



Social Interaction and Cultural Transformation in Contemporary Urban Communities

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Abstract

This study examines how social interaction functions as the primary mechanism driving cultural transformation in contemporary urban communities. Rapid urbanization, technological advancement, and increased mobility have reshaped patterns of communication, participation, and identity formation within urban settings. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research explores how everyday interactions both face-to-face and digitally mediated contribute to shifts in values, lifestyles, traditions, and social norms. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis within a diverse urban community. The findings reveal a transition from predominantly localized, obligation-based interaction toward hybrid and networked forms of engagement that integrate offline and online communication. Cultural transformation is reflected in the gradual reconfiguration of collectivist values, the rise of individual autonomy, evolving consumption patterns influenced by digital culture, and the adaptation of traditional practices to modern urban contexts. The study also highlights the role of digital platforms in accelerating cultural diffusion while emphasizing that new influences are selectively negotiated rather than passively adopted. Intergenerational dialogue and multicultural interaction further shape identity negotiation and community cohesion. Overall, the research demonstrates that cultural change in urban communities is not abrupt or linear but emerges from continuous processes of communication, negotiation, and adaptation embedded in everyday social life. By emphasizing micro-level interactional dynamics, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary urban culture evolves in response to structural and technological transformations.

Introduction

Contemporary urban communities are undergoing rapid and multidimensional transformations shaped by globalization, technological advancement, migration, and shifting economic structures. Urban spaces are no longer merely geographic concentrations of population; they function as dynamic arenas where social interaction continuously produces, reproduces, and transforms cultural meanings. Classical urban sociology has long emphasized that cities fundamentally alter patterns of human association, social bonds, and collective life (Barns, 2019). Similarly, early sociological reflections on modern urban life highlighted how density,

heterogeneity, and anonymity reshape social relations (Lee et al., 2019). In the contemporary context, these structural characteristics are intensified by digital connectivity, transnational mobility, and global cultural flows, producing new configurations of interaction and cultural transformation.

Urbanization has reached unprecedented levels in the twenty-first century. According to global demographic projections (Johnston, 2020), more than half of the world's population now resides in urban areas, and this proportion continues to grow. Such expansion is not only quantitative but qualitative, as cities become nodes of global networks linking economic production, communication systems, and cultural exchange (Santala & McGuirk, 2022). These global interconnections intensify encounters among diverse social groups, thereby reshaping cultural identities and social norms within urban communities. As a result, urban life increasingly reflects hybridity, fluidity, and negotiated meanings rather than stable, homogeneous traditions.

Social interaction lies at the core of these processes. Everyday encounters in neighborhoods, workplaces, markets, and digital platforms generate shared understandings that shape collective life. From a micro-sociological perspective, social reality is constructed through interactional processes that assign meaning to symbols, gestures, and communication (Avdikos & Pettas, 2021). Urban settings, characterized by diversity and rapid change, amplify these processes of meaning-making. Individuals must constantly negotiate identities, norms, and expectations in relation to others whose backgrounds, beliefs, and lifestyles may differ significantly from their own. Consequently, cultural transformation emerges not as a top-down imposition but as an ongoing, interaction-driven process embedded in daily life.

The contemporary city also embodies what (Light & Miskelly, 2019) conceptualizes as the “network society,” in which digital communication technologies restructure social interaction. Online platforms extend the boundaries of community beyond physical proximity, creating hybrid spaces where offline and online interactions intersect. These mediated interactions accelerate the diffusion of cultural practices, values, and symbols across geographic and social boundaries. Cultural transformation thus unfolds simultaneously in physical neighborhoods and virtual networks, blurring distinctions between local and global spheres.

Global cultural flows further complicate urban cultural dynamics. The movement of people, media, technology, and capital contributes to what (Koch & Miles, 2021) describes as complex “scapes” of globalization, where cultural meanings circulate and are reinterpreted in diverse contexts. Urban communities become sites where global influences are localized, resisted, or hybridized. Rather than erasing local cultures, globalization often produces new cultural syntheses that reflect negotiation between tradition and modernity (Wang, 2024). In this sense, cultural transformation in cities is not merely adoption of external influences but a creative and contested process shaped by social interaction.

Migration also plays a pivotal role in reshaping urban cultural landscapes. Cities attract internal and international migrants seeking economic opportunity, education, and social mobility. These movements generate multicultural environments where diverse languages, religions, and customs coexist. As (Rossi, 2019) argues, modernity is characterized by disembodied mechanisms that lift social relations from local contexts and reorganize them across time and space. Urban communities exemplify this dynamic, as migrants maintain transnational ties

while integrating into new local networks. Through everyday interactions, residents negotiate inclusion, exclusion, solidarity, and difference, contributing to evolving cultural norms.

Moreover, late modern societies are marked by reflexivity and identity reconstruction (Qian, 2022). Individuals in urban environments increasingly shape their identities through lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and digital self-presentation. Cultural transformation thus involves shifts in value orientations, including changing conceptions of family, gender roles, community engagement, and social responsibility. The pluralization of identities within cities challenges traditional forms of social cohesion while also creating opportunities for new solidarities.

Despite extensive scholarship on urbanization and globalization, there remains a need to examine how cultural transformation is experienced and enacted at the level of everyday social interaction. Macro-level analyses often emphasize structural forces such as economic restructuring or technological change, yet they may overlook the micro-level processes through which individuals interpret and respond to these forces. Urban communities provide a crucial lens for understanding how structural change translates into lived cultural realities. In local neighborhoods, community gatherings, social organizations, and digital forums, residents collectively redefine norms, negotiate conflicts, and establish new patterns of belonging.

Furthermore, contemporary urban life is characterized by both continuity and disruption. While new forms of interaction emerge, longstanding traditions may persist, adapt, or decline. The interplay between preservation and innovation reflects the agency of community members who actively shape their cultural environment. As (Papangelis et al., 2020) notes, cultural practices are embedded in habitus and social fields, yet they remain open to transformation through shifting social conditions. In urban contexts marked by diversity and rapid change, this transformative potential becomes particularly visible.

Understanding social interaction as a driving force of cultural transformation in contemporary urban communities is therefore essential for comprehending broader patterns of social change. Cities function as laboratories of modern life where global processes intersect with local practices. Through interaction, individuals create shared meanings that sustain, modify, or challenge existing cultural forms. By focusing on these interactional processes, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how culture evolves within the dynamic and complex environment of contemporary urban communities.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive approach was chosen because the central focus of the study is to understand how social interaction shapes cultural transformation through the lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of community members. Rather than measuring cultural change through numerical indicators, this research sought to explore how individuals construct, negotiate, and reinterpret cultural values within their everyday interactions. A qualitative design allows for in-depth exploration of social processes, contextual nuances, and subjective meanings that cannot be captured through quantitative measurement.

More specifically, this study adopted a case study approach. The case study design was selected to enable an intensive and holistic examination of a contemporary urban community as a bounded social unit. By concentrating on a specific community context, the research was able to capture detailed interactional patterns, social dynamics, and cultural shifts occurring within a real-life setting. The case study design also supports the exploration of complex phenomena where the boundaries between social interaction and cultural transformation are fluid and intertwined.

Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in a contemporary urban community characterized by demographic diversity, socio-economic heterogeneity, and significant exposure to digital communication technologies. The selected site represents a dynamic urban environment where migration, economic mobility, and technological integration intersect. The area includes long-term residents as well as newcomers, creating a social landscape shaped by both continuity and change.

The choice of this site was based on its relevance to the research focus. The community demonstrates visible transformations in lifestyle, communication patterns, social organization, and cultural practices. Community activities, neighborhood interactions, and online engagement provide rich contexts for examining how social interaction contributes to evolving cultural norms. By situating the study within this urban setting, the research captures the interplay between local traditions and contemporary influences.

Research Participants and Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was employed to ensure that individuals chosen for the study possessed relevant experiences and insights regarding social interaction and cultural change within the community. The selection criteria included length of residence, level of involvement in community activities, diversity of socio-economic background, age variation, and engagement in both offline and online social networks.

The study involved a diverse group of participants to reflect the heterogeneity of the urban community. Informants included long-term residents who could describe historical shifts in community culture, younger residents who actively engage in digital communication, community leaders who observe collective dynamics, and migrant residents who contribute to cultural diversity. This variation enabled the research to capture multiple perspectives on how interaction patterns shape cultural transformation.

Sampling continued until data saturation was achieved, meaning that no substantially new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. This ensured depth and comprehensiveness in understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The use of multiple techniques enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

In-depth semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source. An interview guide was developed to explore participants' experiences of social interaction, perceived changes in community values, shifts in communication patterns, and transformations in cultural practices. While the guide provided structure, flexibility was maintained to allow participants to elaborate on issues they considered significant. Each interview was conducted in a conversational manner to encourage openness and depth. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Participant observation was conducted to capture real-time interaction patterns within the community. The researcher observed social gatherings, neighborhood meetings, informal interactions in public spaces, and digital community forums. Field notes were systematically recorded to document communication styles, behavioral norms, expressions of identity, and manifestations of cultural change. Observation allowed the researcher to contextualize interview data and identify discrepancies or consistencies between reported experiences and actual practices.

Document analysis complemented interviews and observations. Relevant documents included community records, social media posts, local announcements, and archival materials that reflected shifts in cultural practices and communication patterns. These documents provided additional evidence of transformation and helped trace changes over time.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The process began with data familiarization, in which the researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts and field notes to gain an overall understanding of the material. This was followed by open coding, where meaningful segments of text were identified and labeled according to emerging ideas related to social interaction and cultural transformation.

After initial coding, codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting patterns across participants. Through constant comparison, similarities and differences in experiences were examined. Categories were then refined into overarching themes that represented key dimensions of social interaction and cultural change within the community. These themes were interpreted in relation to the broader socio-cultural context of urban transformation.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher engaged in reflexive memo-writing to document analytical decisions and emerging interpretations. This process ensured transparency and consistency in the development of findings.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis conducted within the selected urban community. The analysis focuses on how evolving patterns of social interaction shape and reflect broader processes of cultural transformation. The findings are organized into three major themes: changing patterns of social interaction, dimensions of cultural transformation, and social interaction as the mechanism of cultural change. Each theme captures recurring patterns identified across participants' narratives and observed social practices. By presenting empirical insights grounded in participants' lived experiences, this section illustrates how everyday

communication, digital mediation, and collective negotiation contribute to the dynamic reconstruction of cultural values and norms in contemporary urban life.

Changing Patterns of Social Interaction in Urban Communities

One of the central findings of this study is the transformation of social interaction patterns from predominantly face-to-face encounters to hybrid forms that combine offline and online communication. In earlier periods, social life within the community was largely structured around direct physical gatherings such as neighborhood meetings, religious events, communal work activities, and informal visits between households. These interactions played a crucial role in strengthening emotional bonds, reinforcing shared norms, and sustaining collective identity.

However, the findings indicate that while face-to-face interaction remains meaningful, it is no longer the primary mode of everyday communication. Digital platforms particularly messaging applications and social media groups have become essential tools for coordination, discussion, and information exchange. Community announcements, event invitations, and neighborhood concerns are frequently shared online before being discussed in person. This shift reflects adaptation to urban lifestyles characterized by time constraints, work mobility, and technological integration.

One participant described this transformation clearly:

"In the past, we used to gather almost every evening in front of our houses. Now we communicate more often through the WhatsApp group. If there is something important, then we meet in person."

Another resident emphasized the practical advantages of hybrid communication:

"Information spreads much faster now. If there is a community activity, we just send a message in the group and everyone immediately knows. But if we want to feel closer, we still need to meet face-to-face."

These statements illustrate that digital interaction has not eliminated direct social contact but has redefined its function. Routine communication and logistical coordination are increasingly conducted online, while face-to-face meetings are reserved for strengthening relationships, resolving sensitive issues, or holding significant communal events. Social cohesion is therefore maintained through a complementary relationship between digital and physical interaction. Generational differences also shape this transformation. Younger residents demonstrate greater reliance on digital communication and perceive it as efficient and flexible. Older residents, although adapting to technological changes, continue to value physical presence as an important expression of respect, solidarity, and sincerity. This generational negotiation reflects broader cultural adjustments within the community as it adapts to contemporary urban realities.

Another significant finding concerns the expansion of social networks beyond immediate geographic proximity. Previously, social interaction was largely confined to individuals living within the same neighborhood. Shared space created repeated encounters that reinforced local identity and collective belonging. In contrast, contemporary urban residents maintain connections that extend across districts, cities, and even national borders. Digital communication technologies enable community members to sustain relationships with former

neighbors, distant relatives, professional colleagues, and online communities organized around shared interests. As a result, identity formation is no longer shaped solely by local interaction but is influenced by multiple and overlapping social spheres. Exposure to diverse perspectives, cultural practices, and value systems contributes to gradual shifts in local norms.

One informant explained this shift as follows:

"Now my friends are not only people from this neighborhood. I have discussion partners from other cities and even from abroad through social media. Sometimes their ideas influence how I see things here."

Another participant highlighted the influence of migration on social interaction patterns:

"Many residents here are newcomers. They bring different cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking. Through daily interaction, we adjust to each other."

These findings suggest that urban communities are increasingly embedded in wider social networks. While local identity remains important, it is continuously influenced by external references. The blending of local and global interactions fosters cultural hybridity and introduces alternative interpretations of norms and traditions. Social interaction thus becomes a channel through which external cultural elements enter the community and are selectively adopted, adapted, or negotiated. The study also identifies a shift in patterns of community participation. Traditional forms of collective engagement such as routine communal work, mandatory neighborhood meetings, and regular informal gatherings have decreased in frequency and intensity. Urban residents often face demanding work schedules, long commuting times, and diverse personal commitments, limiting their availability for structured communal activities. However, the decline in traditional participation does not necessarily indicate social disengagement. Instead, participation has become more flexible, selective, and interest-based. Informal groups organized around hobbies, entrepreneurship, environmental concerns, or social initiatives are increasingly visible. These groups may operate both offline and online, reflecting the hybrid nature of contemporary social interaction.

A long-term resident expressed concern about these changes:

"In the past, almost everyone attended community service activities. Now we have to remind people many times, and sometimes only a few show up."

In contrast, a younger participant offered a different perspective:

"It is not that we do not care. The form of participation is just different now. We are more active in creative communities or social initiatives that match our interests."

These contrasting views reveal a transformation from obligation-based participation toward voluntary and interest-driven engagement. Social bonds are no longer formed solely through territorial proximity or traditional expectations but increasingly through shared interests and networks. This shift reshapes the structure of communal solidarity, moving from fixed and hierarchical forms toward more fluid and network-oriented relationships. Overall, the changing patterns of social interaction in this urban community reflect a broader transition from localized, routine, and tradition-bound engagement to hybrid, networked, and flexible forms of association. These evolving interaction patterns create the social conditions through which cultural transformation unfolds in contemporary urban settings.

Dimensions of Cultural Transformation

One of the most visible dimensions of cultural transformation within the urban community is the gradual shift in value systems. Traditionally, the community emphasized collectivist norms such as mutual assistance, shared responsibility, and strong neighborhood solidarity. Social obligations were clearly defined, and participation in communal activities was often seen as a moral duty rather than a personal choice. Respect for elders, adherence to established hierarchies, and conformity to social expectations were deeply embedded cultural principles.

However, findings from this study indicate a noticeable movement toward greater individual autonomy and personal prioritization. Residents increasingly organize their lives around work commitments, personal development, and nuclear family needs. While communal values have not disappeared, they are often reinterpreted within the context of modern urban life. Collective responsibility is gradually shifting into selective participation based on availability and personal interest.

One participant reflected on this shift:

"In the past, if there was a community activity, everyone felt obligated to attend. Now people think first about their own schedules and priorities."

Another resident described the subtle change in mutual assistance practices:

"We still help each other, but it is not as automatic as before. Now we usually coordinate first through messages, and sometimes people contribute financially instead of physically."

These responses suggest that cultural transformation does not necessarily eliminate collectivist values but reshapes their expression. Mutual aid may still exist, yet it is mediated by negotiation, digital coordination, and personal choice. Respect and hierarchy are also evolving, with younger residents interacting more informally with elders while still maintaining a degree of cultural sensitivity. The transformation of value systems thus reflects adaptation rather than abrupt rupture. Another important dimension of cultural transformation is the shift in lifestyle and consumption patterns. The growing influence of digital media and global cultural exposure has significantly shaped everyday practices related to fashion, food, leisure, and self-expression. Urban residents increasingly adopt trends circulated through social media platforms, online influencers, and global entertainment industries. Participants reported that lifestyle choices are now strongly influenced by online visibility and symbolic representation. Cafés, co-working spaces, fitness centers, and digital-friendly environments have become new social spaces replacing traditional gathering points. Leisure activities are often documented and shared online, creating new standards of social recognition and belonging.

One young participant explained:

"Now people choose places not only because they are comfortable but also because they look good on social media. It becomes part of how we present ourselves."

Another resident observed broader consumption changes:

"Food trends change very quickly. If something becomes viral online, many people here want to try it. Sometimes local traditional food is less popular than new international menus."

These insights demonstrate how digital culture accelerates lifestyle transformation. Consumption practices are no longer purely functional but symbolic, reflecting identity construction and social positioning. At the same time, local elements are not entirely abandoned; instead, they are often repackaged in modern formats to remain relevant. Cultural transformation in this dimension reveals the interplay between global influence and local adaptation. Cultural transformation is also evident in the reconfiguration of traditional practices. Rather than disappearing completely, many traditions are simplified, shortened, or adjusted to fit contemporary urban conditions. Rituals that once required extensive preparation and large gatherings are now conducted in more practical and time-efficient ways. Urban residents frequently balance respect for heritage with the realities of modern life. Economic considerations, limited space, and time constraints influence how ceremonies and communal events are organized. Traditional attire, language expressions, and symbolic gestures may still be used, but often in modified forms.

One senior resident expressed concern:

"Some traditional ceremonies are no longer as complete as before. The younger generation prefers simpler arrangements."

Meanwhile, a younger participant provided a different perspective:

"We still value tradition, but we try to adapt it to our current situation. If it is too complicated, people will not participate."

These contrasting perspectives indicate that cultural continuity and change coexist within the same community. Traditions are not passively preserved but actively negotiated. Through daily interaction and discussion, residents decide which elements to maintain, modify, or omit. Cultural transformation in this sense is not a rejection of heritage but a process of reinterpretation aligned with contemporary needs. The final dimension of cultural transformation identified in this study relates to identity negotiation within a multicultural urban setting. Migration and mobility have introduced diverse ethnic, religious, and regional backgrounds into the community. As a result, social interaction frequently involves cross-cultural engagement, requiring residents to navigate differences in norms, communication styles, and belief systems. Participants described the community as increasingly plural and dynamic. Identity is not fixed but fluid, shaped by interaction across social boundaries. Residents develop inclusive practices to foster coexistence while maintaining aspects of their cultural heritage.

One migrant resident shared:

"When I first moved here, I had to adjust to the local customs. But over time, we also share our own traditions, and people start to understand each other."

Another participant emphasized the importance of tolerance:

"Living in this area means accepting differences. We celebrate different holidays, and that actually makes the community more colorful."

These accounts illustrate that identity negotiation occurs through everyday interaction. Cultural boundaries are not rigid but continuously redefined through communication, shared experiences, and mutual adaptation. The multicultural character of the urban community encourages openness while also prompting reflection on belonging and difference.

Social Interaction as the Mechanism of Cultural Change

The findings of this study demonstrate that cultural transformation does not occur spontaneously or independently of social life; rather, it is produced and reproduced through everyday interaction. Daily conversations in neighborhood spaces, workplaces, religious gatherings, and digital platforms function as arenas where meanings are constructed, contested, and negotiated. Through repeated interaction, certain behaviors become normalized while others are gradually questioned or abandoned. Cultural change, therefore, is embedded in ordinary communication practices.

Participants revealed that subtle shifts in language use often signal broader cultural transformations. For example, forms of address between younger and older residents have become more informal, reflecting a gradual reconfiguration of hierarchical norms. Discussions about lifestyle choices, gender roles, and social expectations frequently occur in casual settings, influencing how individuals interpret acceptable behavior. These interactional exchanges create a continuous process of reinterpretation.

One participant explained:

"Sometimes cultural change does not feel dramatic. It happens in small conversations. When people start talking differently about certain issues, slowly the mindset changes too."

Another resident highlighted the importance of peer discussion:

"If someone introduces a new idea, we talk about it together. At first there may be disagreement, but after repeated discussions, people begin to accept it."

These accounts illustrate that social interaction acts as a mechanism through which collective understanding evolves. Meaning is not imposed unilaterally but shaped through dialogue, negotiation, and shared experience. Cultural transformation emerges gradually from these micro-level processes of communication. The study also finds that digital communication significantly accelerates cultural diffusion within the urban community. Social media platforms, online discussion forums, and messaging applications serve as channels through which new ideas, trends, and norms circulate rapidly. Unlike traditional word-of-mouth communication, digital mediation allows information to spread instantly and reach a wide audience. Participants noted that viral content often influences local behavior, from fashion and food preferences to social attitudes and political awareness. Digital spaces also provide opportunities for public debate, enabling residents to express opinions and challenge existing norms. As a result, cultural change that once required long-term gradual interaction can now unfold at a much faster pace.

One informant observed:

"When something becomes viral online, people here quickly talk about it and sometimes imitate it. The influence feels very fast compared to the past."

Another participant emphasized the role of online discussions:

"Through social media, we are exposed to many viewpoints. Even if we do not fully agree, it makes us reconsider our own perspectives."

These statements demonstrate that digital mediation intensifies interaction beyond physical boundaries. Cultural elements from outside the community enter local discourse through online exposure. However, the adoption of such elements is not automatic; rather, they are filtered through community discussion and interpretation. Digital platforms thus function both as catalysts and arenas for cultural negotiation. Although interaction facilitates cultural change, the process is not uniform or uncontested. The findings reveal that negotiation, adaptation, and even resistance are integral components of cultural transformation. Community members do not passively accept every new influence; instead, they evaluate, reinterpret, and sometimes reject external cultural elements based on perceived compatibility with local values.

Discussions surrounding moral norms, generational expectations, and public behavior often reveal tensions between conservative and progressive orientations. These tensions are not necessarily divisive but represent dynamic processes through which the community collectively defines its cultural boundaries. Through dialogue and shared experiences, residents establish compromises that allow coexistence between traditional and modern perspectives.

One participant expressed selective acceptance of change:

"Not everything from outside is suitable for our community. We discuss it first and decide what fits with our values."

Another resident described moments of resistance:

"Sometimes the younger generation wants to adopt new trends immediately, but the older generation reminds them about our traditions. In the end, we usually find a middle ground."

These reflections indicate that cultural transformation is shaped by continuous interactional negotiation. Adaptation occurs when new practices are modified to align with existing norms, while resistance emerges when changes are perceived as threatening to community cohesion. Through this interactive process, culture remains dynamic yet anchored in shared reference points.

Conclusion

This study concludes that cultural transformation in contemporary urban communities is fundamentally driven by evolving patterns of social interaction. The shift from traditional face-to-face engagement to hybrid offline online communication has restructured how residents build relationships, coordinate activities, and negotiate shared meanings. At the same time, expanding social networks, lifestyle changes influenced by digital culture, reconfigured traditions, and ongoing identity negotiation reflect a multidimensional process of cultural adaptation rather than cultural loss. Cultural change does not occur abruptly or uniformly;

instead, it unfolds gradually through everyday conversations, digital exchanges, collective debates, and intergenerational negotiation. Social interaction therefore functions not merely as a reflection of transformation but as its central mechanism, shaping how urban communities reinterpret values, sustain continuity, and adapt to the complexities of modern urban life.

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