



***Tetangga online: Online communities and the role of urban women in the digital sphere***

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**ABSTRACT**

*The growth of internet-based home décor communities has introduced new forms of digitally mediated social interaction within contemporary urban society. In Indonesia, studies on women-centered online communities have predominantly focused on fandom or religious groups, leaving domesticity-based digital communities relatively underexplored. This study aims to examine the meaning of the term “tetangga online” and to analyze how domesticity, online visibility, and identity negotiation are constructed among urban women in digital environments. Employing a qualitative design with a digital ethnography approach, this research focuses on the Home Decor Tour Indonesia (HDTI) community on Instagram. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six participants and observations of interaction patterns in captions and comment sections, including the analysis of 68 featured homeowners’ posts. The findings reveal that “tetangga online” represents a culturally embedded form of digital neighbourliness that recontextualizes traditional neighborhood interactions into the online sphere. Furthermore, the online display of domestic spaces through home décor practices functions as a strategic medium for women to negotiate their roles within patriarchal social structures while gaining social recognition, solidarity, and potential economic opportunities. This study contributes theoretically by introducing “tetangga online” as an emic concept of digital neighbourliness distinctive to Indonesian urban online communities.*

**Keywords:** Social Media; Online Community; Domesticity; Home Decor; Identity.

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## ABSTRAK

*Perkembangan komunitas dekorasi rumah berbasis internet dan penggunaan sapaan ramah “tetangga online” merupakan fenomena yang muncul di ranah daring sebagai bagian dari gaya hidup urban. Penelitian terkini mengenai komunitas perempuan daring di Indonesia masih didominasi oleh komunitas berbasis fandom atau agama, sementara sedikit penelitian yang mengeksplorasi domestisitas dan praktik dekorasi rumah, termasuk bagaimana praktik daringnya menciptakan jalan menuju konsep dan pemahaman baru tentang bertetangga. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami makna “tetangga online” dan mengeksplorasi domestisitas, visibilitas online, serta negosiasi identitas di kalangan perempuan urban. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan etnografi digital, dengan Home Decor Tour Indonesia (HDTI), sebuah komunitas dekorasi rumah daring di Instagram, sebagai objek penelitiannya. Di samping melakukan wawancara dengan 6 responden, kami mengamati karakteristik sapaan “tetangga online” pada deskripsi dan komentar postingan, serta konstruksi identitas domestik yang muncul pada deskripsi unggahan 68 pemilik rumah yang ditampilkan di akun HDTI. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa “tetangga online” telah menjadi praktik sosial digital yang spesifik secara budaya, yang mentransfer pengalaman bertetangga dari ruang fisik ke ruang digital. Visibilitas virtual ruang domestik melalui praktik dekorasi rumah juga menjadi strategi adaptif bagi perempuan urban untuk menegosiasikan peran mereka dalam struktur sosial patriarkal: mereka dapat mempertahankan tugas sebagai ibu rumah tangga, tetapi pada saat yang sama, memperoleh pengakuan, solidaritas sosial, dan bahkan peluang ekonomi yang sebelumnya tidak dapat mereka raih. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan memperkenalkan “tetangga online” sebagai konsep emik keramahan digital yang unik bagi komunitas daring urban Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** Media Sosial; Komunitas Online; Domestisitas; Dekorasi Rumah; Identitas.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The current development of technology has brought us into the digital revolution era, which has influenced various aspects of human and social life, including the urban culture. The rise of online communities and activities within the digital sphere reflects a shift in urban lifestyle; from activities that once took place in physical spaces to those that now extended into virtual environment, especially since the global limitation during COVID-19 pandemic. The shifting from offline to online community indicates an acceleration of digital migration (Papacharissi, 2002). Such shift often occurs in hobby and interest communities, including in the world of home decor, with social media serves as a platform in conducting activities. Social media allows the users to self-present themselves and strategically interact with their audiences, creating shared digital narratives (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Among Indonesia's urban digital users, one notable phenomenon is the rise of amateur home decor enthusiasts on Instagram, posting their own home decor creations and forming home decor online communities. Within these communities, users affectionately refer each other as “tetangga online” (online neighbor). This greeting reimagines the traditional and physical neighborhood relations within the digital sphere. One online home decor community

that stands out on Instagram is Home Decor Tour Indonesia (HDTI). As of February 2025, HDTI has over 38,000 followers on Instagram. By February 2025, HDTI has published 147 Instagram posts featuring 71 home decors of 68 homeowner accounts; all of them are HDTI members and only one of which is a male homeowner. Its first post dated back to July 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. As people were not able to conduct outdoor activities at that time, research shows that home decor activities raised to elevate daily living comfort at home (Ariawa et al., 2022).

Online communities are often formed by interest-based bonding among their members or participants, be it hobby, religion, fandom, or lifestyle. In Indonesia, online community phenomenon spans widely from hobby-based interest group such as betta fish enthusiast Anwar et al. (2023) whose members have a specific language code, to K-pop fandoms (Jung, 2011). Fandom-based online communities have also strengthened the bond between members with shared identity, initiating a unique practice and shared identity markers among members (Maulina et al., 2025). In some cases, interest-based communities evolved beyond its intended purpose, for instance, when K-Poppers fangirl initiated political activism by raising #TolakOmnibusLaw movement using social media platform like Twitter (Mulyana & Wahyuningroem, 2025).

Many of online communities in Indonesia are women-centered, providing spaces for their members to share experiences, acting as support groups, or providing information on topics such as women's mental health (Arindita & Nasucha, 2023), parenting tips for specific group such as single mothers (Noviani & Wijayanti, 2022), functioning as women empowerment and gender equality activism in Indonesia (Purwaningtyas, 2021), or serving as a safe space for women to share personal stories related to gender issues (Girsang & Hasugian, 2025). Study also shows that women's activities on social media might serve as self-actualization purposes (Irawati et al., 2024) and identity construction in certain historical, cultural, and social contexts (Beta, 2024). Previous studies have shown that online communities' members often utilize language codes or variations to communicate, as discussed in the above paragraph. However, little attention has been paid to the practice of affectionate greetings such as "*tetangga online*" that emerged within interest-based communities, in this case, the home decor communities. Furthermore, existing studies have yet to explore how neighborhood and spatial norms in Indonesia are translated into digitally mediated spatial practices. While there are plenty studies covering Indonesian women's identity within the digital sphere, they usually focus on the religious identity (Beta, 2019), or gender activism (Purwaningtyas, 2021; Winarnita et al., 2022) rather than domestic visibility and how women negotiate their domestic identity in the digital sphere.

This article aims to fill those gaps by discussing the intersection between online and offline realms of home decor practice, as well as the transformation of home decor community into the digital sphere. We examine the term "*tetangga online*" as a greeting ritual unique to the Indonesian online home decor communities, while also exploring how this practice relates to the negotiation of urban women's identities in the digital sphere. We argue that their activities grew on the basis of shared interests or goals. Furthermore, we examine how urban women negotiate their domestic roles or household labor through creative expressions in the digital sphere. This article seeks to answer these questions: 1) How do members of the online home decor community perceive and make sense of the "*tetangga online*" greeting practice on social

media? 2) How do women negotiate domesticity and public visibility through sharing home decor practices within the HDTI community?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. *Digital Sphere and Online Community*

The internet and social media have become an integrated part of everyday urban life. By February 2025, 5.78 billion people or approximately 70.5% of the globe's total population use mobile phones (Data Reportal, 2025). In 2024, internet penetration in Indonesia reached 221.5 million users, which were 79.5% of the total population, according to Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia (APJII, 2024). APJII also reported a significant surge of household internet usage during the COVID-19 pandemic, with internet penetration rising from 73.7% in 2019-2020 to 77.02% in 2021-2022 (APJII, 2022). As per 2024, most popular social media platform in Indonesia was WhatsApp, utilized by 90.9% total number of internet users, followed by Instagram (85.3%) and Facebook at 81.6% users (Meltwater, 2024). While WhatsApp mainly serves as messaging and communication tool, Instagram is a photo and video sharing application that allows its users to build their own visual galleries.

As a digital platform, Instagram shapes what can be visible and by whom through its affordance and algorithmic circulation (Abidin, 2021; boyd, 2010). This affordance enables its users to navigate between public and private types of sharing, e.g. deciding which posts are for public eyes to see and which posts are for close friends only or even lock their accounts to be limited for the audience of their own choice. The platform transforms into what boyd (2010) calls a 'networked public', a public space mediated by the digital network. Social media users can also observe how the algorithm behaves and actively learns the algorithmic rules to decide what kind of posts get more engagement, which hashtag to use, and when to post (Cotter, 2019), which is especially useful for creators within online communities to reach a broader audience for their posts. This reflects not only a shift from physical to online social interactions, but also a transformation of Habermasian public sphere (Kazi, 2011; Papacharissi, 2002; Rauchfleisch & Kovic, 2016). However, this blurring of the private and public boundaries predominantly occurs in cyberspace. In the physical world, access to private matters remains limited and is shaped by individual norms and values.

Digital platforms have also created new forms of community and social space, which formerly could only take place in physical world. Mainly accessed through smartphones, these platforms have evolved beyond conventional tools of communication into spaces where users can sustain a sense of community among families or like-minded individuals, build affiliations, and maintain social interactions without the constraints of time and space (D. Miller et al., 2021). Thus, the online community is formed. Armstrong and Hagel classify four types of online communities, which are 1) *communities of transaction* are communities that exist for the purpose of buying and selling transactions, 2) *communities of interest* are communities whose members have the same interests, 3) *communities of fantasy* allow their members to shape their identities and environments as they wish, and 4) *communities of relationship* which centered on personal experiences and forming mutually supportive networks (Armstrong & Hagel, 2000). Online communities are shaped through ongoing interactions and shared values among their members, mediated through social media instead of direct or physical interactions.

## 2.2. Gender Performativity, Domesticity, and Femininity

Gender performativity is a concept coined by Judith Butler in her book, *Gender Trouble*. She argues that gender identity is not something one is born with but rather constructed from a series of actions and expressions that are repeatedly performed during a person's lifespan. This performance produces a series of social effects that reinforce the illusion of a stable gender identity (Butler, 2014). In the Indonesian context, gender roles have been neatly constructed by the state, particularly during the New Order era. Drawing from patriarchal ideology, the state is symbolically represented as a family; important persons in charge were almost always male and referred to as *bapak* (father), e.g. President Suharto as the ultimate father figure (Suryakusuma, 1996). Gender roles in Javanese cultural traditions are also instilled as national values, for example, that women must be able to maintain their husbands' honor, one way of doing this is by being "smart in keeping household secrets" (Pikatan, 2012; Puspitasari, 2016). This construction positioned women primarily in the domestic sphere as subordinate. Women are expected to be dependent wives who devote their lives for their husbands, families, and the state. Julia Suryakusuma termed this ideological framework as State Ibuism (Suryakusuma, 2021).

Gendered construction positions men as breadwinners who work outside the home to earn a living, while women are mothers who are only involved in domestic roles as caregivers. The domestic sphere is often referred to as the private sphere. This means things that happen within the domestic sphere is not actually for public consumption. In the general view of Indonesian society, family and household are part of the domestic sphere that should be kept secret from the public. Although the New Order era has ended, the domestication of women is often still felt today. Some people still believe that a woman's place is in the home, her duty is to take care of the home and family, which sometimes is reflected in how the media (for example, advertising) represents women (Siswati, 2015).

The separation between the public and the private also occurs spatially, seen in how a house is designed, especially in urban middle-class dwellings in Indonesia. Firstly, there's a specific room adapted from how Javanese culture divides a house into several private spaces, namely *ruang tamu* (guest reception room) which serves as semi-public area to accommodate strangers or non-relatives who visit one's house. Secondly, as the adaptation of Western culture, is a provision of a private bedroom for each family member living in a house; something that previously did not exist in the traditional Nusantara dwellings (Putra et al., 2016). As the opposite of *ruang tamu*, the bedroom is the most private space of one's own; in some cases, not even other family members living in the same house can enter the bedroom without the dweller's permission.

Historically in the modern western context, home decor has been closely associated with women. Home decor manuals, literature, and education were often written by and targeted toward women, who were perceived as "moral guardians and caretakers of the home" (Jones, 1997). This gender construction mirrors the positioning of women in Indonesia with similar domestic ideal implemented by the state. Interior design and home decor were framed as feminine domain. Meanwhile, architecture has been regarded as a masculine field. This gendered construction is associated with women's "natural" traits, such as aesthetic sensitivity, caring, and nurturing (Goodall, 1990). While architecture and professional interior design services acknowledge labor with pay, women's work within the domestic sphere such as

cooking, raising kids, housekeeping, including amateur home decor practices, can be considered as unaccounted or invisible labor (Goodall, 1990; Melchionne, 1998; Suryakusuma, 2021).

These two frameworks; digital sphere and online community, as well as gender, domesticity, and femininity, provide an important theoretical foundation to understand how Indonesian urban women negotiate their gender identities through digitally mediated domestic practices.

### 3. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine amateur home décor practices within online platforms, particularly focusing on the dynamics of home décor communities and the ways urban women negotiate their identities in digital spaces. Drawing on the framework of digital ethnography proposed by Pink et al. (2016), this research explores how practices, interactions, and identity constructions unfold within Home Decor Tour Indonesia (HDTI), one of the most active online home décor communities in Indonesia on Instagram. Data collection involved text-based online interviews conducted through Instagram direct messages, complemented by observations and analyses of digital artifacts such as captions and images shared within the community. This methodological approach was selected because the phenomenon of "*tetangga online*" emerges and is primarily experienced through digital platforms, making digital ethnography particularly suitable for capturing the meanings and interactions embedded in these online practices.

HDTI was chosen as the focus of this study for its large number of followers and frequent activities during the initial period of this research in 2022. HDTI's members are predominantly female, with only one out of the 68 unique homeowners featured being male, reinforcing the relevance of this community as a site for gender and domesticity studies. Potential interview respondents were selected from homeowners who actively used the term "*tetangga online*" on their post captions and on their personal accounts' home decor posts, with six respondents agreeing to be interviewed via Instagram's direct messaging feature. Although only six homeowners agreed to be interviewed, interview data were triangulated with textual analysis of post captions from all 68 homeowners featured on HDTI's account; 54 of whom (79%) explicitly expressed maternal and/or domestic identities in their captions.

Data collection was conducted through observation of posts and captions from all 68 featured homeowners on HDTI's account. We specifically chose posts or homeowner accounts that use the term "*tetangga online*" to greet their followers on their home decor posts, both within the HDTI community and on their personal home decor accounts, the latter being more prevalent. Data documentation was carried out through screenshots and field notes, which were especially crucial when mapping the understandings of domestic identity among female homeowners. Interviews were conducted in June 2022 asynchronously online via Instagram's direct messaging feature, carried out in informal Indonesian language. The interview used open-ended questions to engage the participants into conversation (Knott et al., 2022), while the interview questions covered the themes of "*tetangga online*" term and its meaning for interviewees, the intensity of social relation within the online home decor community, the interviewees' motivation in showcasing their home decor activities online, and gendered

participation in online home decor communities. The platform statistical snapshot data, namely the number of HDTI followers and posts, were recorded in May 2025.

Before conducting the interviews, we first introduced ourselves and briefly explained the purpose of this study to the respondents, which was to explore the topic of "*tetangga online*". Respondents who were willing to answer the questions then voluntarily participated in the interview conversation. To ensure anonymity and maintain privacy, respondents' identities are replaced with initials. Quotes from posts captions on Instagram are also anonymized to protect the privacy of the account owners.

A thorough reading of all online text data and interview results were conducted to grasp the fundamental ideas of this study. Recurring phrases, terms, and narratives were marked as codes. The codes found including: the use of the term "*tetangga online*," statements of domestic identity such as "a housewife" or "a mom of (number of kids)," and narratives of online exposure through home decor. These codes were then consolidated into main themes based on similar patterns and interpreted theoretically using the frameworks of Butler (gender performativity), Suryakusuma (State Ibuism), Kandiyoti (patriarchal bargain), and Page (digital narratives). Data observation was conducted from June 2022 to February 2025, covering HDTI's Instagram posts and its members' personal accounts. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, in which recurring codes were grouped into themes. The resulting themes were mapped into three sub-sections of findings: (1) democratization of home decor practices. (2) redefinition of "tetangga" (neighbor) to "tetangga online," and (3) articulation of the roles and identities of urban women.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### *4.1. The Democratization of Home Decor Practice through Digital Platform*

Before the social media era, architectural and interior design works could only be showcased through TV shows or printed publications such as books and magazines. Acknowledged designers and decorators were those who had enough knowledge and technical skills to be interior design specialists (Pile & Gura, 2014). This strengthened the gatekeeping practice of architect and interior designer professions through formal education, accreditation or certification, and curated publications (Lees-Maffei, 2008). In Indonesia, architecture and interior design or home decor have been the domain of segmented social classes, mainly consumed by the middle and upper classes. This was reinforced by architecture and design magazines such as *Asri* (published since 1983, later transformed into *Asrinesia*) and *Laras* (first published 1987 and discontinued in the mid-2010s). *Majalah Laras* explicitly stated in their now inactive website that their target audience were "...middle-upper income class, which began to grow in the late 1980s and early 1990s" (Laras, 2016). However, the advancement of the internet and digital platform has enabled everyone, including amateur practitioners, to publish their home decor works without undergoing strict or professional curation. This reflects Ruth Page's concepts of "multiple tellership" and "everyday tellers" on social media, allowing not only a single narrator like the print media culture but also multiple everyday users of social media to share their personal narratives all at the same time (Page, 2012). This has opened up opportunities for housewives and urban women to showcase their creativity, while also forming online communities such as HDTI.

HDTI is an online home decor community managed (or, in their term, hosted) by five female founders, each of whom lives in different city or island; one even resides abroad. A set of rules is applied when a home decor account wishes to become HDTI member, for instance they need to follow all of HDTI's hosts. The members post their home decor creations weekly on their personal account, and HDTI's account regularly features its members on their Instagram feed, promising broader engagement and fresh inspirations. For two years, starting in July 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic until July 2023, HDTI regularly featured one member each week. Members were given a free space to introduce themselves in the caption when their home decor creations were featured. As noted in Introduction, all members of HDTI whose houses were featured are women except for one. When introducing themselves, almost all women mentioned their marital status e.g., married to a man while mentioning his profession, as well as the ages or names of their children. Not all women are housewives or stay-at-home mothers; some work in their respective professional fields, such as pharmacist, civil servant, wedding organizers, etc., but none of them claimed to be architects, and only three of them run interior design business despite not having formal education in the design field. This shows that the majority of HDTI members are women with various non-design backgrounds, who use home decorating as a means of self-expression and sharing domestic experiences. This way, social media has democratized home decor practice by enabling broader participation, including women with non-professional interior design background, in what was once a historically exclusive and gatekept field.

#### 4.2. Redefining *Tetangga* into *Tetangga Online*

According to *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI), *tetangga* (neighbor) means "*orang (rumah) yang rumahnya berdekatan atau sebelah menyebelah*" (KBBI, n.d.). This can be translated into "people or houses situated close or next to each other." This definition implies physical proximity to be qualified as *tetangga*. In Indonesian culture, neighborly interactions extend beyond next-door friendliness into a greater collective social belonging. Indonesian people are familiar with RT (*Rukun Tetangga*, or Neighborhood Unit), a grassroots unit consisting of several nearby houses or households, which plays a key role in fostering community participation, social solidarity, and basic bureaucratic needs (Sumadiono, 2018; Yuliastuti et al., 2015). However, in an increasingly individualistic urban dynamics where heterogeneity and anonymity become dominant, the bond between neighbors, especially in larger Indonesian cities, has weakened. This allows individuals a freedom in choosing their social partners and how social relationships are built, based on their respective interests and preferences (Logan & Spitze, 1994). The diminishing interaction among neighbors in urban communities opens up space for a new and alternative interpretation of what it means to be "neighbors" (*bertetangga*).

Instagram users within online home decor communities often affectionately greets fellow community members or commenters as "*tetangga online*." This greeting was observed being commonly used by home decor accounts on Instagram during the period of COVID-19 pandemic, as seen in the following examples:



**Figure 1.** The use of "tetangga online" greeting in a featured post caption (Source: HDTI Instagram account, 2023).



**Figure 2.** The use of "tetangga online" greeting in a comment section (Source: HDTI Instagram account, 2023).



**Figure 3.** The use of "tetangga online" greeting in a personal home decor account (Source: Personal Instagram account of a HDTI member, 2023).

*"Good morning my online neighbors.. Anybody likes to use warm white lamps or LED strip lamp? ..."* (Ms. A's comment on one of HDTI Instagram post, 2022)

Pragmatically, Ms. A greets her fellow commenters who exist only within the digital sphere as her neighbors, even though they are not physically situated nearby or within the same geographical area. What she now considers her neighbor is no longer *only* the people living next door, but those with whom she shares closeness in her digital sphere.

*"The term online neighbor is just the same as interacting with close by or farer neighbor without having to make a direct physical contact, but through online media. Usually, home decor communities use this phrase to greet followers or friends through online media ..."* (Ms. E, 8 June 2022).

*"Because the (physical) house we live in usually have neighbors... Well since we communicate and share information like we do with our neighbors, we become online neighbors."* (Ms. S, 8 June 2022).

*"The term online neighbor refers to everyday greeting for our neighbors around our house. That's why owners of home decor accounts, IG friends are greeted online neighbor."* (Ms. I, 8 June 2022).

These responses reveal that for these HDTI members, *"tetangga online"* is more than a mere casual greeting. It is an affective practice that constructs a sense of proximity, even when they are not physically or geographically close. For them, online friends are more than just close companions; they are considered neighbors. By bringing their decorated domestic spaces into the online sphere, social interaction mediated by digital platform mirrors the closeness typically present in physical home and neighborhood settings. In this context, the emergence of *"tetangga online"* term reflects a cultural shift in the meaning and practice of neighborhood in Indonesia's digital urban culture. Neighborhood is no longer defined solely as a geographical proximity or a group of people sharing a physical space, but also by shared digital practices, emotional bonds, and everyday interaction in the digital sphere. As urban life gets more individualistic and physical neighborly connections weaken, particularly in larger cities, internet-based communities help compensate for the unavailability of conventional communities in the real world (V. Miller, 2020). Online communities such as HDTI offers alternative forms of belonging and support; they bring together individuals from different locations who share a common identity but are unable to always engage in offline activities due to time constraints, distance, or the pandemic situation. The sense of closeness is redefined through shared aesthetics, narratives, and interactions. In this context, *tetangga* (neighbor) has been re-contextualized as a form of virtual closeness, where physical proximity is no longer required for meaningful social connection.

The latest post on HDTI's Instagram account dated back to February 2025, or in their 172<sup>nd</sup> week of featuring their members' home decor. After that, the account seems to be inactive. However, unfeatured members keep posting their home decor activities on their personal accounts and continue to use *"tetangga online"* to greet their audiences, as seen in the following example:



**Figure 4.** HDTI members keep posting their home decor under the HDTI umbrella and use "*tetangga online*" greeting despite the HDTI account being inactive (Source: Personal Instagram account of a HDTI member, 2025).

Posts like this serve as evidence that HDTI's community members' strong bonding does not depend on the activity of the main account. Consistency in stating week numbers and the use of "*tetangga online*" greeting demonstrate that the sense of belonging and shared identity in online communities is built through continuous interaction and shared practices, not solely by the presence of formal structures. This finding echoes with a study conducted on a sport-based online community in which members who actively contribute through digital platforms strengthen their sense of social connectedness even when the formal structure of the community is no longer active (Epranata & Bangun, 2022).

#### 4.3. *Articulation of Urban Women's Role and Identity in the Domestic and Digital Spheres*

In the gendered construction of Indonesian culture, the domestic sphere has long been associated with women. Homemaking and home decorating is considered a form of feminine expression, and, in a way, gives them control of their domesticity. This construction is also internalized by HDTI members. Of 68 featured homeowners, 28 explicitly identified themselves as housewives. The other 26, despite having professional jobs, mentioned their maternal identities; sometimes also introducing their kids' names or stating the numbers of their kids. This means 79% of featured homeowners expressed their domestic or maternal identities, confirming the idea that domesticity remains a central part of how these urban women define or present themselves, even in the digital sphere. The evidence is strengthened even more by the responses of HDTI members we interviewed.

*"Mm, mothers are the ones responsible for taking care of the house, including making it comfortable and tidy. Fathers usually don't want to worry about that; they just know it's done." (Ms. L, 8 June 2022)*

*"Because it's usually women who cleans the house. Not all men, but they tend to make a mess. It becomes memes, too: the husband puts the towel on the bed, and the dirty clothes are left anywhere but not in the laundry basket." (Ms. S, 8 June 2022)*

Interestingly, these women consider home decor, which comes *within* their own domestic sphere, as a way to entertain themselves from daily homemaking routines.

*"...you could say that all women... especially housewives like me who spend a lot of time at home, so I try to make the house as comfortable as possible. One way to do that is by decorating it... hihi." (Ms. E, 8 June 2022)*

*"Maybe it's because women naturally like aesthetic things and their daily duties as 'homemakers.' Religion says that women are naturally meant to be at home. So it should be made as comfortable as possible." (Ms. I, 8 June 2022)*

Even though home decor activities take place within the domestic sphere, these women see it not only as a mere obligation, but also as a form of self-expression. While they accept their domestic roles as part of their identities, they also actively construct new meanings for those roles. When home decor practice in the domestic space is then shared through social media, activities previously considered mundane and private become visible, inviting viewers to engage with the aesthetic, acknowledge, and even appreciate women's unaccounted labor.

As women's domestic activities are shared in social media, private spaces previously inaccessible for the public become visible. Images and videos of bedrooms, private bathrooms, kitchen and dining rooms are now open to be viewed by the general public, specifically, by the women's *tetangga online*. In addition to the shifting meaning of *tetangga*, there has also been a blurring boundary between private, semi-private, semi-public, and public domains, mediated by audio and visual media.

When these women continue to perform their domestic obligations but at the same time decorating their house as a form of self-expression and use digital access to publish their works, they might not intend it to be a feminist action, but it serves as a way to negotiate their position as housewives and homemakers. Kandiyoti (1988) sees this phenomenon as a way of women to "bargain with patriarchy." While still internalizing their domestic roles, their home decor practices function as an adaptive strategy in maximizing opportunities within a patriarchal societal structure. However, these blurring boundaries might only occur in the digital sphere. What has become blurred is visual access: spaces that were physically only accessible to limited people such as bedrooms and kitchens can now be seen by anyone through Instagram. Physical access to these spaces remains limited, depending on individual family norms and cultural values.

Online community plays an important part in these women's articulation of identity and extended roles in their domestic spaces. Initially, HDTI can be considered a community of

interest. However, as its members' activities and interactions online have expanded, it has begun to develop characteristics of three other types of online communities. Firstly, after joining HDTI, several members became engaged in buying and selling transactions of home decor services and equipment. For example, Ms. I has registered as an affiliate with an Indonesian marketplace, which enables her to earn commissions by promoting or sharing products from e-commerce platform on her Instagram page. One of its original founders, K, has also opened her own home decor consultant and contracting business since her Instagram page and interactions with other HDTI members serves as her home decor portfolio. This way, online communities also serve as a site where its members gain visibility, recognition, and potentially economic advantages while still working within the domestic frames. The opportunity to gain economic benefits through Instagram-based visibility is also documented among female Instagram celebrities in Indonesia, who, similar to the case in this study, leverage their social media presence to generate income and public recognition (Thalal et al., 2023). Not only does HDTI shift from community of interest to community of transaction, but this also demonstrates the significant influence of the activities within digital sphere on household finances. Ms. I and other home decor enthusiasts prove that this community can also be a means of economic support for its members' families.

Secondly, this community was founded on a shared interest in home decor. Although most members are lacking professional or educational backgrounds as home decor experts, their shared interest in home decor fosters strong relationships among community members, as expressed by Ms. E:

*"...fellow home decor communities should definitely follow each other.. Support each other, one way is by liking and saving posts about decor, inspiring each other.. That's how it should be, hihi."* (Ms. E, 8 June 2022)

Most members of this community have shared identity as urban women with a strong interest of decorating their home, the domestic space traditionally associated with femininity. Moreover, these women have strong digital knowledge and share a mutual interest to creatively express themselves inside and outside the domestic sphere. In this context, HDTI has also evolved into community of relationships as well as community of fantasy. This shows that domestic activities that are socially constructed to be women's domain such as home decor have become an important medium for urban women to articulate their identity. A similar dynamic has been observed in other Indonesian women-centered online community on Instagram, whose members used impression management strategy to reframe stigmatized identities of traditional dancers (Astagini & Bangun, 2023). Despite being considered as unaccounted labor (Goodall, 1990; Melchionne, 1998; Suryakusuma, 2021), amateur home decor practice has served as a potential medium for women to form solidarity, build personal and collective identities, as well as negotiate their gender role in digital sphere and even gain economic advantages.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This case study demonstrates how the internet enables amateur home decorators to showcase their work through social media and build online communities from their shared interests. The closeness between community members as well as between content creators and

their online followers has given rise to the term "*tetangga online*," shifting the meaning of the word *tetangga* from being geographically close and physically familiar to being close-knit and emotionally connected via online interactions, despite being geographically distant. To answer the first research question, "*tetangga online*" has become an emic concept; a culturally specific digital social practice which transfers local vocabulary into digital interaction on online platforms. Digital platforms reproduce affective proximity by transforming physical interaction into mediated social interaction, using local cultural vocabulary, *tetangga*, in a new, online context.

Addressing the second research question, this study finds that social media, particularly the Instagram, has provided important space for urban women to negotiate their domestic roles and articulate their gender identity through publicly shared amateur home decorating practices, constructing feminine visibility. Through these activities, they are negotiating domesticity by showing their increasingly empowered positions while maintaining their roles and situation within the domestic sphere and space. This process has blurred the boundaries between the private and the public, allowing visual access to the private spaces of these women. The virtual visibility of domestic spaces through home decor practices in this research context has also served as the women's adaptive strategy to negotiate their roles in patriarchal societal structure: they are able to maintain their duties as homemakers, but at the same time, gain recognition, social solidarity, and even economic opportunities previously unattainable from their physical realm. While this phenomenon emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, it opens a broader discourse on how digital platform continues to shape and reshape boundaries between domesticity, femininity, and public participation in everyday urban life.

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