Digital Platforms and the Formation of Networked Communities: The Case of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan

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Abstract: Social media plays a pivotal role in today's society, transforming how individuals save information and engage with the world. The intersection of migration and technology creates a dynamic environment in which social media plays a crucial role in shaping the lives and economic struggles of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Even though there is an Indonesian government representative in Taiwan named the Indonesia Economic and Trade Office (KDEI) in Taipei, it cannot ensure the security of Indonesian migrant workers, because everyone must follow the rules of Taiwan as a workplace. Social media platforms are essential to constructing network communities in this economic and political landscape, as Indonesian migrant workers are unanimous. The socio-economic integration of Indonesian migrants in Taiwan involves various challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination. Qualitative research design employs in-depth interviews to explore the role of social media. Participants were selected using a purposive method to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and the data collected through semi-structured interviews. This research methodology provides a comprehensive understanding of social media usage's personal and social impacts, highlighting the profound connection and empathy it fosters among migrant workers. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and LINE are integral for staying connected, accessing information, and enjoying entertainment. The research argues that using social media plays a crucial role in forming network communities and support groups, offering a sense of belonging and mutual aid among workers, and creating a social security system that still needs to be fully functional.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Networked Communities, Migrant Workers, Taiwan, Social Media

I. Introduction

Taiwan, a developed country with a strong economy, is a key destination for many migrant workers, including those from Indonesia. Indonesian workers are employed in sectors such as domestic work, manufacturing, and elderly care. They face challenges related to language, culture, and labor rights protection. Despite these difficulties, Taiwan offers broader career opportunities, allowing Indonesian workers to develop their skills and careers. Additionally, Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan enjoy social freedom, particularly in interacting and communicating through social media platforms like

Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, where glimpses of their daily lives can often be seen through their posts. Indonesian job seekers consciously decide to become migrant workers, often cited to improve their economic situation and provide a better future for their families. This decision is based on job opportunities and wages in Indonesia, which motivates them to seek employment abroad, especially in Taiwan. They are aware of the challenges they will face, such as cultural differences, language learning, and other risks, but the promise of higher incomes and excellent financial stability lessen their concerns. With careful consideration and planning, they pursue opportunities in Taiwan, viewing migration as a means to achieve upward mobility and financial well-being. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesian migrant workers were vulnerable to developing severe mental health problems (Harjana et al., 2021). Despite the challenges of leaving their families and homeland behind, they choose this path for specific reasons, such as self-sufficiency, new experiences, or higher income.

Previous studies have shown that economic factors drive people to become migrant workers (Gusman, 2015). Workers earn little more than a subsistence wage and have no other means to protect their incomes if they lose their jobs (Khanna, 2020)—the complexity of the reasons underlying an incoming migrant worker for others to understand. Various problems and pressures can cause migrant workers to experience mental health problems, as shown by the results of a survey of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong (Iqbal, 2020). Therefore, a lack of understanding of migrant workers and the motives that drive them to work in other countries can disrupt authentic relationships between migrant workers and those around them. The purpose of this study is to explore the significance of social media for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. This study aims to understand how social media platforms influence their daily lives and communication and research on social integration in a foreign country.

II. Literature Review

Theoretical frameworks related to social media and migration

In recent years, migration has become an increasingly important topic in many Western democracies, and at times, it has been the subject of heated public and political debate (Heidenreich et al., 2020). Migration represents a recurrent source of moral panic, and social media's role in this process has been transforming how media are produced and contested (Walsh & Hill, 2023). Online communities of migrants can act as networks of support but are often driven by commercial motives (Guma et al., 2022).

Madianou and Miller (2018) explore the dynamics of transnational families in the context of new media technologies. Social media forums are integral to maintaining transnational relationships among highly skilled migrant youth (Jagganath et al., 2023). Corporate engagement in refugee integration in Germany illustrates the multifaceted roles the private sector can play in addressing migration challenges (Müller, 2023).

The elite economic press in Chile frames migrants primarily as economic entities, reflecting the close financial, economic elites, and political power (Gonzfinancialodríguez, 2024). Social media data provides a flexible source for exploring the link between migrants' mobility and their interests (Lemoine-Rodrígmigrants'., 2024). The concept of 'platformed panics' captures how social media's design and usage promote networked and participatory panics (Walsh & Hill, 2023).

III. Methodology

The qualitative research design employed in-depth interviews to explore the role of social media for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis identified key themes related to communication, community building, and information sharing. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of social media usage's personal and social impacts. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the study (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019).

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, providing rich, detailed insights into social media's impact on their social connections to access information. Such qualitative methods allow for a nuanced understanding of the social media dynamics in this specific migrant community (Patton & Schwandt, 2014). These methods offer a comprehensive understanding of how social media facilitates communication, community building, and access to resources for migrant workers (Serrat, 2017).

IV. Result and Discussion

Social media also serves as a source of information and entertainment for migrant workers. They frequently use YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok to access news from Indonesia and Taiwan, ensuring they stay informed about current events. Additionally, these platforms offer entertainment options such as music videos, drama series, and humorous content, which help migrant workers relax and unwind during their free time.

a)　Building and Engaging in Communities

Many Indonesian migrant workers join online communities and support groups on platforms like Facebook and LINE. These groups, often organized around shared experiences or common interests, provide a sense of belonging and mutual support. Notable examples of Facebook groups include: (1) Info Job Resmi Dan Swasta TKI TAIWAN (29,000 members), (2) INFO JOB KABURAN /SWASTA AMAN DAN AMANAH (38,900 members), (3) INFO LOKER - TAIWAN – 2024 (32,000 members), etc. Members share advice, offer emotional support, and disseminate crucial information about living and working in Taiwan.

b)　Entrepreneurship and Business

Some Indonesian migrant workers leverage social media to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are used to market and sell products, often catering to fellow migrant workers or local Taiwanese customers. This entrepreneurial use of social media provides an additional income stream and empowers workers by enhancing their business skills and financial independence.

c)　Education and Skill Development

Social media also serves as a tool for education and personal development. Many workers use online resources to learn new skills, such as Mandarin language courses, vocational training, or other educational content on platforms like YouTube and Facebook.

d) Advocacy and Rights Awareness

Advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) utilize social media to reach out to Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. These organizations provide essential information about workers' rights, legal assistance, and support service workers. Media campaigns and informational posts help raise awareness about labor rights, contract obligations, and access to healthcare, empowering workers to advocate for themselves and seek help when needed.

Demographic profile of Indonesian migrant workers

To fully understand and contextualize the social media use of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, it is essential to examine their demographic profile. This includes their age, gender, education level, employment type, and length of stay in Taiwan. This demographic data provides valuable insights into their social media habits and needs.

a) Age and Gender

Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan are predominantly female, with a significant portion between the ages of 20 and 40 (Table 1).

Table 1. The Demographic trends in social media use

Age range	Characteristics
Youth Engagement (20-30 years)	Younger workers are generally more tech-savvy and engaged with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. They use these platforms for communication, entertainment, and staying updated with trends.
Mature Workers (30-40 years)	Older workers may prefer platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp for more straightforward communication with family and friends.

Source: The authors (2024)

b) Employment Type and Work Environment

Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan typically work as caregivers, domestic helpers, and factory workers (Table 2).

Table 2. The nature of the job and the work environment in social media Indonesian migrant worker

Jobs	The work environment

Caregivers and Domestic Helpers	These workers often have limited free time and may have restricted access to mobile devices during working hours. They primarily use social media during breaks or off-duty periods for quick communication with family and entertainment.
Factory Workers	Factory workers might have more structured work schedules, allowing them to plan their social media usage during designated break times and after work. They may also have better access to Wi-Fi in dormitories, facilitating more consistent use. They will live on TikTok every Saturday.

Source: The authors (2024)

c) Geographic Distribution

The geographic distribution of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, whether in urban or rural areas, influences their access to and use of social media:

1) Urban Areas: Workers in cities like Taipei and Kaohsiung generally have better access to high-speed internet and various social media platforms. They are more likely to engage in diverse online activities, including business and education.
2) Rural Areas: Rural residents may face challenges such as slower internet speeds and limited access to certain services, affecting the frequency and type of social media usage.

Impact of Social Media on Social Capital and Integration

Regular interaction with loved ones offers comfort and reassurance, helping workers cope with the emotional stress of being away from home. Sharing experiences and receiving encouragement can mitigate feelings of homesickness and anxiety. Engaging with cultural content from home, such as traditional music, news, and social possibilities shared on social media, helps workers connect to their cultural roots, reinforcing their identity and providing emotional comfort. Social media facilitates the creation and maintenance of community among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Many workers join online groups on platforms like Facebook and LINE, where they can connect with others who share similar experiences. These online communities provide a sense of belonging and mutual support, allowing members to share advice, offer emotional support, and disseminate crucial information about living and working in Taiwan. Participation in these communities helps mitigate feelings of isolation and loneliness, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual aid.

> "However, I also realized that social media can be a means to stay connected with family and friends in Indonesia, as well as get information about the latest developments in the country. Therefore, I try to use social media wisely and in a balanced way by limiting my time and prioritizing the balance between work and personal life." (S, 25 years old)

Social media also plays a crucial role in preserving and sharing cultural practices among Indonesian migrant workers. Through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, workers can participate in virtual cultural events, share traditional recipes, and celebrate religious and national holidays together. This helps maintain their cultural identity and provides comfort by creating a familiar environment in a foreign land.

Social media also has negative impacts on them, including increased anxiety or stress due to being involved in drama or conflict that occurs on social media. Often, online interactions can be a source of unnecessary tension or confrontation, which can affect my mood and mental health.

> "Yes, I have experienced some negative impacts from social media while working in Taiwan. One of them is the distraction caused by social media when I should focus on working in the factory. Sometimes, I find it difficult to refrain from opening social media apps during breaks or free time at work, which can interfere with my productivity" (N, 27 years old)

> "Once, I experienced some negative impacts from using social media while working in Taiwan. One is the deepening sense of longing for family in Indonesia every time I see their photos or videos on social media. Sometimes, seeing their happiness makes me feel sad because I cannot be there with them" (T, 29 years old)

Benefits of Social Media in Relationship Maintenance

Indonesian migrant workers face difficulty navigating social media platforms in Taiwan due to the language barrier. While some platforms offer translation features, not all content is translated accurately, making it challenging to comprehend information or communicate effectively. Cultural nuances and differences in social media etiquette between Indonesia and Taiwan can pose challenges. What may be considered appropriate or polite behavior in one culture could be perceived differently in another, leading to misunderstandings or unintentional offense. Privacy concerns may arise among migrant workers when using social media in Taiwan, especially regarding personal data protection and online security.

V. Conclusion

Social media is a vital tool for maintaining communication with family and friends, alleviating homesickness, and providing emotional support. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and LINE are integral for staying connected, accessing information, and enjoying entertainment. These interactions help workers remain informed about current events in Indonesia and Taiwan.

Furthermore, social media facilitates the formation of online communities and support groups, offering workers a sense of belonging and mutual aid. It also provides a platform for entrepreneurial activities, enabling workers to market and sell products and enhancing their business skills and financial independence. Educational resources available on social media help workers learn new skills, improving job performance and future career prospects. Social media significantly enhances the lives of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan by fostering communication, community building, and personal development; addressing the accompanying challenges is crucial. Future research should focus on developing strategies to mitigate these issues, ensuring social media remains a beneficial tool for this community.

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