

Media, Culture, and Society: Social Interaction in the Digital Era - A Study of the Music Community on Tiktok Indonesia

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Abstract

In the current era of globalization, the development of media technology is progressing rapidly, giving rise to various digital innovations such as social media. Social media serves as a virtual space that allows individuals to form social networks based on shared interests, activities, and collective identities. One of the platforms that has become a center of digital interaction is TikTok, particularly within the music community, including *K-Pop*, *indie*, and *dangdut*. This study aims to analyze the forms of social interaction within *K-Pop*, *dangdut*, and *indie* music communities on TikTok Indonesia, and to examine how these interactions shape community identity and strengthen bonds among members. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, using content analysis of videos, comments, and interactive features such as duets and stitches. The study applies the theory of symbolic interactionism to understand how individuals in the TikTok music community construct meaning, identity, and social relationships through symbolic interactions. This theory emphasizes that identity and social reality are not fixed but are formed through interaction processes infused with symbols, whether through comments, videos, dance challenges, or collaborative features such as duets and stitches. TikTok functions not only as a platform for expressing musical preferences but also as an arena where social interactions are actively constructed and negotiated. The findings of this study reveal that participation in the TikTok music community represents a form of meaningful communication that reflects social connectedness, cultural identification, and the digital dynamics of contemporary society.

Keywords: Tik Tok, Music, Kpop, Indie, Dangdut, Community

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and social media has significantly transformed the landscape of the music industry, including in Indonesia. The rapid advancement of technology has produced major changes in human life, both socially and culturally (Deriyanto & Qorib, 2018). According to Nuryanto (2012), information technology is advancing swiftly, making internet access easier anywhere and anytime. This progress has led to the emergence of various social networks, facilitating communication. Nasrullah (2017) asserts that social media enables anyone to participate, contribute, provide feedback and comments, and share information quickly and without limits. Social media is now a substantial necessity in contemporary life, not merely as a source of entertainment but also as a platform for interaction and the building of social networks (Bessarab et al., 2021).

The application that serves as the focus of this study is *TikTok*. *TikTok* is a short video-based social media platform allowing users to create and share videos, interact through comment sections, private messages, and features such as live streaming and shopping (Chen, Ma, & Sharma, 2024; Cheng, Zeng, & Zhu, 2022; Jing & Nguyen, 2024; Shutsko, 2020; Xiao, Li, & Mou, 2024). Since launching in 2016, *TikTok* has emerged as a new space for creativity and self-expression, reaching more than 1 billion active users globally by 2025. The majority of *TikTok* users are from the United States, with Indonesia following as the second highest at 112.97 million users (Mutia, 2023). Most users of *TikTok* are young people, especially those aged 18–24, accounting for 34.9% of the total user base in 2022 (Erlina, 2023).

The widespread adoption of social media, particularly *TikTok*, has certainly impacted the social interaction patterns of the younger generation. iGen teens from 2010 to 2016 spent more time on digital media such as social platforms, texting, and games, with their online hours

doubling from 2006 to 2016 (Aprilia, 2024). According to a We Are Social report, there were approximately 106.51 million *TikTok* users in Indonesia as of October 2023, making Indonesia the country with the second-largest *TikTok* user population globally. These platforms have become cultural phenomena shaping how younger generations interact, express creativity, and consume content, including music (Kirillova, 2023; Poell, Nieborg, & Duffy, 2021).

Previously, the music community operated largely outside the mainstream conventional industry, but now finds *TikTok* as a new, democratic space to showcase work and build social connections (Czaszewicz, 2024; Frenneaux, 2022, 2025; Zybartyas, 2025). Musicians no longer rely solely on major labels or conventional media; *TikTok* offers features like sound effects, challenges, and the "For You Page" algorithm to reach broader audiences. Musicians can craft distinct creative identities, often integrating local elements such as regional languages, traditional instruments, or Indonesian narratives, which resonate with both domestic and global users.

Beyond content distribution, *TikTok* functions as a dynamic area for social interaction between musicians and fans. Features such as comments, duets, stitches, and live collaborations build more personal, reciprocal relationships, which contrast with the traditional music industry's one-way interaction model. This strengthens digital music communities, forming a new ecosystem wherein creative identities and social ties are mutually reinforcing. Musicians evolve from mere content creators to active participants in cultural discourse.

Nevertheless, these transformations introduce challenges: over-commercialization, pressure to follow viral trends, and the potential erosion of artistic authenticity (Liang & Suwanthada, 2024; Niazi, 2025; Oguntoye, 2025; Zavrel, 2025). It is imperative to examine how the music community expresses itself on *TikTok*, shapes creative identities, and establishes social interactions. This study adopts the symbolic interactionism theory to investigate these phenomena. Symbolic interactionism theorizes that individuals create meaning, form identities, and establish relationships through symbolic communication. This approach aims to reveal how *TikTok* forms social spaces for the K-Pop, dangdut, and indie music communities in Indonesia and how interactions within these spaces reflect the shifting digital culture.

An illustrative example is a video from the *elsafitri_eca* swordsman's account, which garnered 1.4 million likes, was shared 76.2 thousand times, saved by 111.5 thousand users, and received 4,480 comments. This video, showcasing the performance of "Sia-sia Mengharapan Cintamu," attracted significant engagement—ranging from praise for the artist's melodious voice and appearance to invitations for private performances. This phenomenon demonstrates that music content on *TikTok* is not passively consumed; rather, it actively drives social interaction, fostering expression, appreciation, and community involvement.

This case reflects *TikTok*'s evolution beyond a mere entertainment-sharing platform, highlighting its function as an active medium for social interaction. Users engage in two-way communication processes, shaping each other's experiences. Such interactions illustrate how social media is carving out new social spaces, blurring distinctions between creators and audiences, and between individual expression and collective community dynamics.

Employing a symbolic interactionism approach, this study seeks to explore how K-Pop, dangdut, and indie music communities on *TikTok* build relationships, form identities, and generate social meaning through digital interactions. The research aims to contribute to communication science studies, especially regarding social interaction dynamics within the digital media ecosystem.

The rapid evolution of *TikTok* has generated fresh dynamics in digital social interaction within music communities. Despite growing popularity of genres like K-Pop, dangdut, and indie on *TikTok Indonesia*, comprehensive understanding of how these groups interact digitally remains limited. Symbolic interaction through comments, duets, stitches, and dance challenges

constitutes a nuanced form of digital communication, shaping both individual and collective identities. The study thus seeks to answer two key research questions: (1) What forms of social interaction define the K-Pop, dangdut, and indie music communities on *TikTok Indonesia*? (2) How do these interactions help build community identity and strengthen member bonds in a musical context?

The rise of digital media—especially *TikTok*—has constructed novel interaction spaces for Indonesian music communities, including K-Pop, dangdut, and indie. Accordingly, this study seeks to: (1) identify and describe the forms of social interaction evident in these three music communities on *TikTok Indonesia*, and (2) analyze how such interactions shape community identity and foster member bonds in musical contexts. Adopting symbolic interactionism, the research aspires to offer practical guidance for stakeholders in the music and media industries, aiding their grasp of digital audience dynamics, and provide academic insights into the sociological construction of identity and community in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method applied in this study was a descriptive qualitative method. This approach was selected because it aimed to capture the phenomenon of social interaction within the music community on the TikTok platform, without centering on hypothesis testing or quantitative variables. In this context, the descriptive qualitative method enabled researchers to gain a deep understanding of how individuals or groups shaped meaning through their interactions in an evolving digital social setting. The study explored the dynamics of social interaction in music communities on TikTok, identified patterns of interaction, and examined how these communities shaped their creative identities. Thus, this approach suited the description of social phenomena on TikTok, including how musicians, fans, and audiences interacted and collectively created a digital cultural space that influenced one another.

Data collection relied on content analysis, examining videos, comments, and interactions that took place on TikTok. The analysis aimed to map and identify key elements relevant to the music community, such as music videos, music challenges, and the accompanying comments. The research concentrated on uploads related to the K-Pop, dangdut, and indie music genres, since these genres had an active fan base and presented a unique pattern of social interaction. Researchers also observed interactive TikTok features that enabled reciprocal relationships between musicians and audiences, such as duets, stitches, and live broadcasts, which enriched the communication process and fostered more personal social relationships (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Fuchs, 2017). This non-participatory technique meant researchers were not involved in the interaction but only observed and analyzed content and comments produced by TikTok users to obtain a clear picture of the prevailing social dynamics (Silverman, 2011).

The data selection process was conducted by purposive sampling, selecting videos and comments highly relevant to the phenomenon of social interaction in the TikTok music community. The chosen sample included videos that attracted significant interaction—such as a high number of likes, comments, and shares—as well as those showing collaboration or direct interaction between musicians and audiences. This sampling ensured that the data truly reflected the social dynamics present in the digital music community (Krippendorff, 2019). This technique enabled researchers to examine the meanings and symbols generated in each form of interaction, and to understand how these interactions reflected the social constructs developing within the digital music community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Differences in Social Interaction of Kpop, Indie, and Dangdut Music Communities on

Tiktok

The K-Pop fandom is known for having a large and highly dedicated fan base around the world. Fandom members often form communities or their own fandom official names. The purpose of forming the fandom community is to support their idols either by holding an event related to their idols, streaming music, buying their idol merchandise, and participating in various activities that aim to encourage the success and popularity of their idols. Kpop fans usually often get together with fellow fans, whether it's a fandom or not. Starting by watching online concerts together, karaoke together, *family gatherings*, or doing *charity* activities together. Unlike the kpop community, the indie community and dangdut community on tiktok are not so prominent. The activities exposed on TikTok related to the dangdut community are only around parties, and dancing merrily. Connoisseurs of dangdut music are also filled by various groups of people, be it upper, middle, and lower middle society, however, this community is mostly filled with lower-class people. Connoisseurs of dangdut music have always been associated with the lower middle and lower economic and social society. For several years, dangdut music was considered irreverent and inappropriate, even though this type of music is very popular in Indonesia and has lyrics that are familiar to the daily lives of Indonesians (Yuliyani, 2023). Like other popular music, dangdut music has lyrics that describe feelings, but because the majority of listeners come from middle-class society, many of the lyrics also describe the economic, social, and cultural conditions of Indonesian society (Yuliyani, 2023). Dangdut music is often heard in villages, terminals, transportation such as trucks, buses, to coffee and food stalls, which shows the identity and cultural condition of the people in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the indie music community on TikTok is more likely to be filled by young people who often feel very relatable to their current lives (Firdaus, et al., 2024). Musicians and artists use the internet or social media to market their work in the modern era. Social media is becoming a major market with high traffic, especially for indie bands, who mostly start their careers from scratch. The spread of indie music in Indonesia is attributed to the trend among teenagers who continue to keep up with the development of popular culture, as well as technological advancements that allow indie music to market its products more easily. The response to this trend has made it a fast-growing music genre in Indonesia, especially on digital music platforms. Indie music makes room for its minority nature of social expression for its listeners (Zhao, 2024). An analysis of the interaction of the music community on TikTok through the perspective of symbolic interactionism shows that every community does not only use the platform as a medium distribution content but also a room to form and actively negotiate social meanings, identities, and collective symbols. The theory of symbolic interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and further developed by Herbert Blumer, emphasizes that social meaning is not inherently attached to objects or actions, but rather is formed through a continuous process of interaction between individuals. In this context, TikTok became *Symbolic Arena* the place of the Users interact with each other through the creative content they produce and consume.

In the K-Pop community, meaning is formed through fandom symbols such as *lightsticks*, jargon, fancams, or dance challenges, which not only serve as a means of expression, but also as a symbol of collective identity. When users upload content featuring dances from idol groups or videos reacting to the release of the latest song, they are forming a new sense of who they are as "true fans", as well as strengthening a sense of community among community members. Symbolic interactions also occur in the form of comments, stitches, and duets, which are the process of negotiating a shared meaning about identity and loyalty to a particular idol. This is where affective aspects and social integration emerge as a result of a consistent and meaningful exchange of symbols (Goffman, 1959).

Meanwhile, the indie music community uses TikTok as a reflective space to build

personal meaning and a more introspective narrative of identity. Songs that tend to be melancholy or experimental become symbols of self-expression, where users associate their personal experience with the lyrics or mood of the music used. Comments or narratives written on content often contain emotional reflections or life experiences that are then responded to by other users. In this context, symbolic interactions not only shape the meaning of songs, but also open up spaces for empathy, recognition, and social validation between individuals who were previously unfamiliar with each other.

As for the dangdut community, musical symbols are used as a tool to build social relations across classes and generations. The remix song or koplo version became a symbol of collective pleasure and release from routine or social pressure. When users create dancing videos or funny content against the backdrop of dangdut music, the action is not just entertainment, but also forms social solidarity through the exchange of symbols that are easy to understand and accessible to many levels of society. TikTok has become a social space where the identity as an "ordinary person" who likes dangdut becomes legitimate and even celebrated together. This is where we see that social meanings are not fixed, but are always negotiated based on the social context of the user and the symbols they choose to display.

Thus, through the lens of symbolic interactionism, it can be understood that TikTok is not just a medium of entertainment or self-expression, but also serves as a symbolic space where meaning, identity, and social relations continue to be dynamically produced, consumed, and negotiated. The three music communities show how the symbolic interactions that emerge on TikTok reflect the complexity of social dynamics in the digital age.

Conclusion

This research revealed that TikTok has evolved into a vital social space for shaping and mediating interactions within digital music communities, dynamically forming social meaning, collective identity, and relationships through symbols like hashtags, music videos, dance challenges, comments, and interactive features. The study highlighted the K-Pop community's strong engagement and symbolic identity, the dangdut community's inclusive local cultural solidarity across diverse groups, and the indie community's reflective and intimate self-expression through music. Altogether, these findings confirmed TikTok's role not just as a music distribution platform but as a vibrant cultural ecosystem fostering communal bonds, values, and meaning in contemporary digital culture. Future research could further investigate the impact of emerging digital technologies on other genres or communities, and explore how new features or platform policies might influence patterns of identity formation and social interaction in digital spaces.

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