From Risk Communication to Collective Action: The Role of Social Media Influencers in Building Social Cohesion and Community Resilience in Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper explores the emerging role of social media influencers in disaster risk communication and community resilience in Indonesia. Through a literature review of academic journals, e-books, reports, and secondary sources published over the last decade, the study synthesizes insights on how influencers shape public understanding, foster social cohesion, and mobilize collective action in times of crisis. The findings highlight three interrelated roles. First, influencers act as amplifiers of risk information, extending the reach and accessibility of disaster messages beyond institutional channels, though risks of misinformation remain significant. Second, they cultivate social cohesion and community identity by leveraging parasocial trust and cultural values such as *gotong royong*, reframing disasters as collective struggles that demand solidarity. Third, influencers facilitate activism and resource mobilization, transforming digital attention into donations, volunteering, and grassroots engagement, albeit often in episodic or performative ways. The review emphasizes both opportunities and challenges: while influencers democratize access and enhance engagement, their contributions may exclude marginalized groups and risk eroding trust when authenticity is questioned. The paper argues that hybrid communication models—linking influencers with government agencies, NGOs, and local communities—offer the most promising pathway for building inclusive resilience. The study contributes to the literature on digital risk communication, social cohesion, and civic activism while offering practical recommendations for integrating influencer engagement into disaster preparedness and response strategies in Indonesia.

Keywords: disaster resilience, risk communication, social cohesion, social media influencers

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world due to its geographic position along the Pacific Ring of Fire and its tropical climate. The country experiences a high frequency of earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods, and landslides. According to the Indonesian National Disaster Management Agency [1], more than 3,000 disaster events were recorded annually in recent years, affecting millions of people and causing significant social and economic disruption. These recurring disasters underscore the importance of effective communication strategies that can convey risk information, foster public understanding, and motivate preventive actions. However, despite the extensive institutional mechanisms that have been developed, communication gaps persist in reaching communities, ensuring preparedness, and encouraging collective resilience [2].

Traditionally, disaster risk communication in Indonesia has followed a top-down model, in which government agencies, experts, and mainstream media are the primary sources of information. This model prioritizes authority and accuracy but often overlooks the relational and cultural dimensions of communication. Official warnings and advisories are typically technical, impersonal, and one-way, which can limit their resonance with local communities. Research indicates that such approaches frequently fail to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and public perception, leading to insufficient preparedness and, at times, non-compliance with safety measures [3]. The lack of dialogic engagement further weakens the potential for collective learning and social cohesion around disaster preparedness.

The rise of digital technologies, particularly social media, has significantly altered the communication landscape in Indonesia. With over 191 million active social media users— approximately 68% of the population—platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) are now central to the ways Indonesians access news, build identities, and engage in collective discourse. Unlike traditional media, social media enables interactive, participatory, and real-time communication. It allows users to not only consume but also produce, share, and remix information. This democratization of communication opens new opportunities for disaster risk communication, especially in contexts where trust in government institutions may be limited or uneven [4].

Within this digital ecosystem, social media influencers have emerged as important communicators. Influencers are individuals who, by virtue of their large followings and perceived credibility, can shape public opinion and behavior [5]. They are not confined to celebrities but include micro- and nano-influencers who cultivate niche communities and strong parasocial relationships with followers. In Indonesia, where influencers are deeply integrated into marketing, lifestyle, and political discourse, their role in disaster communication has gained increasing visibility. For example, during the Palu earthquake and tsunami in 2018, several influencers amplified donation campaigns, mobilized volunteers, and shared survival information. Similarly, during the eruption of Mount Semeru in 2021, influencers were instrumental in fundraising and amplifying calls for solidarity. These instances demonstrate how influencers can act as intermediaries between technical disaster information and community action.

The unique power of influencers lies in their ability to combine reach, relatability, and trust. Unlike official institutions that often communicate in bureaucratic or technical language, influencers engage in conversational, personal, and culturally resonant ways. They integrate preparedness messages into lifestyle content, use humor or emotional appeals to capture attention, and encourage followers to participate in collective initiatives such as donations or community support. In doing so, they not only amplify risk information but also contribute to building social cohesion and shared identity, which are crucial for resilience [6].

However, the involvement of influencers in disaster communication also presents challenges. First, their credibility can be contested; while many are trusted, others may spread misinformation or oversimplify complex risks. The viral logic of social media prioritizes engagement over accuracy, creating conditions in which sensationalist or misleading content can gain traction faster than verified information. Second, there is the risk of performative activism—where influencers highlight disasters more for self-branding or commercial gain than for genuine solidarity. Third, digital inequalities persist: rural communities with limited connectivity may be excluded from influencer-driven communication, reinforcing existing disparities in preparedness [7]. These risks

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highlight the need for critical reflection on how influencers can be responsibly integrated into disaster risk communication frameworks.

Scholars have begun to examine the relationship between digital platforms, social cohesion, and activism in various contexts. Studies suggest that online interactions can foster inclusive community relationships by enabling individuals to share experiences, construct collective identities, and mobilize around shared concerns [6]. In disaster settings, these dynamics are particularly salient: online communities often become spaces for emotional support, resource coordination, and collective problem-solving [2]. Yet, systematic understanding of how influencers mediate these processes—particularly in the Indonesian context—remains underdeveloped. Most existing research focuses either on government-led risk communication or on the general role of social media, leaving the influencer dimension relatively unexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by synthesizing literature on risk communication, social media, and community resilience, with a focus on the Indonesian context. Specifically, it explores how social media influencers facilitate the shift from risk communication to collective action by building trust, fostering identity, and mobilizing activism. The article adopts a literature review methodology, drawing on academic studies, policy documents, and empirical cases to develop a conceptual framework for understanding influencers' contributions and limitations. By doing so, the article positions influencers not as peripheral actors but as central agents in the evolving disaster communication ecosystem.

The significance of this research lies in three key contributions. First, it provides a theoretical bridge between risk communication, digital media studies, and social cohesion theory, offering a nuanced perspective on how influencers shape community resilience. Second, it situates these debates within the Indonesian context, which is both highly vulnerable to disasters and highly engaged with digital platforms—making it a critical case for global discussions on digital disaster communication. Third, the study offers practical implications for policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and communication practitioners on how to collaborate with influencers to design inclusive, participatory, and effective communication strategies.

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize and critically examine existing scholarship on the role of social media influencers in disaster risk communication, social cohesion, and community resilience. A literature review approach is considered appropriate given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, which intersects communication studies, disaster management, sociology, and digital media research, and the relative lack of consolidated frameworks in this field. To ensure transparency and rigor, the review process was informed by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, although it did not include a statistical meta-analysis. Instead, the study followed a structured procedure involving the identification of relevant literature, screening and eligibility assessment, thematic coding, and the synthesis of findings into conceptual insights.

The literature search was conducted across several major databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, complemented by Indonesian academic repositories to capture region-specific studies. Keywords were drawn from three thematic clusters: disaster communication (e.g., "risk communication," "disaster preparedness," "resilience"), digital media and influencers (e.g., "social media influencers," "digital platforms," "digital activism"), and

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social cohesion and community (e.g., "collective identity," "community participation," "social cohesion"). Boolean operators such as AND and OR were used to combine terms, resulting in searches such as *"social media influencers" AND "disaster communication" OR "risk communication" AND "Indonesia."* The review covered publications from 2005 to 2024, corresponding with the period in which digital platforms gained prominence in disaster and risk communication scholarship.

The initial search identified 524 publications. After removing duplicates, 412 records remained and were screened by titles and abstracts, yielding 136 potentially relevant articles. Following a full-text assessment based on relevance and methodological quality, 78 articles met the inclusion criteria and were examined in depth. Of these, 31 focused directly on disaster or risk communication, 22 investigated influencer dynamics and digital trust, and 25 engaged with the concepts of social cohesion, identity, and resilience in online contexts. To ensure relevance, only peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, and authoritative policy reports were included, while non-academic sources and studies unrelated to social issues were excluded.

The analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis approach. Each article was coded according to key dimensions related to the research objectives, namely the amplification of risk information, the construction of social cohesion and identity, and the facilitation of activism and collective action. These themes provided a framework for comparing findings across different disciplines and contexts, with attention to both convergences and divergences between global studies and Indonesian-specific research. NVivo software was employed to assist in organizing codes, identifying thematic patterns, and synthesizing insights into a coherent narrative.

Several limitations of this methodology should be acknowledged. The reliance on published literature may exclude valuable insights from grey literature, community-level practices, or unpublished reports. Furthermore, while the inclusion of both global and Indonesian cases enriches the analysis, it may obscure local cultural nuances in influencer–follower dynamics. Publication bias also poses a potential limitation, as studies documenting successful or visible cases are more likely to be published than those examining failures or less impactful interventions. Despite these constraints, the systematic review provides a robust basis for understanding how social media influencers intersect with risk communication, social cohesion, and resilience-building in disaster-prone societies such as Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of 78 reviewed studies indicates that social media influencers play an increasingly significant role in reshaping disaster risk communication in Indonesia. The findings of this literature review can be grouped into three thematic dimensions: (1) influencers as amplifiers of risk communication, (2) influencers as builders of social cohesion and community identity, and (3) influencers as facilitators of activism and collective action. Each theme highlights both opportunities and challenges as reported across the reviewed literature. A first theme concerns the role of influencers as amplifiers of risk communication. Across the literature, scholars have noted that traditional disaster communication models in Indonesia have been dominated by institutional top-down approaches, with messages delivered by BNPB or BMKG through press releases and mainstream news outlets [2].

However, these messages often fail to engage communities effectively due to their technical

language and formal tone. Studies consistently emphasize that influencers enhance the visibility and cultural accessibility of such information by embedding it within popular digital practices. For instance, research and media reports repeatedly reference the case of Arief Muhammad, who during the Cianjur earthquake in 2022 used Instagram to disseminate donation links and practical tips. His intervention is frequently cited in grey literature and journalistic analyses as an example of how influencers can accelerate the circulation of risk information compared to institutional channels.

Similarly, the literature points to Jerome Polin, whose humorous yet educational TikTok videos illustrate how youth-oriented influencers can translate technical preparedness messages into formats that resonate with younger demographics [7]. Comparative studies also support this amplification effect. In Japan and the Philippines, scholars have observed that local influencers improve the timeliness and relatability of early warnings, especially among younger and digitally active citizens [8].

Nevertheless, the literature warns that amplification can become problematic when influencers prioritize virality over accuracy. Rachel Vennya's controversial statements during the COVID-19 pandemic are frequently cited as a cautionary tale in both academic and media accounts, demonstrating the risk of misinformation when influencers are not aligned with scientific or institutional communication [9].

A second recurring theme in the reviewed literature is the contribution of influencers to social cohesion and identity formation during disasters. Scholars argue that influencers build parasocial trust with their followers, which becomes particularly valuable in times of uncertainty [10]. The literature on Indonesia frequently highlights the cultural importance of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) as a frame through which influencers encourage solidarity. Awkarin, for instance, is widely documented in both scholarly articles and NGO reports as a case of influencer activism that redefined her public persona. Her involvement in fundraising and volunteering during the 2018 Lombok earthquake is repeatedly cited as an example of how influencers can cultivate empathy, solidarity, and a sense of belonging among youth audiences [4].

Similarly, scholars and news coverage mention Gita Savitri, who often frames disasters within narratives of moral obligation and resilience, thus strengthening identity-based cohesion among her largely educated and reflective audience. The reviewed studies also mention influencers like Tanboy Kun, who mobilized his followers to distribute meals during Jakarta floods, and Reza Arap, who used gaming communities for fundraising.

These examples illustrate how influencers transform fragmented digital interactions into collective narratives that reinforce community belonging. However, across the literature, researchers warn that such cohesion may not always be inclusive. For example, researchers argue that influencer messages tend to privilege urban, middle-class, and digitally connected audiences, leaving behind rural or socio-economically marginalized groups [5]. This limitation is consistently noted in Indonesian studies, highlighting the persistence of digital divides in disaster communication.

The third theme identified across the reviewed literature is the facilitation of activism and collective action. Influencers do not merely spread information but often convert online attention into tangible resources and participation. Numerous case studies in both scholarly and grey literature document influencer-led fundraising campaigns in Indonesia. During the eruption of Mount Semeru in 2021, for instance, Deddy Corbuzier's charity livestream is repeatedly

highlighted as a successful case of influencer-led mobilization. Awkarin and Arief Muhammad are also consistently cited for their ability to transform personal branding into civic participation through fundraising and volunteer coordination [4]. These cases align with international literature showing similar dynamics. Austin et al. [11] describe how influencers in the United States mobilized neighborhood solidarity during Hurricane Harvey, while Uy et al [8] highlight collaborations between influencers and local authorities in the Philippines to promote evacuation planning. Taken together, these studies suggest that influencers can play catalytic roles in bridging digital engagement with offline action.

However, the literature also raises critical concerns. Scholars critique the rise of "performative activism," where influencers signal support for disaster causes without substantive or sustained engagement. In Indonesia, this has been noted in cases where influencers post symbolic support for victims but fail to follow up with accountability for funds raised. Moreover, multiple studies warn that influencer activism is episodic and event-driven rather than integrated into long-term disaster risk reduction strategies, raising questions about sustainability [7].

Across the reviewed literature, several cross-cutting opportunities and challenges become evident. On the positive side, influencers democratize access to disaster information, increase youth engagement, and help bridge the gap between scientific institutions and lay communities. They contribute to identity-building and social cohesion by framing disasters as collective struggles rather than isolated events. They mobilize material and emotional resources, often achieving rapid responses that surpass institutional capacities. Yet, on the critical side, scholars repeatedly warn about misinformation, exclusivity due to digital divides, the risk of performative activism, and the potential co-optation of influencers by political actors. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, multiple studies documented how government partnerships with influencers helped extend the reach of health protocols but simultaneously raised concerns about authenticity and public trust when influencers were perceived as being paid for compliance rather than genuine conviction (Limaye et al.,) [8].

The reviewed studies converge on the recommendation that hybrid models of disaster communication—where influencers collaborate with government agencies, NGOs, and communities—are likely to be most effective [12]. Such models allow influencers to retain authenticity while benefitting from institutional credibility and technical accuracy. In Indonesia, some of these hybrid approaches are already emerging. BNPB has experimented with partnering with influencers for disaster education campaigns, while crowdfunding platforms such as Kitabisa.com have institutionalized influencer involvement in humanitarian fundraising [13]. The literature suggests that scaling such collaborations while addressing inclusivity and accountability will be critical for sustainable outcomes.

Overall, the synthesis of the literature indicates that Indonesian influencers such as Awkarin, Arief Muhammad, Najwa Shihab, Jerome Polin, Deddy Corbuzier, and others exemplify the opportunities and contradictions of influencer-driven disaster communication. They demonstrate the potential to amplify information, build cohesion, and mobilize collective action, but they also illustrate the risks of misinformation, exclusivity, and performativity. The reviewed studies therefore point to the importance of developing frameworks that promote disaster literacy among influencers, strengthen equitable digital access, and institutionalize partnerships that align influencer practices with broader resilience goals. With such frameworks in place, influencers can serve as valuable allies in transforming disaster risk communication into collective action and in

building socially cohesive, resilient communities in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This literature review has examined the evolving role of social media influencers in disaster risk communication and community resilience in Indonesia. By synthesizing academic studies, reports, and media analyses, three interrelated themes emerged: influencers as amplifiers of disaster information, as builders of social cohesion and identity, and as facilitators of activism and collective action. These roles demonstrate how digital platforms, when mediated through trusted figures, can extend the reach of official communication, foster solidarity in fragmented societies, and mobilize tangible resources for disaster response. The findings underscore several opportunities. Influencers democratize access to disaster knowledge by translating technical language into culturally resonant formats that engage youth and digitally active populations. They contribute to social cohesion by leveraging parasocial trust and cultural values such as *gotong royong*, thereby reframing disasters as collective rather than individual struggles. Furthermore, they catalyze civic engagement, transforming digital attention into donations, volunteering, and grassroots mobilization at speeds unmatched by institutional actors. Collectively, these capacities illustrate the potential of influencers to bridge the gap between institutional risk communication and community action.

At the same time, the literature highlights significant challenges. The amplification of disaster messages can slip into misinformation when influencers prioritize popularity or lack scientific grounding, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cohesion built through influencers often reflects the interests of digitally connected, urban audiences, leaving marginalized communities excluded. Activism driven by influencers may be episodic, event-driven, or performative, raising concerns about accountability and sustainability. Additionally, the growing entanglement of influencers with political or commercial interests risks undermining authenticity and eroding public trust. These challenges remind us that while influencers are powerful mediators, their contributions must be critically assessed within broader socio-political and cultural contexts.

Theoretically, this review contributes to the literature on risk communication and social cohesion by demonstrating how influencer-driven communication represents a hybrid form of mediated trust, combining personal branding, parasocial relationships, and digital activism. It extends discussions of digital cohesion by showing how identity, solidarity, and activism are cultivated not solely through institutions or grassroots organizations but also through individual personalities operating within networked platforms. Practically, the review suggests the need for hybrid communication models in which influencers collaborate with government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations. Such partnerships would ensure accuracy while maintaining cultural relatability. Disaster literacy training for influencers, institutional support for inclusive communication, and transparent mechanisms for accountability in fundraising are critical steps to maximize positive outcomes.

Future research should address several gaps identified across the literature. More empirical studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of influencer-led activism on community resilience, particularly beyond episodic disaster events. Comparative studies across different regions in Indonesia could illuminate how digital divides shape the inclusivity of influencer communication. Finally, greater attention should be paid to the political economy of influencer engagement, including how sponsorships, state collaborations, and platform algorithms affect the

authenticity and impact of disaster communication.

In conclusion, influencers in Indonesia occupy an increasingly central position in disaster risk communication, bridging the divide between information and action, between individual identities and collective solidarity. Their ability to amplify, connect, and mobilize offers powerful opportunities for building cohesive and resilient communities. Yet, without careful integration into broader communication frameworks, their contributions risk reproducing inequalities or eroding trust. Harnessing the power of influencers responsibly therefore represents both an urgent challenge and a promising pathway for inclusive, community-centered resilience in Indonesia.

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