

Social Media Response and the Role of Balinese Women in Addressing the Flood Crisis in Denpasar City

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Abstract

This study examines social media responses and the role of Balinese women in addressing the flood crisis that struck Denpasar City in September 2025. Data were obtained through observation, literature review, and interviews with credible informants, and analyzed using W. Timothy Coombs' *Situational Crisis Communication Theory* (SCCT, 2015). However, within the SCCT framework, the phenomenon of hyperreality also emerged, elevating the flood event into a national issue. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram played a crucial role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing social solidarity. However, within the SCCT framework, the phenomenon of *hyperreality* also emerged, elevating the flood event into a national issue. Meanwhile, Balinese women demonstrated a significant role by educating families about waste management, maintaining environmental cleanliness, and providing direct assistance to affected victims. Although social media proved strategic in shaping narratives and collective solidarity, structural mitigation and community participation remain key to preventing similar disasters in the future. Although social media proved strategic in shaping narratives and collective solidarity, structural mitigation and community participation remain key to preventing similar disasters in the future.

Keywords: Denpasar flood crisis, social media, and Balinese women.

1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Its geographical position at the convergence of three major tectonic plates, Eurasian, Indo-Australian, and Pacific, makes the region highly susceptible to earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and floods. The National Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB, 2025) has recorded a significant increase in hydrometeorological events, especially floods and landslides, triggered by climate change and extreme weather conditions. Alternating El Niño and La Niña phenomena have caused instability in rainfall patterns, leading to intense and sudden downpours that often trigger urban flooding.

This situation is also experienced in various regions of Indonesia, including Bali Province. In September 2025, Denpasar City was struck by a major flood following continuous extreme rainfall over two consecutive days. The disaster inundated hundreds of houses, disrupted economic activities, and damaged public infrastructure in several areas, such as Jalan Gatot Subroto, Monang-Maning, and Pemogan. According to local media reports, such as *Tribun Bali* (2025), several residents were trapped in their homes and required urgent evacuation as the water levels rose to nearly one meter. A study by the Disaster Mitigation Center of Udayana University (2025) found that the overflow in the Badung River Basin (DAS Badung) was caused by a combination of natural factors and human activities, including reduced groundwater infiltration areas due to uncontrolled development and waste disposal into drainage channels.

The socio-economic impacts of the disaster were substantial. Trading and transportation activities were disrupted for several days, and communities in densely populated neighborhoods struggled to access clean water and basic necessities. Environmentally, the flood caused pollution due to household waste and plastic materials carried by the water. Sutopo (2023) emphasizes that urban flooding is not solely caused by high rainfall but is also a result of weak ecological awareness and unsustainable environmental governance.

In such crisis situations, social media plays an increasingly important role in public communication. Social media users can directly broadcast disaster events from the scene through live streaming or real-time uploads. Platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram function as primary channels for disseminating information, issuing warnings, and coordinating community assistance. However, the rapid flow of information also presents challenges, such as hoaxes and dramatization, which may trigger panic reactions. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of hyperreality within the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2015), in which the boundary between reality and media construction becomes blurred due to the speed and intensity of information dissemination. Nugroho and Sari (2022) show that in the Indonesian context, social media often serves dual functions: as a tool for mobilizing social solidarity and as a potential source of inaccurate information. In the 2025 Denpasar flood case, visual reports—photos and videos—uploaded within minutes shaped public perceptions massively even before official government statements were released.

In response to the disaster, various social groups provided assistance to affected residents, including Balinese women. Balinese women hold significant sociocultural roles in crisis situations. As agents of social change, Balinese women have long served as pioneers in social, cultural, and humanitarian activities (Darma Putra, 2019). Local values such as *Tri Hita Karana* (harmony between humans, nature, and God) and the spirit of *menyama braya* (brotherhood and solidarity) motivate women to take active roles in family education and community social support. Ardika (2020) notes that Balinese women often act as drivers of social solidarity, managers of community logistics, and maintainers of family harmony during crises. In the context of the Denpasar flood, many women participated in distributing aid, caring for children, managing communal kitchens, and disseminating disaster-mitigation information through social media networks and *banjar* community groups.

Thus, the 2025 Denpasar flood reflects the interaction between digital technology and local cultural values in crisis response. Examining social media responses and the role of Balinese women captures crisis-communication dynamics and illustrates the synergy between social structures, local wisdom, and technological innovation in building community resilience. Accordingly, this article addresses two main questions: (1) How did social media shape the public response to the Denpasar flood crisis? (2) How did Balinese women contribute to flood management and mitigation?

2. Literature Review

A range of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies inform the understanding of disasters and women's roles, particularly in crisis communication. One of the key theories used to analyze communication dynamics during crises is the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), developed by W. Timothy Coombs (2015). According to Coombs, every crisis generates public perceptions of responsibility, which subsequently affect reputation, trust, and social stability. SCCT categorizes crises into three clusters—victim, accidental, and preventable—each requiring different communication strategies. SCCT categorizes crises into three clusters—victim, accidental, and preventable—each requiring different communication strategies. The 2025 Denpasar flood can be

classified as a victim-cluster crisis, as the community was primarily a victim of natural conditions, although structural factors such as inadequate drainage amplified the impacts.

The rise of digital technologies, particularly social media, has significantly transformed the landscape of crisis communication. Previously, information was centrally managed by official institutions; now, the public actively produces, disseminates, and interprets information. Austin, Fisher Liu, and Jin (2012) argue that social media accelerates communication flows during crises through real-time responses, but also increases the risk of misinformation and social panic. In Indonesia, platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and X (Twitter) function as dynamic public spheres where citizens report events, express empathy, and form opinions about governmental responsibility. Within the SCCT framework, this phenomenon reflects a shift from top-down crisis communication toward community-based participatory communication.

Beyond official institutions and digital platforms, civil society, particularly women's groups, plays a critical role in disaster response. Gender and disaster management studies demonstrate that women are not passive victims but active agents in mitigation, emergency response, and post-disaster recovery. Enarson and Chakrabarti (2009) highlighted that empathy, social experience, and community networks possessed by women significantly strengthen community resilience. In disaster situations, women often perform dual roles: maintaining family well-being and participating in social and economic activities that support community recovery.

In the Balinese context, women's roles carry unique sociocultural dimensions. Cultural traditions rooted in *Tri Hita Karana* and *menyama braya* (brotherhood) provide moral foundations for Balinese women to actively engage in social and humanitarian activities. Darma Putra (2019) states that Balinese women not only undertake domestic responsibilities but also drive cultural and social activities at the *banjar* level. Ardika (2020) adds that women's involvement in environmental preservation and family education is an important asset in fostering ecological awareness. During the 2025 Denpasar flood, these cultural values motivated Balinese women to take leading roles in distributing aid, conducting environmental cleanliness campaigns, managing communal kitchens, and organizing community information centers. This demonstrates that Balinese women function as guardians of social harmony and cultural mediators, bridging tradition with modern mitigation needs.

Previous studies have also reinforced the connection between social media and community participation in crisis communication in Indonesia. Sari and Prabowo (2021) found that during the 2020 Jakarta floods, Twitter and Instagram were used effectively to coordinate aid and share emergency information, while also noting the spread of visual hoaxes that complicated public perception—highlighting the urgency of digital literacy. Nugroho and Sari (2022) showed that social media often acts as a *mobilizer of solidarity* during disasters, with spontaneous grassroots initiatives mobilizing donations faster than official institutions.

Studies on Balinese women similarly indicate high levels of social and humanitarian engagement. Wiranata (2018) found that women in *banjar adat* actively participated in PKK programs focused on environmental cleanliness and family education. Lestari (2020) highlights the substantial role of Balinese women's social networks in strengthening community resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These studies collectively demonstrate that the interaction between social media and local socio-cultural values—particularly those enacted by women—is crucial for building social resilience during crises. However, research that specifically explores the synergy between social media roles and Balinese women’s contributions in the context of flooding remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining social media responses and the contributions of Balinese women during the 2025 Denpasar flood.

3. Research Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with phenomenological analysis to understand the social experiences and digital communication patterns that emerged during the 2025 Denpasar flood. Phenomenology, as described by Moustakas (1994), seeks to uncover the essential meanings of lived experiences through deep reflection on participants' consciousness and perceptions of an event. This approach is relevant for exploring the experiences of women and local communities in navigating crisis situations and managing communication through social media. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative phenomenology allows researchers to understand how individuals interpret their lived experiences within specific social contexts.

The data sources comprised primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with several informants, including community leaders, women activists, flood victims, and government officials involved in disaster response. Secondary data were obtained from news articles, social media posts (such as WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, and X), and relevant academic literature. The use of both primary and secondary data aligns with Moleong’s (2019) guidance, which emphasizes triangulated data collection in qualitative research.

Data collection techniques included social media observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Social media observation was conducted to trace information flows, narratives of solidarity, and public responses during the crisis. This technique follows Silverman’s (2021) argument that digital observation provides insights into contemporary communication practices. In-depth interviews were used to explore subjective perspectives regarding women’s roles and communication dynamics during the disaster, consistent with Kvale’s (2007) approach to qualitative interviewing. Document analysis complemented the data by examining digital archives, online news coverage, and local policy documents. Bowen (2009) emphasizes that public documents are essential data sources that strengthen thematic interpretation.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). Thematic analysis was selected because of its ability to identify key patterns and meanings within narrative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). SCCT served as an analytical lens for understanding the types of responses, perceptions of responsibility, and communication strategies during the crisis (Coombs, 2015). To ensure validity, the study employed source and method triangulation by comparing data from various informants, documents, and social media observations, following Denzin’s (2012) recommendation for enhancing credibility in qualitative research.

4. Results and Discussion

The major flood that struck Denpasar City in September 2025 was one of the most significant urban disasters in Bali in the past decade. The event was triggered by extreme rainfall that persisted for three consecutive days, compounded by the city’s clogged drainage system due to sedimentation and the accumulation of domestic waste. The most affected areas included East Denpasar, Peguyangan, and

parts of Renon, with flood depths reaching between 80 centimeters and one meter. Socioeconomic impacts emerged immediately: hundreds of houses were inundated, transportation access was paralyzed, and daily economic activities—particularly those of small and medium enterprises—came to a temporary halt (ANTARA News, 2025).

The initial government response was reactive in nature. The Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD), together with village-level *desa adat* authorities, promptly initiated evacuations, victim registration, and the establishment of temporary shelters, while the provincial government declared an emergency status. However, logistical shortages and cross-agency coordination challenges caused delays in the distribution of aid to affected residents. Conversely, local communities demonstrated strong social resilience—mutual aid initiatives emerged across *banjar* neighborhoods, including community kitchens and the use of social media for incident reporting, evacuation coordination, and fundraising (BPBD Bali Updates, September 11–16, 2025).

The September 10, 2025, flood was later confirmed to be one of Bali’s most severe disasters in more than a decade. Heavy rainfall that began before dawn caused rivers across Denpasar to overflow, sweeping into residential areas, public facilities, markets, and major roadways. BPBD Bali recorded more than 356 disaster points, including over 200 flood sites spread across Denpasar, Badung, Gianyar, and Jembrana. In addition to inundating hundreds of buildings, the flood damaged several structures in central Denpasar, destroyed two bridges, and caused the collapse of more than 20 retaining walls (The Guardian, September 15, 2025).

The most tragic consequence was the loss of lives. Reports from national and international media indicated that at least 17–18 people died, most of whom were residents of Denpasar. Search and rescue teams continued to look for missing individuals swept away by the current. Thousands of residents were evacuated to shelters after floodwaters reached chest level, and electricity, communication networks, and road access were disrupted in several areas (AP News, September 11, 2025).

In addition, damage to infrastructure and economic facilities was substantial. In Denpasar’s major trading zones, particularly the Kumbasari Market and Jalan Sulawesi, more than 470 kiosks, stalls, and shop houses were severely damaged or swept away. Initial BPBD estimates placed material losses at approximately IDR 28.9 billion, excluding damages to public facilities, drainage infrastructure, and tourism-supporting establishments such as villas, homestays, and souvenir shops. Experts and regional authorities argued that the flood exposed weaknesses in the city’s drainage management, increased river sedimentation, and shrinking infiltration areas due to rapid urban development over the past decade (The Jakarta Post, September 14, 2025).

The Bali Provincial Government declared one-week emergency status to accelerate the response, evacuation, and initial recovery efforts. President Prabowo Subianto visited the affected locations and reaffirmed the central government’s commitment to infrastructure repair and community recovery. Hydrology experts interviewed by the media emphasized that the disaster was not solely triggered by extreme rainfall but was intensified by atmospheric waves, poor waste management, river basin narrowing, and escalating urban development pressures (*Bali Post*, 15–21 September 2025)

Overall, the September 2025 flood shook Bali’s social and economic systems and served as a critical reminder of the fragility of urban water governance. The event underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive evaluation of spatial planning policies, flood control mechanisms, and environmentally grounded mitigation efforts to minimize similar future disasters.

4.1 The Role of Social Media in Crisis Communication During the Denpasar Flood

During the 2025 Denpasar flood crisis, social media played a central role as a channel for communication and social mobilization. WhatsApp served as a rapid conduit for cross-community and volunteer coordination. Local groups—organized by *banjar* and civil society organizations—functioned as emergency communication hubs, where reports of flood points, logistical needs, and the search for separated family members circulated in real time. The speed of information flow through WhatsApp effectively replaced formal government communication, which tended to be slower.

However, this phenomenon also illustrates the emergence of flood-related hyperreality, as described by Jean Baudrillard (1981), wherein social media representations produce a new reality that exceeds the event itself. The Denpasar flood became more than an ecological disaster; it became a viral media spectacle—circulated, edited, and emotionally interpreted. Meanwhile, this dynamic also reflects Hannah Arendt's (1963) notion of the banality of crisis, whereby human tragedy becomes routine consumption and loses reflective meaning as it overlaps with the flows of digital entertainment. Thus, social media played a dual role: as a tool for social coordination and as a hyperreal representational space that reshaped public understanding and emotional experience of the disaster.

TikTok and Instagram provided another dimension of crisis communication: narrative and emotional. Through short videos and visual uploads, residents shared their experiences, such as documenting flood currents and showcasing acts of community solidarity. This phenomenon created hyperreality in which the Denpasar flood transcended local boundaries and became a national viral issue in the digital space. Dramatic visualizations of flooded major roads and residents rescuing pets generated broad emotional resonance, driving sympathy and interregional aid. However, this viral momentum also posed challenges, including the spread of hoaxes and exaggerated framing that sometimes distorted public perception of government performance.

Public attention toward disasters in the digital era is shaped not only by the severity of events but also by visual intensity, emotional proximity, and algorithmic resonance. Bruns and Burgess (2015), in their study on crisis communication on social media, argue that platforms such as Twitter create “networked publics”—spaces in which citizens actively produce and disseminate crisis information. Similarly, Houston et al. (2015) emphasize that social media enables “digital volunteerism”—spontaneous public participation in disaster response.

Liu, Fraustino, and Jin (2016) further explain in the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* that social media accelerates *information convergence*, blending official messages with citizen narratives in real time. Meanwhile, Papacharissi (2015), in *Affective Publics*, highlights how collective emotions, such as empathy and care, become key drivers of public engagement with disaster issues. In this context, the Denpasar flood exemplifies *affective mobilization*, in which online discourse spurred tangible actions, such as donation drives, volunteer formation, and moral pressure on the government to expedite the response.

Thus, public attention to the September 2025 Denpasar flood was driven not solely by the physical impact but also by digital communication dynamics that created an affective, emotional, and hyperreal space. Social media accelerated information circulation while generating new forms of social solidarity in which empathy and public concern were produced, amplified, and mediated by algorithms and the visual aesthetics of disasters.

4.2 The Role of Balinese Women in Responding to the Denpasar Flood Crisis

Anthony Giddens (1991) asserts that the family is the primary institution of socialization; it is within the family that individuals learn values, norms, and cultural practices that shape their behavior. This socialization process forms the foundation of ecological awareness at the household level. In Bali, women occupy a central position as educational agents within the family, instilling discipline in cleanliness, teaching waste management practices, and cultivating environmental responsiveness.

At the community level, women involved in PKK groups at the *banjar* level act as extensions of the family's educational function. Through outreach activities, they raise awareness to prevent improper waste disposal, which often leads to drainage blockages. These activities also include education on waste separation at the source, distinguishing between organic waste (food scraps, leaves, and biodegradable materials) and inorganic or chemical waste (plastic, metal, glass, and hazardous materials). This practice aligns with the 3R principles (reduce, reuse, and recycle) emphasized in sustainable waste management theory.

According to Tchobanoglous and Kreith (2002), effective waste management must begin at the source, as 60%–70% of urban waste problems stem from household behavior. Furthermore, Schübeler (1996), in the framework of community-based solid waste management, explains that the success of waste management systems depends on active community participation, particularly from women, who often act as drivers of behavioral change within households. This aligns with the concept of social ecofeminism, which views women as guardians of the harmonious relationship between humans and nature (Shiva, 1988).

In many *banjar* in Denpasar, waste bins are available in every neighborhood corner; however, their effectiveness relies heavily on household-level awareness and the culture of waste sorting. When the family's educational function operates effectively—especially through women's leadership—the communal system strengthens: clean behavior becomes a norm, and functioning drainage systems help mitigate seasonal flooding commonly caused by plastic waste and household debris. Thus, waste management is not merely a technical issue but a sociocultural process in which the family serves as the foundational space for cultivating ecological ethics in Balinese society.

The active roles of Balinese women also reflect their dual functions as caregivers and communicators at various stages of disaster management. Women often serve as early information gatherers (through social networks and digital media), coordinators of informal evacuations, and managers of household needs during the aftermath, demonstrating that women's local capacities are not merely reactive but preventive and adaptive. Theoretical analyses in gender and disaster studies (Enarson & Morrow, 1998) argue that acknowledging women's roles is crucial for reducing structural vulnerabilities and enhancing community response effectiveness (Fatanti et al., 2021; Enarson & Morrow, 1998).

At the socio-communal level, Balinese women frequently serve as mobilizers of solidarity—organizing communal kitchens, identifying affected families, and coordinating aid distribution—thereby strengthening the community's social capital. These collective actions are not only practical but also culturally normative: the value of *Tri Hita Karana* (harmonizing human–human, human–God, and human–nature relations) provides ethical guidance for mutual aid, and *desa kala patra* guides adaptive responses according to local spatial-temporal contexts, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and socially accepted. Applied studies in Bali and local wisdom research show that integrating these values

accelerates recovery and reinforces social cohesion—provided that women’s roles receive formal recognition within disaster-management mechanisms to prevent marginalization (Metera, 2025).

Based on Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Coombs, the Denpasar flood can be categorized as an accidental-cluster crisis arising from external conditions combined with systemic negligence (e.g., drainage infrastructure and environmental governance). The initial communication strategies were dominated by *providing instructions* —evacuation warnings and early alerts—and *adjusting information*, which emphasized governmental empathy.

However, the effectiveness of formal messages remained limited because of gaps between official communication and field realities. Here, social media complemented government communication by generating public-solidarity narratives. Community responses in digital spaces exhibited *trust bridging*, in which trust emerged not from institutional authority but from socio-cultural proximity. Trust rooted in *adat* community structures and local wisdom proved effective in reducing panic, maintaining cohesion, and accelerating recovery. The Denpasar flood illustrates how synergy between government communication, social-media dynamics, and local cultural values can form an adaptive and socially just crisis-communication ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

In the 2025 Denpasar flood disaster, social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram played a strategic role in disseminating information, shaping public opinion, and mobilizing social solidarity. These platforms became essential tools for managing public perception and reinforcing the legitimacy of disaster-response measures. However, hyperreality also emerged, in which the flood transcended its ecological dimension and became a symbolic construct in digital spaces, demonstrating how online imagery and emotion shape new social realities.

In the sociocultural context, Balinese women played a crucial role as educators and drivers of community-based mitigation. The family serves as the primary institution for socializing the values of cleanliness, responsibility, and ecological harmony. Through PKK initiatives at the *banjar* level, waste sorting, drainage upkeep, and household preparedness were reinforced by the *Tri Hita Karana* ethos, which emphasizes the balance between humans and nature. Accordingly, the effectiveness of digital communication must be complemented by structural and cultural interventions—through improved drainage systems, disciplined waste management, and enhanced ecological awareness—for disaster response to be more adaptive, participatory, and sustainable.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by the availability of primary data, particularly the inability to conduct broader field observations because of time constraints and the rapid progression of the disaster. The analysis also relies significantly on secondary sources and digital observations, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of all affected communities. Further studies with expanded field interviews, ethnographic immersion, and participatory action methods are recommended to enrich the understanding of community resilience dynamics.

5.3 Recommendations

To prevent recurring floods in Denpasar City, the community must enhance awareness of waste management, drainage maintenance, and environmental health. The commitment and active

participation of Balinese women in supporting flood victims should be sustained and further developed in collaboration with all societal components. Strengthening ecological literacy, institutionalizing community-based waste management, and formalizing women's roles in disaster governance structures are crucial steps toward building a more resilient urban system.

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