

**ECOLOGICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNICATION IN  
URBAN AGRICULTURE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF  
THE PALEMBANG COMMUNITY INFORMATION GROUP (KIM) AS A  
DIGITAL INTERMEDIARY.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the role of Community Information Groups (KIM) in Palembang in mediating the urban farming program “Gerakan Sumsel Mandiri Pangan” (GSMP). Amidst the digital divide and challenges of urban food security, KIM is positioned as a hybrid intermediary between the state and the community. Using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach and digital ethnography, this study analyzes how KIM members negotiate the meaning of agricultural technology and translate it into digital content. Findings show that KIM does not merely disseminate information linearly, but rather performs “vernacular translation” that adapts technical instructions into relevant local narratives. However, their effectiveness is constrained by infrastructure friction and role tensions between being government agents or citizen advocates. This study recommends a shift from a top-down extension model to a distributed digital literacy approach that recognizes the agency of local intermediaries.*

**Keywords:** *Participatory Communication, Digital Intermediaries, Urban Farming, Community Information Groups (KIM), Food Security.*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Template naskah ini diformat menggunakan style MS-WORD yang telah disediakan. Gunakan style tersebut untuk memudahkan memformat naskah anda. The discourse on global food security has undergone a significant shift from a focus on rural production to resilient urban food systems. Rapid urbanization in Global South countries demands the transformation of cities from mere sites of consumption to units of

production through urban farming (Yani et al., 2024). In Indonesia, this initiative is often intervened by the state through food decentralization policies, such as the “South Sumatra Food Independence Movement” (GSMP) launched through South Sumatra Governor Regulation No. 22 of 2022 (South Sumatra Provincial Government, 2022).

However, the adoption of agricultural technology in urban environments is not merely a technical process. It is highly dependent on the “human infrastructure” that mediates the flow of information. This is where the strategic but problematic role of Community Information Groups (KIM) lies. In accordance with Minister of Communication and Information Technology Regulation No. 08/2010, KIM was formed as an agent for the dissemination of information from, by, and for the community (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2010). Recent literature highlights that in the digital era, actors such as KIM function as “digital intermediaries” that bridge the second-level digital divide—namely, the gap in the ability to use information meaningfully (Heeks, 2022; Tsan et al., 2019).

Although studies on urban farming are increasing, research that specifically examines the dynamics of participatory communication in these state-society intermediary groups is still limited (Prastyanti et al., 2024). This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the transformation of KIM Palembang from passive extension workers to active content producers. Through the lens of participatory communication and critical innovation diffusion theory, this article challenges the assumption of linearity in agricultural extension and offers a new perspective on the negotiation of meaning in technology adoption.

a. From Diffusion to Participatory Communication.

Rogers' (2003) classic paradigm of innovation diffusion is often criticized for its pro-innovation bias and top-down nature. In the context of contemporary development, the focus has shifted to Participatory Communication for Development (PCD), which emphasizes dialogue and community empowerment (Servaes, 2008). A recent study in Yogyakarta shows that participatory communication strategies in urban farming are more effective when they involve regular meetings and democratic group

management, rather than simply vertical instruction (Prastyanti et al., 2024). Participation is no longer just physical presence, but concerns control over narratives and decision-making.

b. Digital Intermediaries and New Gaps

Digital transformation in agriculture promises efficiency, but often widens inequality for those with low digital literacy (Abdulai et al., 2023). Human intermediaries such as extension workers or digital farmer groups are crucial for navigating this ecosystem. However, the position of KIM as a government-formed entity is often ambiguous: are they an organic representation of civil society or an extension of the bureaucracy? Studies by Mukti and Winanta (2021) and Yasintha and Chandrika (2021) indicate that KIM has great potential as a model for public participation, but is often constrained by human resource capacity and dependence on the government's agenda.

c. Urban Farming as a Social Practice

Urban farming in Indonesia is not only about growing chili peppers, but also about social cohesion and family economic resilience (Suharti et al., 2021). The adoption of technologies such as hydroponics is often driven by factors of prestige and community social dynamics, not just rational economic calculations. Therefore, analysis of KIM must look at how agricultural technology is “interpreted” and “communicated” in the daily interactions of residents.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design to not only observe but also facilitate social change (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Pretty, 1995). The research was conducted in Talang Semut Village and the South Sumatra Communication and Information Agency Office, involving KIM members, agency officials, and 10 purposively selected community members. The data collection techniques used were observations conducted over 3 months during technical training and content creation assistance, in-depth interviews, and digital ethnography, namely content analysis of 50 social media posts (Instagram/TikTok) produced by KIM to see narrative patterns and engagement. The data obtained was then

analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Negotiating the Meaning of Agricultural Technology**

The technical training provided covered vertical farming and hydroponics. Field findings showed that KIM members engaged in a process of “meaning negotiation” (Wenger, 1998) with regard to this technology. Verticulture is widely adopted because of its compatibility with the narrow land of Talang Semut residents, in accordance with the Relative Advantage principle in Rogers' theory (2003). Conversely, hydroponics is adopted more as a symbol of modernity and visual content material than for mass food production.

KIM members translate technical agricultural language into vernacular (local) language. For example, the term “AB Mix nutrients” is often simplified to “plant medicine” in communication between neighbors. This ability to translate culture validates KIM's role as an effective intermediary, in line with the findings of Agustien et al. (2024) regarding the importance of local communication in GSMP implementation.

#### **Role Transformation: From Information Consumers to Producers**

Before the intervention, KIM tended to passively distribute government flyers. After digital literacy training, a significant shift occurred. KIM began to independently produce video content that showcased local realities—such as crop failures or practical tips for caring for plants in narrow alleys.

This participatory content proved to increase community engagement. This confirms the thesis of Setyaningsih and Utama (2021) that contextualized digital literacy can strengthen community social capital.

### The Intermediary Dilemma: Between the State and Citizens

KIM's position as an intermediary faces structural challenges. On the one hand, they are expected to be the mouthpiece of the government to ensure the success of the GSMP narrative. On the other hand, they must maintain the trust of citizens. Findings show that there is tension when KIM has to report data. There is a tendency toward performative reporting (only reporting the good) to please supervisors. This phenomenon hinders the critical feedback that is actually needed for policy improvement, a risk that was also identified by Sandi et al. (2020) in a study of KIM implementation in other regions.

#### **4. CONCLUSION/PENUTUP (Style: Heading1)**

This study concludes that KIM Palembang plays a vital but complex role in the ecology of urban agricultural communication. They are not merely conduits of information, but active filters and interpreters who negotiate state policies to suit the local context.

The success of programs such as GSMP cannot be measured solely by the number of plants grown, but by the extent to which there has been an increase in the communication capacity of citizens. The main recommendation of this study is the need for the government to shift its approach to KIM development from instructional to dialogical. Digital literacy should be directed towards strengthening the “narrative sovereignty” of the community, not merely technical skills in operating social media.

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