultural practice that strengthens communal identity, rather than merely an individual spiritual expression (Andriyana & Adrian, 2024; Sumbulah et al., 2024). Religious activities are connected to narratives of togetherness and the intergenerational transmission of values. Documentation of TPA/TPQ activities, for example, demonstrates the community's role in instilling moral values in the younger generation. This finding aligns with studies showing that digital spaces can strengthen the social bonds of local communities through religious practices (Najiha, 2025). From a decolonial perspective, these practices reflect efforts to preserve local systems of meaning amidst the dominance of global digital culture (Mignolo, 2011).

Creativity and Collective Achievements

Creativity in Mintorejo is positioned as a collaborative effort deeply rooted in the village's identity. Achievements such as winning the 2024 Creative Village Competition

are represented as collective successes, not individual accomplishments. The narrative constructed highlights the involvement of various community members and the sustainability of community efforts. By consistently showcasing local art, traditions, and communal identity, residents use digital media to preserve cultural sovereignty while affirming the value of togetherness amidst the tide of digital homogenization (Putra et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

Instagram use in the Mintorejo Digital Village serves not only as a means of communication but also as a space for the formation of communal identity. Four key themes (transparency, solidarity, religiosity, and creativity) shape a community-based digital ecosystem that strengthens participation, social cohesion, and collective agency. These findings indicate that residents do not merely adopt technology but adapt it to local social and cultural values, thereby offering an alternative to uniform and technocratic models of rural digitalisation.

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