

## **Leveraging TikTok virtual gifts for rural infrastructure funding: A case study from Sampang Village, East Java, Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the use of TikTok virtual gifts as a novel approach to funding rural infrastructure projects in East Java, Indonesia, focusing on the village of Sampang. The initiative, driven by local residents, utilized funds gathered from viral TikTok donations to repair damaged roads in the region. Through qualitative observation and thematic analysis of secondary data from news sources like Detik.com, this research examines the dynamics of community-led funding, social media influence, and the limitations of traditional government support. The findings highlight the significant role of digital platforms in empowering rural communities, overcoming bureaucratic delays, and fostering collective action. Despite the success of this initiative, questions remain regarding sustainability, transparency, and the future role of digital fundraising in rural development. This paper contributes to the understanding of how digital media can support grassroots development efforts and the challenges involved.

### **Keywords:**

TikTok virtual gifts, rural infrastructure, digital fundraising, community empowerment, social media impact

### **Article History:**

Received: November 16, 2024, revised: November 29, 2024, accepted: December 02, 2024, published: April 30, 2025

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### **DOI:**

[doi.org/10.60036/jj6hx682](https://doi.org/10.60036/jj6hx682)

## INTRODUCTION

Rural infrastructure development is a cornerstone of enhancing the well-being and economic potential of communities. A unique example of such innovation can be observed in Sampang Regency, East Java, where the construction of a rural road in Maggar Hamlet, Batuporo Barat Village, was funded through TikTok's virtual gift system. This initiative was spearheaded by local residents who creatively utilized social media to overcome funding challenges. The resulting road was constructed using a simple concrete-paving method, reflecting limited resources but showcasing the power of collective action and community-driven innovation. This phenomenon sheds light on the untapped potential of social media platforms like TikTok to address tangible socio-economic issues.

This study aims to address a notable research gap by exploring the utilization of social media platforms for funding physical infrastructure projects, particularly in rural areas. Previous studies have predominantly focused on the entertainment, cultural transformation, and consumer-driven aspects of TikTok. For instance, Zhang (2021) analyzed TikTok's infrastructuralization process, emphasizing its impact on cultural power dynamics and entertainment trends, without delving into its practical applications for community-driven development projects. Similarly, Shi and Wu (2023) demonstrated TikTok's effectiveness in facilitating charitable donations through live-streaming, but their work did not extend to infrastructure-oriented initiatives. This leaves a critical gap in understanding how TikTok's interactive features can be adapted to address development challenges in resource-limited settings.

The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining social, economic, and technological analyses to explore the use of TikTok as a tool for empowering communities in rural infrastructure development. By investigating the practice of virtual coin donations via TikTok, this study presents a new perspective on how digital platforms can bridge financial gaps in underfunded regions. Unlike traditional crowdfunding, TikTok's live-streaming and gifting systems enable real-time interaction, fostering transparency, trust, and wider community participation. These features can be strategically harnessed for sustainable development goals, particularly in low-income and rural contexts.

Moreover, this research contributes to the literature by identifying the success factors of such community initiatives, including the role of social media in disseminating information, building trust among stakeholders, and mobilizing collective action. It provides insights into the mechanisms by which social media platforms like TikTok can facilitate grassroots movements for economic and social development. This study not only highlights the potential of TikTok as a fundraising tool but also explores its implications for broader social transformation, offering practical recommendations that can be replicated in other rural areas both in Indonesia and globally.

This investigation is grounded in a comprehensive review of credible sources, including Lindgren's "Digital Media and Society: Transforming Economies and Cultures" (2022), which explores the socio-economic impacts of digital media, and Tella and Olaniyi's "Social Media Strategies for Dynamic Library Service Development" (2020), which discusses how social media strategies foster collaboration and resource mobilization in community settings. By integrating insights from these foundational texts and empirical studies, this research bridges theoretical understanding and real-world applications, contributing to the emerging discourse on digital media as a catalyst for sustainable rural development.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. The Role of Social Media in Economic Empowerment

The rise of social media as a transformative tool for economic empowerment has been well-documented across various contexts. Akhter and Al-Zaman (2024) provide a compelling analysis of how digital platforms, including TikTok, empower marginalized communities like the Hijra in South Asia by offering economic visibility and creating new revenue streams through content creation and audience engagement. Their study emphasizes the dual role of social media in facilitating self-expression and providing economic independence. Similarly, Cui (2021) delves into the broader impact of social media on economic ecosystems, highlighting how platforms influence consumer behavior, entrepreneurial ventures, and market dynamics. These studies reveal the adaptability of social media to diverse socio-economic environments, reinforcing its potential as a tool for community-based economic initiatives.

Synthesizing these findings, it is clear that social media platforms like TikTok are not merely entertainment venues but powerful engines for economic transformation. The ability of TikTok to engage global audiences, combined with its accessible monetization features, positions it as a strategic resource for addressing economic challenges in underserved regions.

### 2. TikTok as a Platform for Social Entrepreneurship and Digital Fundraising

TikTok's unique features, including its algorithm-driven visibility and interactive user experiences, make it an effective platform for social entrepreneurship and fundraising. Tetep et al. (2024) explore how TikTok influences social entrepreneurship by increasing awareness and engagement with entrepreneurial ventures, particularly in altering consumptive behaviors to support socially-driven businesses. The study highlights how TikTok campaigns can foster a sense of community ownership and participation, which is critical for initiatives like rural infrastructure funding.

Shi and Wu (2023) further analyze TikTok's role in facilitating online charitable donations through live-streaming, showing how real-time interactions, combined with emotional appeals, significantly enhance users' willingness to donate. Similarly, Ziobrowska-Sztuczka (2024) examines the use of crowdfunding by influencers on TikTok, illustrating how they leverage their audience's trust and engagement to generate funds for various causes. This duality of entertainment and functionality establishes TikTok as a robust platform for both profit-driven and philanthropic activities.

By synthesizing these studies, TikTok's multifaceted capabilities in social entrepreneurship and digital fundraising emerge as crucial tools. The platform bridges entertainment and economic purpose, creating opportunities for engaging stakeholders in innovative fundraising models that align with community and development goals.

### 3. Social Media's Contribution to Infrastructure Development

The concept of "infrastructuralization," as introduced by Zhang (2021), provides a theoretical lens to understand TikTok's evolution from a video-sharing platform to a driver of economic and social transformation. Zhang's work highlights TikTok's capacity to shape power relationships, influence societal behaviors, and drive economic change at scale. This perspective is echoed in the findings of Sharif et al. (2023), who analyze TikTok's impact on Pakistani society, particularly its ability to merge market dynamics with moral and entertainment values. These insights are particularly relevant to rural infrastructure development, as they demonstrate how TikTok can mobilize diverse stakeholders by blending cultural relevance with economic imperatives.

Synthesizing these insights, TikTok's potential for infrastructure funding lies in its ability to channel its broad reach and cultural influence into tangible outcomes. The platform's ability to

connect creators, donors, and beneficiaries in real-time can redefine traditional funding models for infrastructure projects, particularly in rural contexts where conventional funding is often limited.

#### **4. Community Empowerment through Digital Marketing and Socio-preneurship**

Community empowerment through digital tools is another critical area that aligns with TikTok's potential for infrastructure funding. Sari et al. (2023) explore the role of digital marketing training in socio-preneurship, showcasing its effectiveness in equipping communities with the skills needed to optimize online platforms for economic development. Their findings highlight the potential for grassroots initiatives to use TikTok as a marketing and fundraising tool. Morgan et al. (2024) extend this discussion to nonprofits, demonstrating how social media platforms like TikTok enhance mission-oriented fundraising efforts by engaging diverse audiences through compelling narratives.

Synthesizing these works reveals that TikTok's role in community empowerment is not limited to economic activities; it also fosters social cohesion and collective action. By equipping rural communities with the tools to create impactful content, TikTok can serve as a catalyst for both economic and social transformation, making it a valuable resource for infrastructure development initiatives.

#### **5. Case Studies and Best Practices in TikTok-based Fundraising**

Arnold et al. (n.d.) provide practical insights into the use of TikTok for youth-driven charitable initiatives, offering strategies that align with sustainable development goals. Their work underscores the importance of leveraging TikTok's interactive features, such as live streams and viral challenges, to maximize engagement and fundraising outcomes. This complements the findings of Shi and Wu (2023), who emphasize the role of emotional engagement and immediacy in driving donations through TikTok's unique features.

Synthesizing these case studies highlights the need for a strategic approach to TikTok-based fundraising. By combining best practices from successful campaigns, rural infrastructure projects in East Java can design tailored strategies that leverage TikTok's capabilities to meet specific funding goals.

### **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the use of TikTok virtual gifts as a funding mechanism for rural infrastructure development in Maggar Hamlet, Batuporo Barat Village, Sampang Regency, East Java. The research focuses on secondary data obtained from credible news platforms, such as detik.com, which provide comprehensive reports, interviews, and related information regarding the initiative. By synthesizing these sources, the study captures the narrative surrounding the funding process, community involvement, and the outcomes of the road construction project.

The collected data is subjected to in-depth content analysis, with a focus on themes relevant to economic empowerment, digital fundraising, and community-led development. The study applies theoretical frameworks related to economic mobilization and empowerment, such as the role of social media in resource optimization (Lindgren, 2022) and community-driven innovation (Tella & Olaniyi, 2020). These frameworks help contextualize the findings and establish connections between the practical use of TikTok virtual gifts and broader socio-economic theories.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, this research employs triangulation by cross-referencing data from various sources. As described by Patton (2002), triangulation increases credibility by integrating multiple data sources and methods, offering a holistic

perspective. In this study, triangulation involves comparing media reports, interviews, and theoretical literature to verify the real-world impact of TikTok as a tool for socio-economic transformation.

Thematic analysis, following the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), is used to identify and analyze recurring patterns in the data. The rationale for employing thematic analysis lies in its flexibility and systematic nature, which allows the researcher to delve deeply into the data while maintaining a clear structure. This method is particularly suited for exploring complex socio-economic phenomena, as it facilitates the identification of key themes such as the effectiveness of TikTok as a fundraising tool, the dynamics of community participation, and the socio-economic outcomes of the initiative. Moreover, thematic analysis enhances the reliability of the findings by providing a transparent and replicable process for coding and categorizing data.

The results are then interpreted within the context of existing literature on digital media and economic empowerment, as outlined in the literature review. This methodological approach enables the study to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital platforms like TikTok can be leveraged for innovative rural development solutions, while also addressing the broader implications for sustainable economic and social transformation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The case of road construction in Maggar Hamlet, Batuporo Barat Village, Sampang Regency, funded by TikTok virtual gifts, is an extraordinary example of community-driven infrastructure development that has leveraged digital media to address local challenges. The initiative not only highlights the potential of digital platforms like TikTok in facilitating small-scale social entrepreneurship but also reveals the complex dynamics between local governance, social media engagement, and rural development.

### **1. The Viral Impact of TikTok: Mobilizing a Collective Effort**

The genesis of this road project can be traced back to the initiative of Ihayak Ulumiddin, a local resident, who uploaded a video of the road's deteriorating condition and the community's efforts to repair it. The video quickly went viral on TikTok, attracting donations from viewers across the platform. This viral response underscores the significant role social media can play in mobilizing resources for local causes. As Ihayak shared, "From the moment I uploaded the video and went live, many people were interested and contributed towards this project." This phenomenon is consistent with the findings of Sharif et al. (2023), who explored TikTok's economic influence, highlighting the platform's ability to crowdsource funds for a variety of social causes. The ability of TikTok to create widespread visibility for community-driven projects is further emphasized by Cui (2021), who noted the profound economic impact of social media, particularly in terms of raising awareness and mobilizing funds for community-based projects.

### **2. The Push for Self-Reliance: A Response to Inadequate Government Support**

The residents of Maggar Hamlet were initially reluctant to wait for government assistance, particularly funding through the village's official budget (Dana Desa). Faced with the poor condition of the road and the lack of sufficient support from local government channels, they opted for a collective approach, pooling resources and rallying support through social media. This self-reliance mirrors a broader trend observed in rural communities where individuals take initiative in the absence of timely governmental intervention (Sari et al., 2023). The decision to bypass official channels reflects a growing frustration with the inefficiencies of bureaucratic processes in rural infrastructure development. Amir, one of the local coordinators, stated that

the road was "severely damaged and needed immediate repair, but no help was coming from the village budget," showcasing the community's resolve to act in the face of neglect.

This local initiative aligns with the empowerment frameworks discussed by Tella & Olaniyi (2020), who argue that community-driven development not only strengthens local bonds but also empowers individuals to address their own needs, particularly when government support is inadequate or delayed. The success of the project highlights the potential of digital platforms to catalyze social change, bypassing traditional channels that may be slow or inefficient.

### **3. The Role of Social Media in Bridging the Funding Gap**

The construction of the road, which spans over 4.47 kilometers and involves eight repair points, is a testament to the power of digital fundraising. The funds raised through TikTok donations were pivotal in enabling the community to carry out the work despite limited financial resources. As described by the residents, the road was repaired using simple materials, with concrete slabs replacing asphalt due to financial constraints. However, the quality of the work was still impressive, with a road width of 2.5 meters and a thickness of 15 cm. The fact that the residents included a symbolic marker on the road, stating "Dana Warga Koin TikTok" (TikTok Coin Donation by the Community), further emphasizes the collective ownership of the project.

This symbolic gesture of marking the road serves as a powerful reminder of the community's autonomy in resource mobilization and infrastructure development, which can be contrasted with the slow pace of official government-funded projects. The distinction made between roads built with village funds and those constructed via community donations echoes the ideas in Zhang (2021), who discusses the role of social media platforms in transforming the way people interact with infrastructure and development. TikTok, in this case, did not just serve as a medium for raising funds, but also as a platform for fostering social cohesion and collective action.

### **4. Criticism of Government Accountability: The Role of Social Media as a Public Forum**

While the initiative was widely praised by the TikTok community for its resourcefulness, it also sparked significant online criticism of the local government. Many netizens expressed frustration over the allocation of village development funds, questioning why such initiatives were necessary when resources were ostensibly available through formal channels. One user commented, "Where is the village fund? Why is this initiative coming from the people and not the government?" This commentary reflects the increasing scrutiny that governments face in the age of social media, where actions (or inactions) are more transparent and open to public critique.

The public nature of these discussions and the ensuing debates over government accountability underscore a broader trend explored by Morgan et al. (2024), where social media platforms provide a space for users to question and hold local officials accountable. This trend points to a shift in power dynamics, where citizens can now directly challenge local authorities and call for greater transparency in the management of public funds.

### **5. Socio-Economic Impact and Future Implications**

This case study exemplifies the potential of social media platforms like TikTok to foster social entrepreneurship and address infrastructure gaps in underserved communities. By combining local initiative with digital tools, the residents of Maggar Hamlet were able to achieve significant improvements in their living conditions, illustrating the potential for similar models to be adopted in other regions. The success of this project also speaks to the evolving role of digital media in rural development, where communities can leverage online platforms not just for social connection, but also for economic and developmental purposes.

Looking ahead, this case offers insights into how rural areas might benefit from a more participatory approach to infrastructure development, one where the community plays an active role in both decision-making and funding. The TikTok-driven road project in Sampang highlights the growing intersection between digital media, community empowerment, and economic self-reliance.

The use of TikTok virtual gifts to fund rural infrastructure in Maggar Hamlet is a compelling example of how digital media can revolutionize local development efforts. Through grassroots mobilization and collective action, residents were able to bypass the limitations of traditional funding sources and achieve tangible results. This initiative not only showcases the transformative power of social media but also raises important questions about the future of local governance and the accountability of government institutions in rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

The road construction project in Maggar Hamlet, funded through TikTok donations, showcases how communities can harness the power of social media to address local development challenges. Faced with slow government responses, the residents of Maggar Hamlet demonstrated the effectiveness of collective action in the digital era, using online platforms to crowdsource funds for essential infrastructure. This initiative not only highlights the potential of digital fundraising in tackling rural development issues but also reflects the growing public dissatisfaction with bureaucratic delays in infrastructure projects.

The success of this project carries broader implications for rural areas across Indonesia and beyond. It underscores that with the right combination of technology and community participation, urgent infrastructure needs can be met without waiting for external assistance. However, it also raises critical questions about government accountability and the efficiency of traditional funding mechanisms. Moving forward, it is crucial for governments to recognize the transformative role of digital platforms and explore ways to integrate them into development strategies, particularly in underserved areas where conventional approaches often fall short.

For practical suggestions, it is essential for local governments to embrace the power of digital platforms in community-driven development efforts. They can support and collaborate with residents in utilizing social media for fundraising by creating official channels for these initiatives, ensuring transparency and proper fund management. Governments should also establish clear guidelines for digital fundraising, allowing citizens to contribute in a structured and accountable manner. Building stronger partnerships between local authorities and communities will foster greater trust and ensure that infrastructure projects are addressed in a timely fashion.

Future research could focus on the scalability of TikTok-driven fundraising models in other rural contexts, examining their adaptability in regions with different levels of digital access and community engagement. Additionally, exploring the long-term sustainability of such initiatives could provide insights into whether they promote lasting infrastructure improvements or remain dependent on continuous online contributions. Comparative studies between self-funded projects and government-funded initiatives might also shed light on their efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and impact on community satisfaction, offering valuable perspectives for policy and practice in rural development.

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