



Exploring the digital crossroads: The influence of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the influence of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh, focusing on four key issues: the impact on cultural perceptions, the role of algorithms in content visibility, social media as a platform for cultural discussion and debate, and the psychological impact on cultural engagement of users engaging with cultural content. Using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis, this study reveals that social media can enhance cultural pride and identity, but also pose challenges such as misinformation, pressure to produce high-quality content, and echo chamber effects. . The findings underscore the need for the integration of digital literacy in education, strategic content creation and the development of supportive online communities. This study highlights the complex interactions between social media and cultural engagement, providing insights for policymakers, educators and cultural practitioners to optimize the positive impacts while mitigating the negative impacts of social media on cultural heritage in Aceh. Future research should focus on specific strategies to improve digital literacy and the long-term psychological impact of cultural engagement on social media.

KEYWORDS: Social media, cultural engagement, algorithms, digital literacy, psychological impact

Introduction

The advent of social media has revolutionized the way cultures interact and engage within the diverse societal landscape of Aceh. The proliferation of social media platforms has transformed traditional cultural practices, often creating a dichotomy between the preservation of heritage and the adoption of modern digital trends. Social media is seen as an external influence that sometimes conflicts with local cultural norms and values (Engel & Lee-Davies, 2019; Radwan, 2022; Tang & Chan, 2020). It is widely recognized that social media introduces

new cultural narratives that may not align with the traditional values of Acehnese society (Badmantsyrenov et al., 2022; Kusujarti et al., 2015; Loh & Chin, 2023; Tomblason & Wolf, 2017). Furthermore, the rapid influx of social media use is not matched by adequate digital literacy, leading to superficial engagement with cultural content (Kang et al., 2024; Panarese & Azzarita, 2020; Reynolds & Chiu, 2016; Rubinsteins-Avila & Sartori, 2018). At the same time, the community's readiness to integrate these digital platforms into everyday life is limited, resulting in a fragmented cultural

engagement (Bruni & Esposito, 2022; Elers, Dutta & Elers, 2022; Park, 2014; Risi et al., 2020). This indicates that while social media holds potential for enhancing cultural participation, its current integration remains incompatible with the intrinsic cultural dynamics of Aceh.

Despite the increasing body of research on social media's impact, existing studies have inadequately addressed the critical aspects of its incompatibility with cultural engagement in diverse societies such as Aceh. Current literature tends to adopt a linear perspective, focusing predominantly on the general implications of social media without delving into the deeper, more complex relationships between digital platforms and cultural practices. (R) These studies fail to identify the fundamental issues in the interaction between social media and cultural traditions. (E) Three main trends can be identified in the existing research. First, studies often emphasize the overall impact of social media on daily life and future societal changes (Liang, Lu & Martin, 2021; Tang et al., 2019; Wang & Liu, 2019; Water & Lo, 2012). Tang & Chan (2020) asserts that social media not only affects daily activities but also significantly shapes future cultural developments. Second, other studies focus on the negative consequences of social media usage in cultural contexts (Hammad & Awed, 2023; Hu, Hu & Wang, 2021; Hu, Ji & Li, 2023; Sharifian et al., 2022). Third, research frequently highlights the issue of digital literacy in the adoption of social media within cultural settings (Ali, Raza & Qazi, 2023; Chen, 2018; Kang et al., 2024; Kimmons, 2014; Limbu, 2018; Talib, 2018). From these trends, it is evident that the social and cultural characteristics within the context of social media adoption are not thoroughly examined, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of how social media influences cultural engagement in Aceh.

The objective of this paper is to fill the gaps left by existing studies, which have not thoroughly analyzed how socio-cultural characteristics of societies influence the adoption and impact of social media. The ability of social media to enhance or disrupt cultural

engagement is heavily influenced by the cultural and religious context of a society. It is crucial to analyze public perceptions of social media and its role in cultural engagement. Accordingly, this study proposes to address four key questions: (1) How do social media platforms influence public engagement with cultural studies in Aceh? (2) What are the psychological effects of social media on public perception of cultural topics in Aceh? (3) How do social media algorithms impact the visibility of content related to cultural studies? (4) In what ways do social media platforms facilitate discussions and debates about cultural topics in Aceh?. Answering these questions will provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between social media and cultural engagement in Aceh. This knowledge will form the basis for developing policies and strategies that optimize the positive impacts of social media on cultural engagement while mitigating its potential negative effects. Such insights are essential for policymakers, educators, and cultural practitioners aiming to harness the benefits of social media in promoting and preserving cultural heritage in Aceh.

This study is based on the argument that the incompatibility between social media and cultural engagement in Aceh cannot be separated from the fundamental differences in the nature of social media and traditional cultural practices. Acehnese society values communal living and shared cultural practices, which may conflict with the individualistic and efficiency-driven nature of social media. Social media platforms are designed to maximize engagement and efficiency, often prioritizing rapid content consumption over deep cultural immersion. This can threaten communal cultural practices that require time, participation, and collective effort. Successful integration of social media into cultural engagement demands robust digital infrastructure and egalitarian social structures to ensure equal access and participation. Additionally, the prevailing values within Acehnese society need to be adapted to support the constructive use of social media for cultural engagement (Iqbal, 2017; Siregar, 2021; Usman, 2021). This includes promoting digital literacy and creating awareness about the

potential and limitations of social media in preserving and promoting cultural heritage (Liang, Lu & Martin, 2021; Martins et al., 2022; Shao et al., 2023; Su et al., 2022). Therefore, achieving successful cultural engagement through social media in Aceh requires a deliberate social engineering approach that aligns technological adoption with the communal and cultural values of the society (Hosseini et al., 2020; McNutt, 2014).

Research methods

Research design

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the influence of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the research subjects. As Creswell (2013) explains, this approach is highly effective for uncovering the meanings and interpretations individuals hold regarding cultural engagement through social media. In the context of Aceh, it

is crucial to understand how the community interprets and responds to cultural content they encounter on social media. This study utilizes methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of social media posts. The approach aims to understand the intricate dynamics between social media usage and cultural practices in Aceh.

Research participants

This study involved various participants who played important and diverse roles in the context of cultural engagement in Aceh. Careful selection of participants was undertaken to ensure comprehensive representation of a wide range of perspectives and experiences regarding social media use and its impact on cultural practices (Huat & Jung, 2014; Tapsell, 2021). Each group of participants had unique contributions that provided deep insight into the complex dynamics between social media and cultural engagement. Below is a complete description of the participant groups involved in this research (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of research participants

No.	Respondent Group	Sample Description
1	Cultural Enthusiast	This group consists of individuals who are deeply passionate about culture and actively participate in various cultural activities and events in Aceh. They provide insights into how social media influences their cultural engagements and the dissemination of cultural information.
2	Educator	This group includes teachers and educators who are involved in integrating cultural education into their curricula. They can provide valuable perspectives on how social media is used as a tool for cultural education and engagement among students.
3	Community Leader	Community leaders who play a significant role in promoting and preserving cultural heritage in Aceh. Their leadership and influence within the community make them key informants on the impact of social media on cultural practices and community cohesion.
4	Digital Content Creator	Individuals who create and share digital content related to Aceh's culture on various social media platforms. They offer insights into the creation, distribution, and reception of cultural content online.
5	Social Media Analyst	Experts who analyze social media trends and data, providing an understanding of how cultural content is consumed and engaged with on digital platforms. Their analytical skills help to quantify the impact of social media on cultural engagement.
6	Cultural Advocate	Advocates who actively promote cultural awareness and heritage conservation in Aceh. They use social media as a platform to raise awareness and mobilize support for cultural initiatives.
7	Cultural Historian	Historians who specialize in the study of Aceh's cultural history. They provide a historical perspective on how cultural practices have evolved and how social media plays a role in this evolution.

8	Community Activist	Activists who are involved in community-based movements and initiatives. Their activism provides a grassroots view of how social media facilitates cultural engagement and community participation.
9	Youth Representative	Young individuals who represent the youth demographic in Aceh. They offer perspectives on how social media influences their cultural identity and participation in cultural activities.
10	Psychologist	Psychologists who study the impact of social media on mental health and cultural identity. They provide insights into the psychological effects of social media on cultural engagement.
11	Cultural Content Creator	Creators who produce cultural content specifically tailored for social media platforms. They offer perspectives on content creation strategies and audience engagement.
12	Social Media User	General users of social media who engage with cultural content online. They provide insights into user behavior, preferences, and the overall impact of social media on their cultural engagement.

Data collection

a. Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants to gather personal insights into the impact of social media on cultural engagement. These interviews aimed to explore individual experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding the intersection of social media and cultural practices in Aceh (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

b. Focus Groups

Focus group discussions were facilitated to explore collective perceptions and the dynamics of cultural debates influenced by social media. These discussions provided a platform for participants to share their views and engage in dialogue, helping to uncover collective insights and shared experiences related to cultural engagement (Vangen, 2017).

c. Content Analysis

Content analysis was performed on social media posts, focusing on the content, frequency, and engagement of cultural discussions on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This analysis helped identify prevalent themes and patterns in how cultural topics are discussed and engaged with on social media (Hallinan et al., 2023).

Data analysis

The data from interviews, focus groups, and social media content were analyzed to provide

a comprehensive understanding of the influence of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh.

Narrative analysis was employed to explore the stories and personal experiences shared during interviews and focus groups. This method provided a deeper understanding of the implications of social media on cultural engagement by examining the personal and collective narratives of participants (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Key narratives included:

- a. Influence of social media on Cultural Perception: Personal stories and accounts of how social media content shapes public perception of cultural topics in Aceh. Participants shared how exposure to diverse cultural content online led to new understandings and appreciation of their cultural heritage.
- b. Algorithmic Impact on Cultural Content Visibility: Narratives from participants about their experiences with the visibility or suppression of cultural content due to social media algorithms. Discussions highlighted the challenges of ensuring that valuable cultural content reaches a wider audience.
- c. Social media as a Platform for Cultural Discussion and Debate: Experiences and stories about how social media facilitates or hinders discussions and debates on cultural issues. Participants described both positive and negative dynamics in online cultural dialogues.

- d. Psychological Impact on Users Engaging with Cultural Content: Emotional and cognitive responses of users interacting with cultural content on social media. Participants reflected on feelings of pride, connection, or conflict triggered by online cultural interactions.

By focusing on narrative analysis, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how social media influences cultural engagement in Aceh, revealing the complexities and varied experiences of users in navigating digital and cultural landscapes.

Research findings

This study investigated the impact of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh using qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis. This section details the findings, highlighting key themes such as the influence of social media on cultural perceptions.

Influence of social media on cultural perception

Social media has had a significant impact on cultural perceptions among the people of Aceh, especially among the younger generation. The integration of cultural education through social media involves sharing traditional practices, historical narratives and cultural events. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok are actively used to promote Acehnese culture, although the level of engagement varies across different user groups.

Younger generations who actively promote Acehnese culture on social media use Instagram to share stories and visuals of cultural practices, reaching a wide audience. They noted that social media allows them to showcase Aceh's rich cultural heritage to people who may not have the opportunity to see it in person.

"Social media has allowed me to showcase our rich cultural heritage to people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience it (Culture Enthusiast, MJ)."

However, they also show the superficial nature of some agreements. While many people like and share their posts, there is often a lack

of understanding and appreciation of their cultural significance.

"The challenge is to get people to move beyond simply liking photos to truly understanding and appreciating the meaning of culture (Culture Enthusiast, MJ)."

An educator discusses the benefits of using social media in an educational setting. They use Facebook and WhatsApp groups to facilitate discussions on Aceh's history and customs, making cultural learning more interactive and accessible to students.

"Using social media in education helps make cultural learning more interactive and accessible to students (Educator, LA)."

They emphasised the need for essential digital literacy skills among students to navigate and evaluate the cultural content they encounter online.

"Students need to develop critical thinking skills to distinguish accurate information from the vast amount of content available on the internet (Educator, LA)."

A community leader highlighted the role of social media in mobilizing community support for cultural preservation efforts. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have been instrumental in raising awareness and organizing cultural events, fostering a sense of community engagement.

"Social media is a powerful tool for mobilizing community support and participation in cultural events (Community Leader, LZ)."

They also noted the challenges of balancing traditional communal practices with the individualistic nature of social media, which often prioritises quick consumption over cultural deepening.

"We need to find ways to harmonise our communal values with the fast-paced nature of social media so that our cultural practices are truly valued (Community Leader, LZ)."

The findings from the interviews reveal a complex landscape where social media both enhances and challenges cultural engagement in Aceh. Key themes identified include (Figure 1).

These findings underscore the complex interplay between social media and cultural engagement in Aceh. While digital platforms offer great opportunities to promote and preserve cultural heritage, they also present

challenges that need to be addressed through critical digital literacy and deeper community engagement. These insights provide a foundation for developing strategies and policies that harness the potential of social media to increase cultural engagement while maintaining the authenticity and integrity of Acehese cultural practices.

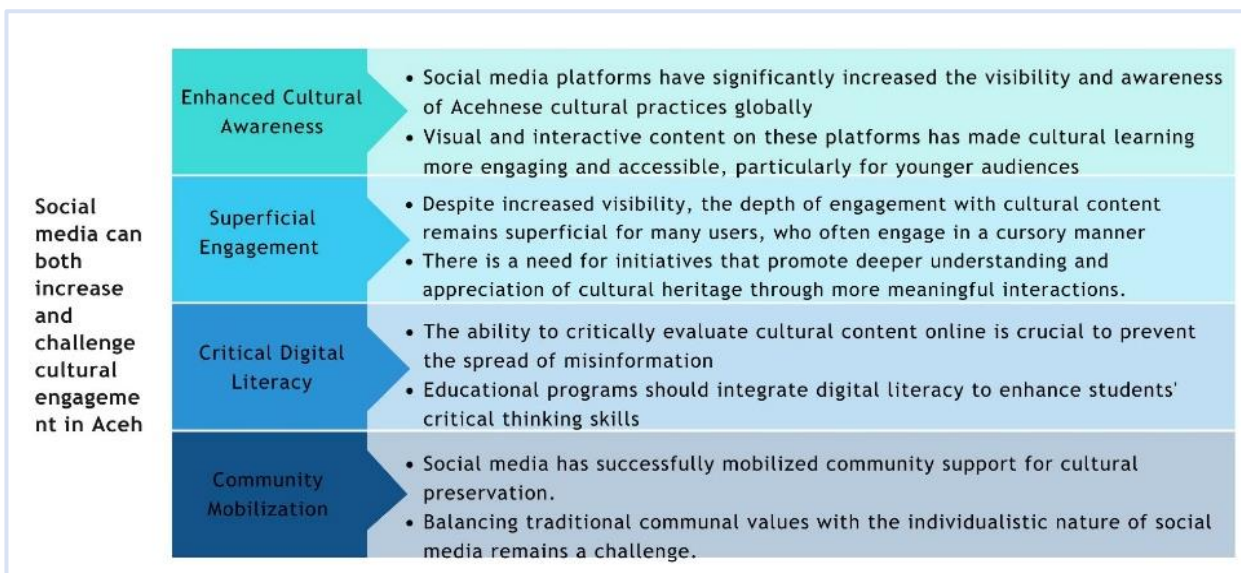


Figure 1. Analysis of the Dual Role of Social Media in Cultural Engagement in Aceh

Impact of algorithms on visibility of cultural content

Social media algorithms play an important role in determining the visibility of cultural content on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok. These algorithms prioritize content based on various engagement metrics, which can significantly affect how cultural information is disseminated and perceived by users.

A digital content creator who focuses on Acehese cultural content, highlighted that the visibility of their posts is heavily influenced by platform algorithms. They emphasized that high levels of engagement, such as likes, shares and comments, are crucial for their content to reach a wider audience.

"Social media algorithms largely determine who sees my content. Without high engagement, our cultural content may never reach a wider audience (Digital Content Creator, USA)."

Despite creating high-quality cultural content, it's common to find their posts overshadowed by more sensational or trending topics favoured by the algorithm.

"Sometimes, deep cultural content loses out to more sensationalised or viral content. This makes us have to work harder to ensure our content remains relevant and visible (Digital Content Creator, USA)."

A social media analyst discusses how algorithms are designed to maximise user engagement, which can sometimes work against culturally specific content. They note that algorithms tend to favour content that generates direct interaction and high levels of.

"Algorithms tend to prioritise those that can generate fast and many content interactions. Cultural content that takes time to understand often doesn't get the visibility it deserves (Social Media Analyst, SRA)."

A cultural advocate, emphasised the need to use social media strategically to increase the visibility of cultural content. They discuss how understanding how algorithms work can help in creating posts that are more likely to be seen.

" Understanding how algorithms work can help us design more engaging and

interactive content, thereby increasing the chances of it being seen by a wider audience (Cultural Advocate, AA)."

The interviews reveal that social media algorithms significantly impact the visibility of cultural content in Aceh. Key themes identified include (Figure 2).

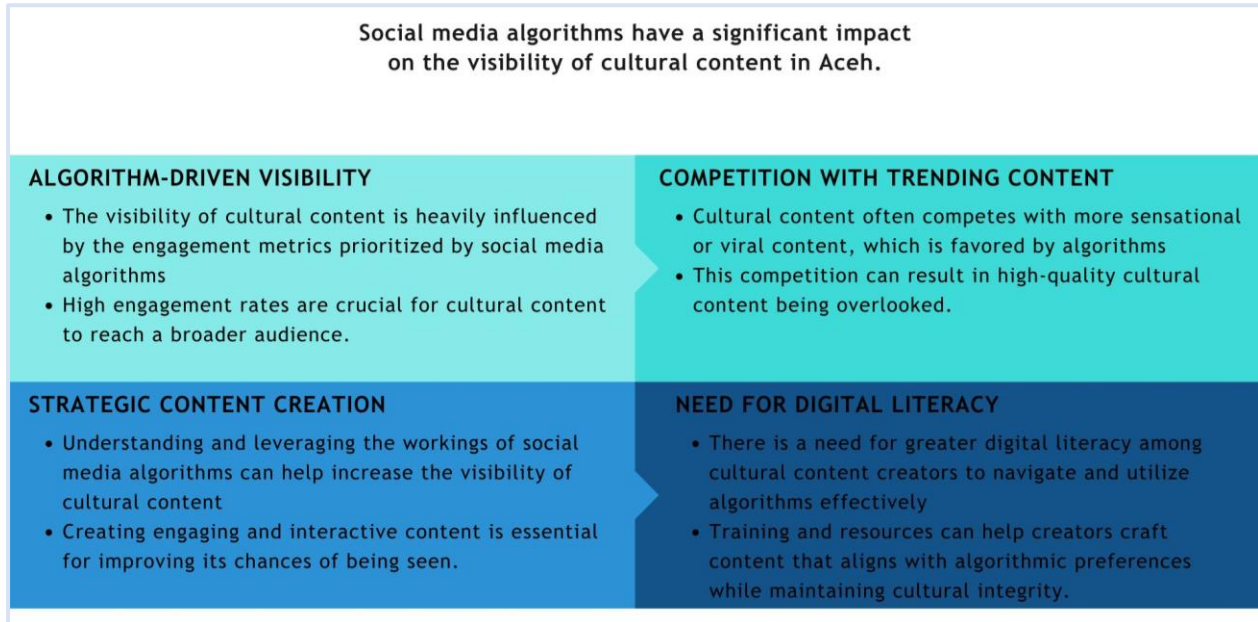


Figure 2. The Impact of Social Media Algorithms on Cultural Content Visibility in Aceh

These findings highlight the significant impact social media algorithms have on the visibility of cultural content in Aceh. While these algorithms can increase the reach of cultural heritage, they also pose challenges by prioritising content based on engagement metrics that may not support deep cultural posts. Overcoming these challenges requires a strategic approach to content creation and a better understanding of algorithmic mechanisms. These insights provide a foundation for developing strategies that can optimise the visibility and impact of Acehese cultural content on social media platforms.

Social media as a platform for cultural discussions and debates

Social media platforms have emerged as important venues for cultural discussion and debate, providing space for diverse voices and perspectives to engage with Acehese cultural topics. These platforms facilitate both positive

and negative interactions, influencing public discourse on cultural issues.

A cultural historian, highlighted the role of social media in democratising cultural discussions. They emphasised that platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok allow individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in conversations about Acehese culture, which were previously limited to academics or community leaders.

" Social media opens up space for everyone to engage in cultural discussions. In the past, these conversations may have only taken place among academics or public figures, but now everyone can contribute (Cultural Historian, HR)."

Cultural historians note that while social media democratizes discussion, it also brings challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for heated debates that can escalate into conflicts.

“While social media makes discussions more inclusive, there are challenges such as the spread of misinformation and debates that can turn into conflicts (Cultural Historian, HR).”

A community activist, discussed how social media serves as a platform for advocacy and raising awareness on cultural issues. They use social media to mobilize support for cultural preservation and to highlight cultural events and initiatives.

“ We use social media to advocate for cultural preservation and raise awareness about cultural events and initiatives (Community Activist, ZF).”

Despite its advantages, one community activist expressed concern about the echo chamber effect, in which social media algorithms tend to reinforce existing beliefs and limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

“ One concern is the echo chamber effect, where social media algorithms tend to reinforce existing beliefs and limit exposure to diverse views (Community Activist, ZF).”

A Participant representing the youth demographic, pointed out the importance of

social media in engaging the younger generation in cultural debates. They mentioned that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are popular among young people to discuss cultural identity and heritage.

“ Social media is essential for young people to engage in cultural debates. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are popular among young people to discuss cultural identity and heritage (Youth Representative, SA).”

Participant I highlighted the challenge of ensuring that these discussions remain respectful and productive, noting instances where debates can become polarized and unproductive.

“The challenge is to ensure that discussions remain respectful and productive. There are times when debates become polarized and unproductive (Youth Representative, SA).”

The interviews indicate that social media platforms significantly influence cultural discussions and debates in Aceh. Key themes identified include (Figure 3).

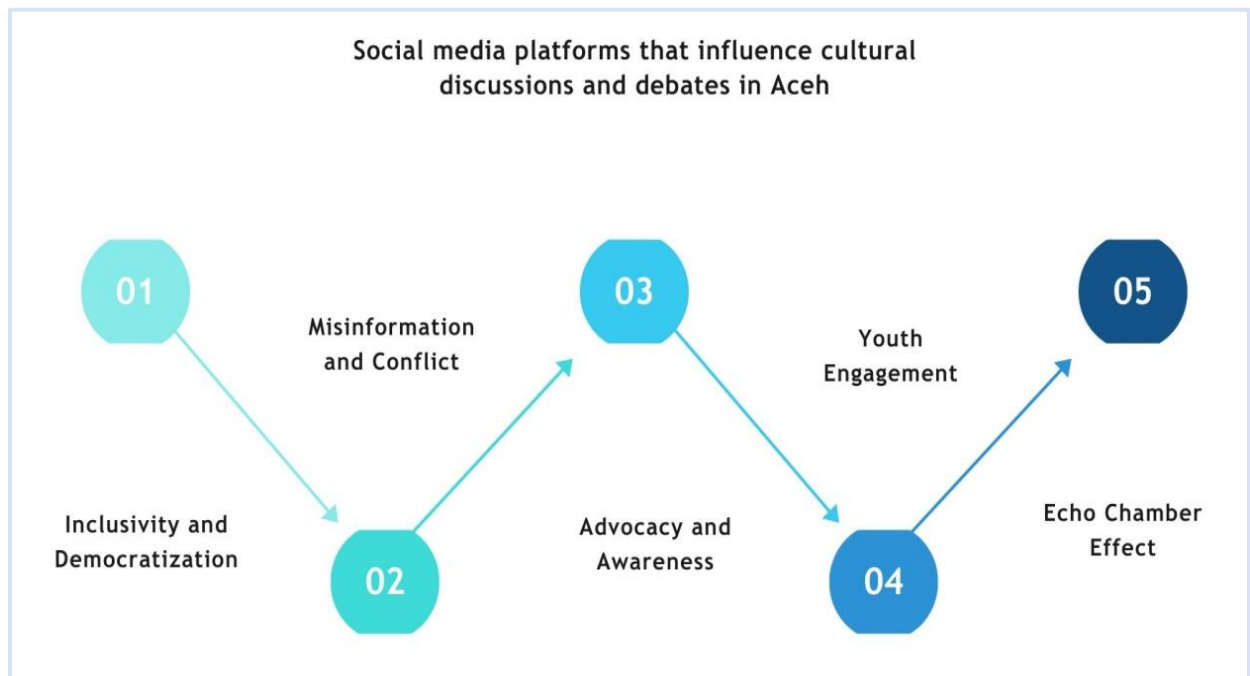


Figure 3. The Influence of Social Media Platforms on Cultural Discussions and Debates in Aceh

1. Inclusivity and Democratization:
 - Social media democratizes cultural discussions, allowing broader participation from various demographic groups.
 - Platforms enable diverse voices to contribute to cultural conversations, breaking down traditional barriers.
2. Misinformation and Conflict:
 - The spread of misinformation is a significant challenge, with false information potentially skewing cultural debates.
 - Heated discussions can sometimes escalate into conflicts, highlighting the need for moderation and fact-checking.
3. Advocacy and Awareness:
 - Social media serves as a powerful tool for advocacy, raising awareness about cultural issues, and mobilizing community support.
 - Activists and community leaders use platforms to highlight cultural events and preservation efforts.
4. Youth Engagement:
 - Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are crucial for engaging younger generations in cultural debates.
 - Ensuring that these discussions remain respectful and productive is essential to prevent polarization.
5. Echo Chamber Effect:
 - Social media algorithms can create echo chambers, reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives.
 - Strategies are needed to encourage exposure to a broader range of viewpoints.

These findings underscore the important role of social media as platforms for cultural discussion and debate in Aceh. While these platforms provide opportunities for inclusive

and broad participation, they also present challenges such as misinformation, conflict, and the echo chamber effect. Overcoming these challenges requires strategic moderation, digital literacy, and efforts to foster respectful and productive dialog. These insights provide a basis for developing strategies to utilize social media for positive cultural engagement and discourse.

Psychological effects on users engaging with cultural content

Interaction with cultural content on social media can have a range of psychological effects on its users, affecting emotional well-being, sense of identity and cultural pride. This section explores the psychological impact of engaging with cultural content through social media platforms, based on insights from stakeholder interviews.

A psychologist, discussed the emotional responses that users experience when interacting with cultural content on social media. They note that exposure to positive cultural content can increase a sense of pride and belonging among users, particularly younger generations who may be exploring their cultural identity.

“Exposure to positive cultural content can increase a sense of pride and togetherness among users, especially the younger generation who may be exploring their cultural identity (Psychologist, SF).”

However, psychologists also highlighted potential negative emotional impacts, such as feelings of exclusion or inadequacy when users compare their cultural expressions to idealized representations online.

“There are also potential negative emotional impacts, such as feelings of exclusion or inadequacy when users compare their cultural expressions to idealized representations on social media (Psychologist, SF).”

A cultural content creator, emphasized the motivational aspect of social media engagement. They shared that positive responses and high engagement on cultural

posts often increased their motivation to continue creating and sharing cultural content.

"Positive feedback and high engagement on my cultural posts often increase my motivation to continue creating and sharing cultural content (Cultural Content Creator, IJ)."

In contrast, a content creator mentioned the stress and pressure to constantly produce high-quality content that meets viewers' expectations, which can lead to burnout.

An active social media user discussed the dual impact of cultural content on their mental well-being. While they feel a strong connection to their cultural heritage through cultural posts, they also experience anxiety and frustration due to negative comments or cultural misunderstandings in online discussions.

"While I feel a strong connection to my heritage through cultural posts, I also

experience anxiety and frustration due to negative comments or cultural misunderstandings in online discussions (Social Media User, MA)."

Social media user participants emphasized the importance of creating supportive and respectful online communities to mitigate these negative impacts and encourage positive cultural engagement.

"It is important to create supportive and respectful online communities to mitigate these negative effects and encourage positive cultural engagement (Social Media Users, MA)."

The interviews revealed that engagement with cultural content on social media has both positive and negative psychological effects on users. The main themes identified include (Table 1)

Table 2. Emotional and Community Impacts of Engaging with Cultural Content on Social Media

Positive Emotional Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engagement with cultural content can enhance feelings of pride, belonging, and identity among users, particularly younger generations. ○ Positive feedback and high engagement on cultural posts can boost content creators' motivation and sense of accomplishment.
Negative Emotional Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may experience feelings of exclusion or inadequacy when comparing their cultural expressions with idealized online representations. ○ The pressure to produce high-quality cultural content consistently can lead to stress and burnout among content creators. ○ Negative comments and cultural misunderstandings in online discussions can cause anxiety and frustration.
Importance of Supportive Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating supportive and respectful online communities is crucial to mitigating the negative psychological effects of engaging with cultural content. ○ Encouraging positive interactions and cultural understanding can enhance users' overall experience and mental well-being.
Balancing Engagement and Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users and content creators need to find a balance between engaging with cultural content and maintaining their mental health. ○ Strategies such as setting boundaries, seeking support, and promoting digital literacy can help manage the psychological impacts of social media engagement.

These findings highlight the complex psychological impact of engaging with cultural

content on social media. While these platforms can foster positive emotional experiences and a

sense of cultural identity, they also present challenges such as stress, anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. Overcoming these challenges requires creating supportive online environments, encouraging respectful interactions, and implementing strategies to balance engagement with well-being. These insights provide a foundation for developing approaches that optimize the psychological benefits of cultural engagement on social media while minimizing its negative impacts.

Discussion

This research shows that social media plays an important role in cultural engagement in Aceh, revealing its influence on cultural perceptions, content visibility, cultural discussions and debates, and psychological effects on users. The findings speak to a broader phenomenon: how social media can strengthen cultural identity and pride while presenting challenges such as the spread of misinformation, pressure to produce high-quality content, and echo chamber effects. This phenomenon is rooted in several factors: the influence of social media algorithms, the competitive nature of viral content, and the need for digital literacy. By understanding and addressing these challenges through strategies that support deeper and more respectful engagement, social media can be optimally utilized to promote positive and sustainable cultural engagement in Aceh.

Influence of social media on cultural perception

This study found that social media has a significant influence on cultural perceptions among Acehnese, especially the younger generation. The use of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and TikTok to promote Acehnese culture has enabled the dissemination of traditional practices, historical narratives and cultural events to a wider audience. However, the level of engagement and understanding of cultural content varies among different user groups.

The reason behind this significant influence can be attributed to social media's ability to reach a wider audience and provide a platform to share and discuss culture in real-time (Chen & Chen, 2016; Chen, Chen & Xu, 2016;

Poulupoulos et al., 2018; Poulupoulos et al., 2018). Acehnese youth use Instagram to share stories and visuals of cultural practices, which allows them to showcase Aceh's rich cultural heritage to people who may not have the opportunity to see it in person. However, a challenge faced is the superficiality of some engagement, where although many like and share content, a deep understanding and appreciation of the cultural meaning is often lacking (Allegrini * Paltrinieri, 2022; beech, 2023; Kim, 2014).

These findings are in line with previous research which suggests that social media can be an effective tool for cultural promotion (Hu, Gu & Zhang, 2017; Kizgin et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2022). However, this study also adds to the literature by showing that while social media is effective in disseminating cultural information, there is an urgent need to improve digital literacy among users so that they can better understand and appreciate cultural content in depth. An educator in this study emphasized the benefits of using social media in an educational setting to make cultural learning more interactive and accessible, which is in line with the study by Junco et al. (2011) on the use of social media in education.

In a broader context, the results of this study suggest that social media can serve as a bridge between the younger generation and their cultural heritage, but only if supported with adequate digital literacy education. Social media users in Aceh, especially students, need to develop critical thinking skills to navigate and evaluate the cultural content they encounter online. This is important to ensure that their engagement with cultural content is not superficial but deep and meaningful.

Impact of algorithms on visibility of cultural content

This research reveals that social media algorithms have a significant impact on the visibility of cultural content in Aceh. These algorithms prioritize content based on various engagement metrics, which can affect how cultural information is disseminated and perceived by users. Digital content creators focused on Acehnese culture noted that the

visibility of their posts is heavily influenced by engagement levels such as likes, shares and comments.

Social media algorithms are designed to maximize user engagement, so content with high levels of interaction is more likely to be seen by a wider audience (Baumann et al., 2024; Bouchaud, 2024; Makady, 2023; Shin, 2023). This causes Aceh's high-quality cultural content to often lose out to more sensationalized or viral content. Cultural content creators have to work harder to ensure their content remains relevant and visible. Social media analysts also emphasized that algorithms tend to prioritize content that generates fast and many interactions, which can be detrimental to cultural content that takes time to understand.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that social media algorithms play an important role in determining content visibility (Gang et al., 2020; Karmakar et al., 2020; Steiner, 2020; Xiaojuan, 2023). However, this study adds new insights by highlighting the specific impact on cultural content in Aceh. A study by Dawson (2023) suggests that algorithms can amplify inequalities in content visibility, which is in line with the finding that cultural content often loses out to sensational content. Cultural advocates in this study also underlined the importance of algorithmic understanding to increase the visibility of cultural content, supporting Swart (2021) argument of the need for algorithmic literacy among content creators.

In a broader context, the results of this study suggest that while social media algorithms can increase the reach of cultural content, they also pose significant challenges. Algorithms that prioritize engagement metrics tend not to support deep cultural content, which requires more understanding and time to appreciate. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve digital literacy among cultural content creators, so that they can utilize algorithms to their advantage and ensure their content remains visible and appreciated.

Social media as a platform for cultural discussions and debates

This research identified that social media platforms have become an important space for cultural discussions and debates in Aceh. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok allow participation from a variety of backgrounds, which was previously limited to academics or community leaders. Social media opens up space for everyone to engage in cultural discussions, despite challenges such as the spread of misinformation and the potential for heated debates.

The main reason social media can democratize cultural discussions is because of its wide accessibility and its ability to bring together different voices. Cultural historians note that social media allows individuals from diverse backgrounds to participate in conversations about Acehnese culture. However, significant challenges arise from the spread of misinformation, which can influence public discourse and lead to conflict. Social media algorithms often amplify content that generates the most interaction, which can create an echo chamber where diverse viewpoints do not receive the attention they deserve.

This research is in line with previous literature showing that social media has great potential to mobilize support and raise awareness about cultural issues (Davis, 1989; Kizgin et al., 2018; Pouloupoulos et al., 2018; Tombleson & Wolf, 2017). However, this research also adds a new dimension by showing how algorithms can amplify echo chamber effects and limit exposure to diverse views (Bessi et al., 2016; Cinelli et al., 2021; Kitchens et al., 2020). The community advocates in this study used social media to advocate for cultural preservation and raise awareness about cultural events, supporting findings from research by Caneba and Maitland (2017) on the use of social media in advocacy.

In a broader context, the results of this study suggest that while social media can be a powerful tool for democratizing cultural discussions, these platforms also bring significant challenges. Echo chamber effects caused by social media algorithms can limit balanced and in-depth discussions on cultural

issues. It is important to ensure that discussions remain respectful and productive, especially among younger generations who actively use platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to discuss cultural identity and heritage.

Psychological effects on users engaging with cultural content

This research explores the psychological effects of interacting with cultural content on social media. Exposure to positive cultural content on social media can increase a sense of pride, community and cultural identity, especially among younger generations who are exploring their identity. However, there are also potential negative impacts such as feelings of exclusion or inadequacy when users compare their cultural expressions to idealized representations on social media.

The positive and negative impacts of engaging with cultural content on social media can be explained by how users respond to feedback and engagement from their audience. One psychologist noted that exposure to positive cultural content can increase a sense of pride and togetherness among users. However, comparison to idealized representations on social media can lead to feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. Cultural content creators also feel increased motivation from positive responses and high engagement on their posts, but also face stress and pressure to constantly produce high-quality content.

These findings support existing literature on the psychological impact of social media. Research by Voggenreiter et al. (2024) showed that positive feedback on social media can improve emotional well-being, while research by Huang and fan (2022) found that social comparison on social media can lead to feelings of inferiority. This study adds that the pressure to constantly produce high-quality content may also lead to burnout among content creators, which is in line with findings by Gregerson & Ormen (2023) on work pressure in the creator economy.

In a broader context, the results of this study suggest that engagement with cultural content on social media can have complex and

diverse psychological effects. While exposure to positive cultural content can strengthen cultural identity and pride, challenges such as stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy also arise. It is important to create supportive and respectful online communities to mitigate these negative impacts and encourage positive cultural engagement.

Practical implications of the findings include the importance of integrating digital literacy in the education curriculum in Aceh to teach students how to critically assess and understand cultural content. Government and educational institutions need to develop programs that not only teach how to use social media but also utilize algorithms to increase the visibility of cultural content. Community leaders and cultural activists should collaborate with social media platforms to create in-depth and informative content, increasing public appreciation and engagement with Acehese culture. In addition, a strategic approach to content moderation and improved digital literacy among users is needed to address the spread of misinformation and ensure inclusive and constructive dialog. Cultural content creators and social media users need to find a balance between engaging with cultural content and maintaining their mental health through strategies such as setting boundaries, seeking support and promoting digital literacy. As such, these efforts can help optimize the use of social media for positive and sustainable cultural engagement in Aceh.

Conclusion

This research reveals the significant influence of social media on cultural engagement in Aceh, with four main findings: the influence of social media on cultural perceptions, the impact of algorithms on the visibility of cultural content, social media as a platform for cultural discussion and debate, and the psychological effects on users who engage with cultural content. The findings suggest that social media can strengthen cultural identity and increase a sense of pride, but also present challenges such as the spread of misinformation, pressure to produce high-quality content, and echo chamber effects.

The significance of this research lies in identifying the urgent need for digital literacy, strategic approaches to content creation and moderation, and the creation of supportive and respectful online communities. By understanding and addressing these challenges, social media can be utilized to promote positive and sustainable cultural engagement in Aceh.

The study's limitations include a potentially non-representative sample size, a temporal scope that may not capture evolving social media trends, reliance on self-reported data which may introduce bias, and a geographical focus limited to Aceh. To address these, future research should aim for larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and comparative studies across different regions. For future research, it is recommended to further explore specific strategies that content creators and educational institutions can implement in improving digital literacy and content moderation. Research could also focus on the long-term impact of cultural engagement on social media on users' psychological well-being as well as effective ways to mitigate its negative impact. Through further research, we can better understand the complex dynamics between social media and cultural engagement, so as to develop more effective strategies to support the preservation and promotion of Acehnese culture in the digital era.

Recommendations for policy and practice include enhancing digital literacy programs, adopting strategic content creation and moderation, promoting supportive online communities, developing policies for content regulation, and encouraging ongoing research and collaboration between academic institutions, cultural organizations, and social media platforms. These steps can help maximize the benefits of social media for cultural engagement while mitigating its challenges.

Disclosure statement

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