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Abstract

This study examines the role of hyperlocal digital platforms in implementing sustainable development concepts, using Nextdoor as a case study. Research findings indicate that the platform demonstrates dual influence on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) components. Users organize environmental initiatives (cleanups, community gardens) that contribute to achieving UN SDGs; however, the platform's governance system creates risks of polarization and misinformation dissemination. The study reveals that traditional ESG metrics are inadequate for evaluating technological platforms, necessitating the development of new approaches to analyzing "platform governance" as a key component of sustainable development.

Keywords: ESG, sustainable development, hyperlocal media, Nextdoor, social capital, media communications, genres, UN SDGs.

I. Introduction

Contemporary discourse on sustainable development has transformed from general principles to a structured agenda. From the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which focused primarily on nation-states, to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. This agenda, encompassing 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), represents a fundamental paradigm shift as it is universal in nature and contains a direct call for the private sector to become a key participant in achieving global objectives [5]. The SDGs provided a comprehensive roadmap that catalyzed corporate structures in seeking and implementing more rigorous and transparent reporting and accountability frameworks [13].

Against this backdrop, there has been a rapid ascension of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) concepts as the dominant approach for evaluating corporate sustainability. ESG criteria have become not merely an evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), but a strategic framework that integrates sustainable development principles directly into core business processes, risk management, and long-term value creation [11]. This transition from broad governmental objectives (SDGs) to specific corporate metrics (ESG) reflects a deeper process—the partial "privatization" of responsibility for sustainable development. While SDGs are addressed primarily to UN member states, their implementation is impossible without large-scale investment, innovation, and operational activities from the private sector. ESG frameworks have become the instrument allowing financial and corporate sectors to translate global goals into measurable, reportable, and investment-attractive indicators [11].

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
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Despite intense focus on actions at corporate and national levels, the success of the ESG agenda depends on concrete actions at the local level, where a "missing link" emerges—the infrastructure for implementing the "last mile" of sustainable development. This study argues that *hyperlocal digital platforms* become this link, whose potential in this area remains insufficiently explored.

Hyperlocal digital platforms represent a mechanism for operationalizing ESG components at the local community level. The Nextdoor platform, covering more than 330,000 neighborhoods in 11 countries, presents a relevant example for analysis [17]. According to Communication Infrastructure Theory, the presence of local communication resources is a necessary condition for collective citizen action [12]. Nextdoor functions as a digital "neighborhood story network", mobilizing communities to address environmental and social challenges. Critical theory of "civic technologies" points to the risk of digitizing existing inefficient structures without transforming them [21]. Platforms may create an illusion of participation while reinforcing social inequality and polarization [4].

Research Objective: to analyze Nextdoor platform's contribution to ESG agenda implementation through the lens of environmental, social, and governance components.

The central research question of this article is formulated as follows: how do the functional capabilities, governance models, and community dynamics on a hyperlocal platform such as Nextdoor relate to ESG principles and goals, contribute to their achievement, and potentially conflict with them?

The main thesis of this study is that *hyperlocal digital platforms* like Nextdoor represent a powerful but ambivalent tool for implementing the ESG agenda. On one hand, the platform creates measurable social and environmental value by mobilizing communities. On the other hand, its governance structures and business model carry risks that could negate this positive effect. The subsequent sections will present the theoretical apparatus for analysis, conduct a detailed examination of the Nextdoor case through the E, S, and G lens, propose a synthesis and critical assessment of its contribution, and formulate recommendations for various stakeholders.

II. Methods

The research is based on comprehensive analysis of Nextdoor platform functionality using theoretical frameworks of Communication Infrastructure Theory [12] and Prosocial Tech Design Governance concepts [21]. The methodology includes: content analysis of platform documentation, financial reports, and company public statements; systematization of user initiatives by activity types and correspondence to UN SDGs; analysis of platform governance systems, including moderation mechanisms and partnerships with government agencies; evaluation of moderation intervention effectiveness based on randomized controlled trial results [10].

Data were collected from open sources, including corporate reports, academic publications, and case studies of platform usage by municipal services.

III. Results

Nextdoor's contribution to the social and environmental agenda manifests primarily through collective actions of its users. The platform serves as a digital organizational tool that translates online communication into offline actions with measurable positive effects.

3.1. Environmental Component (E)

Research demonstrates that Nextdoor is effectively used for organizing grassroots environmental initiatives. The platform becomes a coordination hub for residents seeking to improve their neighborhood's environment. City administrations and community groups use the platform to announce and recruit volunteers for community cleanups of parks, lakes, and streets [3]. For example,

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
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the city of Santa Rosa launched the EPIC (Every Piece Inspires Change) campaign aimed at reducing street and storm drain litter, with the campaign launch marked by a community cleanup organized with Nextdoor support on Earth Day [6].

Another example is the creation and maintenance of community gardens. Stories from various cities, from Salisbury (Maryland, USA) to Stafford (United Kingdom), show how neighbors use Nextdoor to launch ideas, coordinate work, share seedlings, and report progress [19]. These initiatives not only exemplify local greening efforts but also contribute to urban biodiversity restoration while providing residents with fresh produce [2].

These actions directly correlate with specific UN Sustainable Development Goals. Organizing cleanups and improving public spaces contribute to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Promoting recycling programs and resource sharing corresponds to SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Creating community gardens and restoring green spaces supports SDG 15 (Life on Land). In this model, platform users act not merely as content consumers but as active producers of environmental value.

3.2. Social Component (S)

The platform's contribution to social sustainability (S) is multifaceted. At its core lies the ability to strengthen social capital. Nextdoor creates conditions for neighbors to meet, provide mutual assistance, discuss common problems, and form a sense of community belonging, which is fundamental to social sustainability [23]. The platform is used to organize local events, from yard sales to celebrations, fostering real, offline connections between people. A critically important aspect is supporting the local economy, which directly corresponds to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Nextdoor functions as an authoritative source of local business recommendations. Neighbors seek and share reviews of cafes, repair shops, and other services, stimulating local demand and supporting small businesses [20]. According to company data, 98% of users believe that local businesses contribute to their neighborhoods' prosperity [1].

The recent implementation of the "Faves" feature using artificial intelligence marks a significant shift in this dynamic [7]. This feature, learning from years of platform discussion history, provides users with summarized, algorithmically generated responses to recommendation requests [7]. While this enhances information search efficiency, it shifts the trust center from organic, human recommendations from specific neighbors to the platform's opaque algorithm. This transition from a peer-to-peer trust model to a "user-platform" model represents a pivotal moment carrying both opportunities and risks of bias and manipulation, requiring critical consideration within the (S) component context.

For systematic presentation of positive effects, it is appropriate to present them in tabular form (see Table 1).

Table 1: Typology of Environmental and Social Initiatives on Nextdoor Platform

Initiative Type	Activity Description	Illustrative Examples	UN SDG Correspondence	Platform Role
Environmental cleanups	Organizing volunteer groups for waste collection in parks, around	EPIC campaign in Santa Rosa [6];	SDG 11, SDG 14, SDG 15	Information dissemination, volunteer coordination,

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
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Volume 20, June 2025

	lakes, on streets, and other public spaces	Lake Lily cleanup in Maitland [3]		resource mobilization
Community gardens	Transforming abandoned or unused land plots into gardens for shared resident use	Garden creation in Salisbury (Maryland); Nextdoor Nature project in Stafford (United Kingdom) [15]	SDG 2, SDG 11, SDG 15	Idea launch and discussion, collaborative work organization, knowledge and resource sharing
Local business support	Exchanging recommendations and reviews about local goods and service providers to stimulate local economy	Finding reliable service providers; restaurant and store recommendations [1]	SDG 8, SDG 11	Recommendation mechanism, business page creation, targeted advertising
Mutual aid and social cohesion	Organizing neighbor assistance (e.g., finding babysitters), jointly addressing safety issues, conducting local events	Finding babysitters, organizing yard celebrations, safety warnings [24]	SDG 3, SDG 11, SDG 16	Communication platform, interest group creation, notification system
Recycling and shared consumption	Creating sections for free exchange or sale of used items, promoting waste recycling programs	"For Sale & Free" section for selling and exchanging items; waste collection day information [9]	SDG 12	Marketplace, information channel from municipal services

3.3. Governance Component (G)

The G (Governance) component in Nextdoor's context extends beyond traditional corporate governance to encompass both external partnerships and internal platform governance mechanisms. This is where the most serious contradictions and risks emerge.

The "Nextdoor for Public Agencies" program encompasses over 10,000 government agencies [18], enhancing transparency and efficiency in government-citizen communication and representing a unique governance innovation [22]. It allows verified government structures—such as police, fire

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
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RT&A, No 2 (85)
Volume 20, June 2025

departments, health departments, and city administrations—to directly communicate with residents in clearly defined geographic zones (e.g., specific neighborhoods, electoral districts, or evacuation zones). Partnership cases with Yonkers and Frederick police departments demonstrate how this function is used to disseminate critical safety information, traffic conditions, or emergency situations, as well as to receive public feedback [24].

From an ESG perspective, this program directly contributes to strengthening the (G) component by enhancing transparency and efficiency of government services while building trust between authorities and citizens. This fully aligns with SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The platform provides authorities with a powerful targeted communication tool previously unavailable.

However, the internal system architecture creates imbalance: only government agencies can initiate public communication, limiting public oversight. The most serious governance risks relate to internal platform mechanisms, specifically content moderation. Like any social network, Nextdoor is susceptible to misinformation spread, hate speech, racism, and social polarization amplification, representing a significant ESG risk [21].

Nextdoor's moderation system represents a hybrid model based on user complaints and algorithmic violation detection [10]. However, its effectiveness raises serious questions. Key evidence comes from results of a large-scale randomized controlled trial conducted on the platform itself [10]. The experiment hid comments flagged as offensive for some users. The study showed this measure led to only modest (12%) reduction in offensive content views and, more importantly, had no statistically significant impact on user behavior: they did not create offensive content less frequently or consume positive content more actively. This finding indicates that Nextdoor's current governance mechanisms are insufficient for effectively countering key risks and changing behavioral patterns toward greater civility.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) development presents an additional threat. Research shows how financial incentives (e.g., aspirations to become "influencers" and monetize content) can drive users to mass-create viral, including disinformational, content using AI [8]. This creates a new, large-scale challenge for Nextdoor's moderation systems, which may be unprepared for such generated content flows.

For clear presentation of the platform's complex governance system, Table 2 is appropriate.

Table 2: Nextdoor Platform Governance Model: Mechanisms, Stakeholders, and Challenges

Governance Sphere	Governance Mechanism	Key Stakeholders	Declared Goal/Advantage	Identified Risks and Contradictions
Content Moderation	User complaints, neighbor-moderator voting, algorithmic filtering	Users, volunteer moderators, Nextdoor Inc.	"Creating a kinder world where everyone has a neighborhood they can rely on" [23]	Low effectiveness in changing user behavior; algorithm opacity; moderator bias risk; inability to handle AI content [10]

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
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RT&A, No 2 (85)
Volume 20, June 2025

Government Agency Partnerships	Verified accounts for government agencies with geotargeted publishing rights	Government agencies (police, fire), users, Nextdoor Inc.	"Providing residents with critical real-time information"	Power imbalance (one-way communication); lack of public oversight; risk of political use; digitization of hierarchical governance models [18]
Advertising and Monetization	Targeted advertising based on user data; sponsored posts; self-service model for advertisers	Advertisers (small and large business), users, Nextdoor Inc.	Ensuring platform financial sustainability; providing business access to local audiences	Engagement monetization, including from conflictual content; data privacy risks; advertising algorithm opacity; ESG value creation by users without profit participation [21]

This table deconstructs the complex concept of "platform governance", clearly contrasting Nextdoor's declared goals with documented risks and contradictions.

IV. Discussion and Conclusions

Analysis reveals an important feature of Nextdoor's business model. The platform effectively externalizes ESG value creation labor to its users while the company extracts financial benefits from this activity. Users organize cleanups, plant gardens, support local businesses—all this activity creates real social and environmental value. This user content and activity constitute the primary product making the platform attractive to advertisers—Nextdoor's main revenue source [14]. The company's financial reports focus on metrics such as Weekly Active Users (WAU) and Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) [16], not on the volume of social or environmental value created by users. A fundamental gap emerges: the community produces ESG value while the corporation monetizes engagement generated by this value, lacking formalized mechanisms for measuring, reporting, or reinvesting in this process. This can be characterized as a form of "social washing" embedded in the platform's structure.

However, applying the critical framework of "civic technologies" to this model reveals built-in power imbalances. The platform's architectural solution places institutional authority above citizen control. The platform does not create symmetric space for dialogue but rather provides authorities with a privileged "megaphone." Instead of transforming citizen-government relations toward greater partnership, this model risks reinforcing traditional, hierarchical "top-down" governance.

The most serious governance risks relate to internal platform mechanisms, specifically content moderation. Like any social network, Nextdoor is susceptible to misinformation spread, hate speech, racism, and social polarization amplification, representing a significant ESG risk [21].

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4.1. Preliminary findings

The study revealed fundamental duality in Nextdoor's contribution to the ESG agenda. The platform effectively catalyzes social capital creation and environmental initiatives, directly contributing to UN SDG achievement. Users independently organize cleanups, create community gardens, and support local businesses, generating measurable social and environmental value.

However, the positive potential of (S) and (E) components is constantly threatened by governance (G) deficiencies. Ineffective content moderation does not influence user behavior [10], while the government agency interaction model reinforces hierarchical power structures [18]. A "measurement gap" is identified: the company gains financial benefits from users' ESG activities but does not measure or bear responsibility for the value they create [14]. This creates conditions for "social washing"—using isolated positive stories to improve corporate image without addressing systemic problems.

Traditional ESG frameworks are inadequate for evaluating technological platforms. It is necessary to expand the "governance" concept to include rigorous auditing of "platform governance" and "design governance" [21]. Platform architectural decisions are political decisions with enormous social consequences.

Applying the concept of "prosocial technology design governance" [21] shows that current Nextdoor efforts represent low-level interventions. Achieving higher prosociality levels requires fundamental changes: algorithm transparency, independent auditing, alternative success metrics, and business model reconsideration.

V. Conclusion

Hyperlocal digital platforms play a significant but contradictory role in advancing the sustainable development agenda. Nextdoor demonstrates powerful potential for mobilizing local communities to address environmental and social challenges; however, systemic governance deficiencies undermine positive effects.

Key recommendations include:
- Development of specialized ESG standards for technology platforms
- Implementation of prosocial design principles instead of reactive moderation
- Creation of platform certification systems based on social impact criteria
- Ensuring algorithmic system transparency and independent auditing

Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
HYPERLOCAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: ANALYSIS OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION
TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

RT&A, No 2 (85)
Volume 20, June 2025

Future research should focus on developing methodologies for quantitative assessment of "hyperlocal social capital" and comparative analysis of different platform governance models to identify the most effective practices.

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Kokhanova Liudmila[1], Sokolov Aleksandr
HYPERLOCAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: ANALYSIS OF THEIR CONTRIBUTION
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RT&A, No 2 (85)
Volume 20, June 2025

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