



# Visualization of the Individualistic Attitude of City Society Using an Urban Photography Approach

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**Abstract.** Jakarta is a city with a distinctive appeal, making it not only a dream destination for its own residents but also for people from other regions. This condition has led to significant migration flows from outside Jakarta into the city, driven by diverse objectives. Such migration is not merely a physical relocation but also involves the transfer of cultural practices brought by the migrants. The process of urbanisation in Jakarta has produced a heterogeneous society, as its inhabitants come from diverse regional backgrounds. The people of Jakarta are often categorised as an urban society characterised by activeness, independence, and a tendency toward individualism. In line with this phenomenon, the objective of this research is to produce photographic works that represent the individualistic attitudes of Jakarta's urban society through the approach of urban photography. The research method employed is practice-led research, an approach that emphasises the creation and reflection of new works through artistic practice. The outcome of this study is a series of photographic works that capture the individualistic attitudes of urban society by utilising decisive moments within the framework of urban photography.

**Keywords:** Urban Photography, Individualistic Attitudes, Urban Society.

## 1 Introduction

Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia, formally designated as such under Law No. 29 of 2007, which established the Government of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta as the capital of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia [8]. The city holds a distinctive appeal for surrounding communities, as it functions as a hub of economic, social, cultural, political, educational, and administrative activities. This attractiveness has direct consequences, most notably the continuous process of urbanisation. Urbanisation, however, does not merely signify the physical migration of populations from

rural to urban areas; it also entails cultural transformation. This process contributes to the formation of what is commonly referred to as the urban society.

Social relations within Jakarta's urban community are generally more individualistic compared to those in rural areas. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), individualism refers to the belief that prioritises personal rights over societal or state interests, considering the self (personality) as more important than others. For the people of Jakarta, individual interests often take precedence over communal concerns, thus reinforcing the perception of Jakarta's society as individualistic. Interpersonal relations among city residents are typically driven by specific objectives and interests. Individualistic behaviour has become deeply embedded in everyday practices, frequently observable in public spaces such as trains, the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), office districts, and other urban facilities. This study aims to visualise such individualistic attitudes through urban photography.

The research adopts an urban photography approach, as this genre aligns with both the subject and the study's thematic focus. Urban landscape photography emphasises urban life, encompassing architectural forms, public spaces, transportation networks, social interactions, and the broader cultural dynamics of city life [2]. Beyond merely documenting physical settings, urban photography seeks to capture atmosphere, dynamism, and cultural nuances of urban environments. Central to this approach is the concept of the decisive moment, popularised by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson in his 1952 book *Images à la Sauvette*. The decisive moment is the precise instant when visual elements in a scene align harmoniously, producing a composition that is both unique and unrepeatable. The aim of this study is to produce a body of work that visualises the individualistic attitudes of urban society through an urban photography approach, thereby providing insights for spectators, particularly those within urban communities.

In this research, photographic works will be created using natural sunlight, also known as available lighting. This form of lighting is particularly suitable for outdoor settings, where rapid and spontaneous moments occur in public spaces. The use of available lighting ensures that the authenticity of urban situations can be visually captured without artificial enhancement. Based on the foregoing discussion, this study focuses on the theme "Visualizing the Individualistic Attitudes of Urban Communities through an Urban Photography Approach."

## 2 Methods

This study specifically aims to explore how individualistic attitudes manifest within urban communities in Jakarta through the lens of practice-led research. It focuses on producing four photographic works that illustrate these attitudes, using urban photography to highlight situations of minimal social interaction, such as mobile device usage, commuter routines, and solitary behaviour in public spaces. The research is carried out in Jakarta's transit stations and office areas, chosen to represent the city's urban dynam-

ics. Interpretation of data is informed by both empirical observation and critical reflection on Jakarta's social context, enabling a deeper understanding of individualistic attitudes as adaptive responses to the complexities of urban life.

### 3 Results And Discussion

This research produced photographic works using an urban photography approach. I chose urban photography to show the individualistic attitudes of Jakarta's residents. I began by observing daily activities in the city to find clear examples of individualistic behaviour. I collected data in office districts around Jalan Sudirman, on commuter trains, and on the MRT system. While making images, I patiently waited for the right moment when scenes best showed individualistic tendencies. This approach allowed me to authentically capture Jakarta's urban society in context. The following section presents the photographic works produced through this research:



**Fig. 1.** Connected to Devices, Disconnected from the Surroundings [Source: Salwa Suci Aisyah, 2024]

In the first photograph, the researcher visualises the individualistic attitudes of Jakarta's urban society. The image was taken at the Dukuh Atas MRT Station, one of the city's busiest transit points. The composition features three subjects seated on the same bench while waiting for the train. These individuals represent the urban community. Urban society refers to a social group that emerges and is continually reproduced through the processes of modernity within the dynamics of modern institutions [6]. The seating

arrangement of the subjects conveys a sense of disconnection: one individual faces forward while the other two sit in the opposite direction. Each subject is engrossed in their personal device, with one wearing headphones, further emphasising a withdrawal into private space. Visually, the photograph illustrates the absence of social engagement, as each subject appears deeply immersed in their own world, indifferent to those seated beside them.

This observation aligns with urban social structures characterised by “secondary control,” where city dwellers largely disregard the personal behaviours of others as long as such actions do not disrupt the public order [6]. Urban photography offers a methodological approach to research that opens up the city, its objects, and its events, thereby enabling a deeper reflection on the complex textures, emotions, and experiences embedded within urban spaces [5]. Accordingly, the choice of both subject matter urban residents and location Jakarta’s metropolitan transit system corresponds with the methodological focus of urban photography.

From a technical standpoint, the photograph was composed in a horizontal format to align with the arrangement of the seated figures. The camera angle was set at eye level, thereby reproducing the authenticity of the observed scene. The background featuring the MRT station was deliberately included to provide contextual information, enabling viewers to readily situate the image within an urban public space. Lighting was entirely natural, utilising the available illumination within the station environment. Crucially, the photograph captures a decisive moment, when the subjects simultaneously engaged with their mobile devices while remaining physically proximate yet socially disengaged.

Cartier-Bresson’s concept of the decisive moment highlights the importance of timing in capturing fleeting instances where visual elements align to create meaning. In this instance, the moment underscores the pervasive individualism of Jakarta’s urban residents, visually articulated through their simultaneous isolation within a shared public setting. Metropolitan life requires individuals to undertake mental adaptation through the development of a blasé attitude, characterised by emotional detachment and reduced responsiveness as a protective mechanism against the intensity of excessive stimuli.

According to Simmel, the form of individualism that emerges in this context should not be understood merely as personal apathy, but rather as a structural consequence of social density, the high frequency of interactions, and the accelerated pace of urban life. Social relations in metropolitan spaces tend to be impersonal and fleeting, prompting individuals to cultivate emotional distance to maintain personal autonomy and psychological stability. Consequently, urban individuality is shaped through adaptive processes in response to the social conditions of large cities, in which personal freedom and social alienation coexist simultaneously as inherent characteristics of metropolitan life [10].



**Fig. 2.** Public Space, Private World [Source: Salwa Suci Aisyah, 2024]

For the second photograph above, the shoot was in the office area, specifically under the flyover on Jalan Sudirman in Jakarta. The shooting was done at night after work. This is the right time because in this area, you can see city people gathering after work. In the photo, several people representing the city's community are seen sitting in a row using the pedestrian facilities. In the photo, the subjects are seen sitting in a row, leaving space between them, so that the need for privacy within the city community is visually evident. All subjects are performing the same activity: holding and operating a cell-phone.

From the photo, it can be seen that city people are more comfortable doing their own activities and prefer to limit closeness to others. Social relations in rural and urban communities are very clearly different. In the village, the nature of mutual cooperation is almost no longer bound, so that neighbours or families no longer know each other deeply, but instead show eccentric behaviour, especially among those living in multi-storey houses with high fences.

In urban communities, in social life, individual interests are more important than the interests of the community at large (individualistic). The behaviour of creative city people is radical and dynamic in their acceptance of change and new habits; every action in urban society is generally based on a healthy balance that is not bound by custom. In urban society, individualistic and impersonal relationships give rise to individuals who, in their relationships with others, demand only certain goals and interests. The more individuals interact, the more it will change the social nature of modern society. City people develop mechanisms to protect themselves from various external stimuli, leading them to become rational and individual [6]. The author captured the moment when

the subjects were sitting in a row, performing the same activity simultaneously. In addition, the distance between one subject and another is also far apart, so there is no closeness between them. From the photo, the spectator can visually capture the individualistic attitude seen in city society. Civil inattention is understood as an ethical mechanism that allows individuals to mutually acknowledge one another's presence without engaging in excessive surveillance or social involvement, thereby maintaining a balance between shared presence in public spaces and the protection of personal boundaries.

The article highlights challenges that emerge alongside the development of modern technologies, including the use of digital devices, visual surveillance systems, and practices of visual documentation that may disrupt the continuity of civil inattention norms. The presence of such technologies blurs the boundaries between public and private spaces while reshaping patterns of social interaction previously regulated by implicit social agreements among individuals. Accordingly, the article underscores the importance of re-examining civil inattention as an ethical principle for understanding shifts in social practices within public spaces in the era of contemporary technology [9].



**Fig. 3.** Privacy Amidst the Bustle of the City [Source: Salwa Suci Aisyah, 2024]

In creating the third photographic work, the author presents urban society as the chosen subject, captured while engaged in daily activities, specifically utilising the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). The photograph was taken inside an MRT carriage in the Dukuh Atas area of Jakarta. In this image, the subjects, urban residents, are shown sitting side by side within the train. Urban society is highly dependent on transportation systems for

mobility, which in turn requires adequate infrastructure, such as efficient road networks. Uncongested roads are essential to support physical mobility, which significantly influences the city's economic growth. This mobility relates to the effectiveness and efficiency of transporting people and goods from one point to another. Reducing travel time and improving mobility constitute the foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of modern transportation systems in urban contexts.

Human mobility systems may take the form of private transportation or mass transit [6]. In this photographic work, the author visually highlights the subjects as urban individuals who are predominantly engaged with their own mobile devices. This depiction illustrates a broader characteristic of urban communities, where daily activities and personal needs are often fulfilled independently, without reliance on others. Urban residents tend to adopt rational modes of thinking, prioritising individual interests over others' concerns [7].

One of the defining features of urban social structures is social tolerance, whereby individuals may share close physical spaces while maintaining significant social distance. In such contexts, social control manifests in impersonal forms: as long as an individual's behaviour does not harm the public, it is generally tolerated [6]. The photograph illustrates the individualistic tendencies of urban society, as subjects are depicted focusing solely on their personal activities despite their shared physical space within public transportation. Although the image is seated closely, it conveys a sense of separation and boundaries between individuals. The author deliberately waited until each subject was absorbed in their own activities to capture this representation. The city's social, cultural, and economic dynamics offer rich, compelling visual narratives.

Everyday urban life, often classified as human-interest photography, is a subject matter that rarely exhausts its potential. The strength of such photographs lies less in technical mastery than in the ability to capture the decisive moment. Accurate titling further deepens the meaning and message of human-interest photography. This genre requires photographers to cultivate sensitivity in identifying the right moment. Urban social issues thus become compelling subjects due to the variability of their settings [12].

In this photographic work, the author also sought to capture the precise moment when the MRT seats were fully occupied, thereby emphasising the close physical proximity between subjects while simultaneously revealing their individual isolation. Despite their physical closeness, the photograph visually highlights the boundaries individuals maintain, each absorbed in their own activities and inhabiting a personal space within a public environment. Foreground and background considerations were also integral to the composition: the MRT door served as the foreground, while the MRT window provided the background, enabling spectators to identify the scene's location with greater clarity. This work employs an urban photography approach, as urban photography serves as a medium to visualise both subjects and atmospheres connected to the city.

Urban photography offers a methodological framework for exploring the city, its objects, and its events, thereby allowing a deeper reflection on the complex textures, emotions, and lived experiences within urban spaces [5].



**Fig. 4.** The Individual in the Urban Corridor [Source: Salwa Suci Aisyah, 2024]

In creating the fourth photograph, the author seeks to visualise the individualistic attitude of urban society at a different moment than in the previous works. The selected subjects in this photograph are intended to represent the characteristics of city dwellers. In general, urban communities are perceived to experience better living conditions than rural communities. However, such conditions also lead to an increase in the cost of living due to the fulfilment of unlimited needs. This circumstance compels individuals to compete for employment or engage in various activities to meet personal or familial needs. Consequently, individuals tend to become more limited in their social interactions and more self-centred, a tendency that leads to individualism or even egoism. From a social relations perspective, urban interactions are often based on personal interests, in which actions are primarily driven by the pursuit of individual benefits [1]. The photograph was captured at a train station in the Blok M area of Jakarta. Visually, the image depicts two subjects engaged in different activities: the first, a woman, appears asleep, while the second, a man, is using his mobile device. This moment illustrates the individualistic tendencies of urban society, as each subject is absorbed in their own activity with minimal regard for their surroundings. The first subject's ability to sleep inside a public train, despite being surrounded by others, demonstrates a lack of concern for the environment, while the second subject's focus on his mobile device similarly reflects detachment. Such behaviours, often described as "indifference" or "apathy," are among the characteristics of urban communities, where sensitivity and concern for others tend to diminish [1]. The process of creating this photograph required careful anticipation of the decisive moment, specifically when the first subject was in a deep sleep while the second was using his device. This synchronisation enabled the visualisation of urban individualism to be conveyed clearly to spectators. Additionally,

the use of foreground and background elements was deliberately considered to strengthen contextual information about the location. The train door served as the foreground, indicating that the subjects were engaged in activities within the train carriage, while the background showed a group of urban residents waiting in line outside the carriage. Together, these visual elements provide spectators with a more comprehensive understanding of the setting and context in which the image was created. The creation of this work adopts an urban photography approach. Urban street objects represent the complexities of everyday life, offering multiple possibilities for visual documentation through photography. This is made possible by perceiving the street as an 'environmental frame' that encapsulates the lived experiences of urban dwellers [11]. In line with modern developments, photography has become a reliable medium for recording realities and activities within the city. Urban subjects, therefore, not only serve as favoured themes but also function as focal points for exploring and understanding the evolving dynamics of urban life. The city constitutes a space that simultaneously constrains and enables the formation of individuality through the intensity of social interactions, social differentiation, and personal freedom. Simmel conceptualises metropolitan life as a social condition that compels individuals to develop adaptive mechanisms in response to excessive stimuli. The blasé attitude is understood as a psychological strategy that allows individuals to maintain personal autonomy amid the density and anonymity of urban environments. This perspective emphasises that individuality in the urban context does not represent social isolation but rather emerges from the complex relationship between individuals and the city's social structures. Modern individuals do not possess a single, coherent identity; instead, their identities are fragmented and context dependent. Individuality is thus shaped through individuals' engagement with multiple social systems, including work, family, culture, and public space. The city facilitates this condition by providing diverse social arenas in which individuals can perform and negotiate different aspects of the self [3].

## 4 Conclusion

The individualistic attitude of contemporary urban society has become an inseparable characteristic, with the majority of city dwellers exhibiting such behaviour. Urban residents tend to prefer engaging in activities independently, even in crowded environments such as office areas or public facilities. Privacy is highly valued, so urban activities are often conducted individually, with little regard for others or the surrounding environment. One of the most significant indicators of urban individualism is the extensive use of digital devices, particularly mobile phones. Mobile phones have become an integral part of daily life, consistently accompanying urban residents in nearly all aspects of their activities. This constant engagement with digital devices, whether in public spaces, while commuting, or even when seated next to others - further accentuates the individualistic orientation of city life. The continuous operation of mobile devices narrows attention to the screen, reinforcing detachment and reducing sensitivity to the surrounding social environment. To visually capture this phenomenon, the ap-

appropriate methodological approach is urban photography. As a photographic genre, urban photography emphasises the documentation of subjects and events within the city, serving as a medium for portraying urban realities and social issues. Through visual representation, urban photography provides opportunities for reflection, particularly for urban communities themselves. The creation of such photographic works requires anticipating the decisive moment, specifically when urban residents are preoccupied with their personal activities, particularly in public spaces where social interactions would ordinarily be expected. Capturing these moments enhances the clarity with which the visual representation of urban individualism can be communicated. Furthermore, photographic techniques play a crucial role in reinforcing visual narratives. The deliberate selection of foreground and background elements is essential, as these components are interrelated in providing contextual information that supports the intended subject—in this case, urban society. Proper utilisation of foreground and background enables spectators to identify the location, atmosphere, and conditions of the scene, thereby ensuring that the photographic work authentically reflects the realities observed during the moment of capture.

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