

"Hardcore Music as a Medium for Social Critique and Cultural Resistance: An Ethnographic Study of the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC)"

Jimmy Putra Pradana ¹, Ririn Puspita Tutiasri ², Sigit Andrianto³

¹ UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Jimmy Putra Pradana, Surabaya, Indonesia, 21043010050@student.upnjatim.ac.id

² UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Ririn Puspita Tutiasri, Surabaya, Indonesia, ririn_puspita.ilkom@upnjatim.ac.id

³ UPN "Veteran" Jawa Timur, Sigit Andrianto, Surabaya, Indonesia, sigit.andrianto.fisip@upnjatim.ac.id

Corresponding Author Email: 21043010050@student.upnjatim.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine how Hardcore music is utilized by the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) as a medium of social criticism and a form of resistance against various forms of domination, including those exerted by the state, institutions, and mainstream culture. As a subculture, Hardcore music has evolved not only as a form of musical expression but also as a symbolic act of defiance against dominant values perceived as oppressive.

This research employs a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions, to understand the cultural practices, symbolic meanings, and social dynamics within the SBHC community.

The findings indicate that Hardcore music plays a crucial role in shaping the community's collective identity and in conveying socio-political messages. Lyrics addressing issues such as social injustice, oppression, poverty, and critiques of capitalism serve as key tools for voicing dissent and building collective awareness. Moreover, the SBHC community demonstrates strong solidarity through various social and collaborative activities, utilizing music as a means to strengthen social ties and expand networks of resistance.

Music is not merely regarded as a form of entertainment, but as a powerful medium of cultural communication to express resistance, advocate for alternative values, and challenge the hegemony of popular culture. This study highlights how music subcultures like Hardcore provide a significant articulatory space for the pursuit of freedom of expression and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Music is a medium of communication that functions not only as entertainment but also as a means of social, cultural, and political expression. In the context of modern society, music has become an integral part of social dynamics, often used to voice critiques of injustice (Primada & Yani, 2020), inequality, and structural forms of domination. One music genre rich in social criticism is Hardcore a subgenre of punk rock known for its loud, fast-paced, and aggressive character. Despite being categorized as underground, Hardcore music possesses significant

symbolic and communicative power in expressing resistance to dominant social norms. It has developed into a subculture that embodies values and norms distinct from those of mainstream culture. Through Bourdieu's theoretical lens, participation in this subculture generates specific forms of cultural capital that challenge existing hegemonic structures (Rohmah et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, particularly in the city of Surabaya, the Hardcore music community has grown rapidly as part of a subcultural movement that rejects the homogenization of popular culture and the

commercialization of the music industry. The Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) has emerged as an alternative space that not only facilitates musical expression but also constructs collective identity, social solidarity, and symbolic resistance affirming that community is not merely a geographical entity, but a symbolic construct marked by a shared sense of belonging (Surya & Taibe, 2022). Within this community, music becomes a tool for fostering critical consciousness, articulating social grievances, and resisting perceived oppressive forms of authority.

SBHC, established in 2001, is part of Surabaya's underground music scene. It was formed as a platform for Hardcore music enthusiasts and performers to express social concerns, build solidarity, and voice resistance against oppressive norms. The community emerged from the collective spirit of youth who sought to create an alternative space outside the mainstream currents of popular culture and commercial music.

Beyond being an artistic and critical space, SBHC represents alternative values such as equality, independence, anti-authoritarianism, and freedom of expression. Although often stigmatized as a rough or unruly community, its members consistently demonstrate critical awareness, social concern, and creativity in conveying their messages. Over more than two decades of existence, SBHC has established itself as a major force in the resistance music scene in East Java and across Indonesia demonstrating how subcultural communities can survive, grow, and contribute meaningfully to broader discourses of cultural communication and resistance.

SBHC upholds the principles of collectivity, equality, solidarity, and courage to speak out. Within the community, every individual holds an equal position without rigid hierarchy distinctions arise only from one's contribution to the community. The spirit of "Do It Yourself" (DIY) serves as a foundational principle in their activities, from music production and event organization to the dissemination of social messages.

This study aims to explore how Hardcore music is used by the SBHC community as a medium of social criticism and resistance. Employing an ethnography of communication approach, the research seeks to uncover the symbolic and cultural practices within the Hardcore community, and how music functions as an articulatory medium in constructing discourses of resistance against dominant social structures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Habitus and Modal Social (Pierre Bourdieu)

The concepts of habitus and capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu are used to understand how a community's social experiences shape the structure of dispositions within their cultural practices. In the context of the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC), (Krisdinanto, 2014) habitus is reflected in lifestyle choices, musical preferences, and collective attitudes toward dominant systems perceived as oppressive. Hardcore music becomes an expressive form of a collectively constructed habitus within an alternative social space (Rohmah et al., 2023). The formation of cultural and social capital such as solidarity, collaboration, and inter-community networks acts as a tool of resistance against the hegemony of mainstream culture (Suyanto et al., 2023).

Community and Collective Identity

As a music-based community, SBHC not only unites fans of Hardcore music but also functions as a symbolic space where collective identity is formed. This identity emerges through social interaction, the use of cultural symbols (such as clothing styles, moshing, and logos), and practices of solidarity that embody a spirit of resistance against dominant norms. Communities like SBHC generate a strong *sense of belonging* and exemplify *imagined communities* that are shaped through shared values and networks of solidarity Tutiasri, R. P. (2016).

Ethnography of Communication

The ethnography of communication approach enables researchers to explore the symbolic meanings and socio-cultural structures within communities. By combining realist ethnography (which is objective and descriptive) and doing ethnography (which is participatory and reflective), researchers gain a deeper understanding of how Hardcore communities interact, construct meaning, and negotiate identity. This methodology emphasizes the importance of field immersion, participant observation, and the researcher's relational engagement with the community (Marvasti, 2003).

Cultural Studies and Popular Culture

The Cultural Studies approach views popular culture as a contested arena between hegemony and resistance. Hardcore music functions as a medium of resistance that challenges values of commercialization, patriarchy, and capitalism, serving as a voice for marginalized social and economic groups. In this context, Hardcore communities such as SBHC form a *counter-culture* that articulates values of collectivity, equality, and freedom (Sklar et al., 2022).

Music as a Medium of Communication and Resistance

Music, as a form of symbolic communication, possesses the power to convey social critique nonverbally. In this study, Hardcore music is seen as a vehicle for expressing collective anger, fostering political consciousness, and facilitating social activism. As noted by Syahida & Mardiana (2025), music serves as a cultural communication tool that unites the community and conveys social messages that are often excluded from mainstream discourse. Music becomes a weapon for marginalized groups to voice their discontent and resist oppressive structures (Syahfila, 2019).

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural practices within the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC), particularly in how music is utilized as a medium for social criticism and resistance Dahlan, A. F.,(2025). Ethnography is selected because it allows the researcher to directly observe social interactions, symbols, and meanings that develop naturally and contextually within the community.

Data Collection Techniques To capture a holistic and authentic picture of SBHC's practices, this study uses multiple ethnographic data collection techniques, including:

1. **Participant Observation** The researcher actively engages in community activities such as gigs, rehearsals, and social events, while making detailed field notes on verbal and non-verbal interactions, performance styles, and symbolic practices.
2. **In-DepthInterviewsS** Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key community members, including musicians, event organizers, and long-time participants, to gain insights into their personal experiences, motivations, and interpretations of Hardcore as a form of resistance.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGD)** Group conversations are organized with selected members to discuss shared values, community identity, and collective perspectives on social and political issues.
4. **Document and Artifact Analysis** Examination of zines, flyers, posters, lyrics, online content, and other media produced by SBHC to understand how resistance messages are articulated and disseminated.

5. **Audio-VisualD Documentation Recording** performances, events, and interviews to capture the aesthetic, sonic, and performative dimensions of the Hardcore scene, enabling deeper analysis of symbolic elements.

In applying ethnography to the study of Hardcore Music as a Medium of Social Criticism and Resistance, it is important to follow specific steps that distinguish this method from other qualitative approaches. According to (Marvasti, 2003) in *The Practice of Ethnographic Research*, there are nine key stages:

1.	Formulating research questions
2.	Selecting the research site
3.	Deciding who will be observed
4.	Determining when and where the research will take place
5.	Gaining access to the community
6.	Building rapport and relationships within the community
7.	Choosing the researcher's role in the field
8.	Negotiating consent and agreements with informants
9.	Recording observations and conducting ethnographic interviews

Table 1 Formulating of research

Research Location and Duration

The SBHC (Surabaya Hardcore Community) comprises a large number of members who are not only based in Surabaya but also spread across various cities and regencies throughout East Java. This research was conducted in Surabaya, specifically within the core environment of the Hardcore community in the city.

To determine the research site, the researcher carried out preliminary screening by attending gigs, independent music events and engaging in informal conversations at various youth gathering spots frequented by Hardcore music enthusiasts and performers in Surabaya. Through direct fieldwork, the researcher participated in several events related to Hardcore music and the SBHC community. These firsthand experiences allowed the researcher to observe the flow and dynamics within the community. In order to obtain a deeper understanding, the researcher also visited several key locations that serve as regular gathering places for the community, including Kedai Terus Berjalan, Joss Pluss Hardcore

Heroes, Lego Caffè, and Warkop Ziero Personal Horror. The ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over a six-month period, providing sufficient time to observe, interact, and engage meaningfully with community members.

RESULT

The Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC)

The Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) was established in 2001 as a response to the need for a more specific space of expression and cultural identity articulation among Hardcore music enthusiasts and performers in Surabaya. Prior to its formation, the city's underground music scene was unified under a broad umbrella encompassing various subgenres such as punk, grindcore, metal, and hardcore. However, as musical orientations and ideological perspectives began to diverge, a need emerged to create a community more focused on the distinct values and aesthetics of Hardcore music.

SBHC was born as a collective initiative by musicians, gig organizers, and alternative culture activists who sought to respectfully separate from the broader punk movement and cultivate a self-sustaining Hardcore culture. The community not only served as a platform for musical expression but also evolved into a subcultural movement that rejected dominant social norms, the commercialization of music, and repressive forms of authority. Core values such as resistance, solidarity, equality, and anti-mainstream attitudes have become central principles upheld by the community.

Since its inception, SBHC has been a driving force behind various musical and social activities in Surabaya. The community actively organizes underground gigs, produces independent releases, and participates in social initiatives and fundraising efforts. While it stands independently, SBHC continues to maintain harmonious relationships with punk and other subcultural communities in Surabaya, fostering a collaborative environment that strengthens the local independent music scene.

With over two decades of sustained presence, SBHC has become more than a platform for Hardcore musicians, it has emerged as a symbol of local cultural resistance that advocates for autonomy, freedom of expression, and defiance against the capitalist dominance of the mainstream music industry.

Informant

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) with members of the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) in Surabaya, which included organizers, musicians, and active community participants.

For the in-depth interviews, a total of 14 informants were selected, each representing specific roles within the community. Among them 5 informants were both community organizers and musicians, 4 informants were involved solely as musicians, and 5 informants were identified as active participants and cultural observers within the SBHC community.

These informants were chosen based on their active engagement, experience, and understanding of the dynamics within the Hardcore scene in Surabaya. Their perspectives contributed significantly to exploring how the community uses music as a medium for social criticism, resistance, and identity formation.

No	Name	Age	Information informant
1	HI SBHC	41	Informant 1
2	PT SBHC	35	Informant 2
3	FU SGBC	42	Informant 3
4	TB SBHC	42	Informant 4
5	AG SBHC	41	Informant 5
6	JK SBHC	35	Informant 6
7	PI SBHC	39	Informant 7
8	DM SBHC	43	Informant 8
9	SD SBHC	41	Informant 9
10	JS SBHC	29	Informant 10
11	IP SBHC	19	Informant 11
12	VC SBHC	19	Informant 12
13	GH SBHC	40	Informant 13
14	LM SBHC	28	Informant 14

Table 2 Informant Table

DISCUSSION

Music as Self-Expression and Collective Identity

Within the SBHC community, music is not merely seen as a form of entertainment, but as a vital medium for self-expression and the construction of collective identity. In this context, Hardcore music functions as an existential symbol that represents unheard emotions, anger toward injustice, and the desire to create a more egalitarian social space. Based on interview findings, most informants shared that their involvement in the Hardcore community stemmed from personal restlessness and a search for identity during their formative years. Several community activists expressed the following:

“Every time we attend a gig, it's not just to watch a band. It's like a small ritual that reaffirms who we are that we stand together.”

Informant 10, June 14, 2025

“I joined because I felt different. I didn't fit into such a normative environment. In Hardcore, I feel like I can truly be myself without being judged.”

Informant 11, June 14, 2025

“When you channel your energy into Hardcore, you really feel the adrenaline. People in this scene just want to express themselves, it doesn't mean we're bad. Not everyone in Hardcore is like the stereotype.”

Informant 12, June 14, 2025

These testimonies illustrate that Hardcore music offers a safe space for individuals to express themselves, articulate emotions that are often suppressed in formal social environments, and respond to social pressures in a constructive way. As a nonverbal yet powerful mode of communication, music allows for the transmission of social messages, ideologies, and cultural values in alignment with the community's subcultural practices (Wibisono & Sari, 2021).

Beyond personal expression, Hardcore music also serves as a medium for constructing collective identity. Shared values, dress codes, attitudes toward authority, and the gig experience all contribute to this process. In this context, “gigs”—live music events organized independently and collectively by the community—are not merely performance venues. They are crucial sites for building social networks, strengthening communal solidarity, and enacting the ideological values championed by the scene. Through gigs, the community not only showcases musical

expression but also addresses social, political, and cultural issues relevant to its members' everyday lives (Sutopo & Lukisworo, 2023).

Gigs also become incubators for emerging bands and forge strong symbolic cohesion among members. As (Sutopo & Lukisworo, 2023) explain, resistance can be expressed symbolically through lifestyle, music, and cultural practices of marginalized groups. Although members may appear rough in dress and demeanor, their practices often convey deeper messages. As one informant noted:

“Even if we look wild on the outside, many Hardcore members really uphold discipline especially regarding scene ethics. We don't pirate each other's work, we don't sabotage gigs, and we respect collectivespace.” **Informant 1, June 21, 2025**

“Back then we relied on flyers and word of mouth. Now we can make digital posters, share gig info on Instagram, or release tracks via Bandcamp. More people can hear what we're voicing—and music is the medium.” **Informant 2, May 3, 2025**

“Everyone has different styles, right? In Hardcore, most people just wear what they like. Sometimes it's also a way to support the bands like wearing their merch helps them get recognized.”

Informant 12, June 14, 2025

“It's not just in the lyrics. Sometimes it's in the artwork or T-shirts like the one I'm wearing now that criticizes the government. Expression through clothing is also a form of symbolic resistance.”

Informant 13, June 17, 2025

The testimonies of Informants 1, 2, and 13 emphasize that the collective is built through active participation in community events and through cultural symbols such as band T-shirts, stickers, posters, and community jargon, as mentioned by Informant 2. These practices reinforce internal solidarity and create boundaries that distinguish the group from dominant external cultures.

This approach not only aims to describe social realities but also contains a normative and emancipatory dimension liberating individuals or groups from unjust conditions. According to Napitupulu (2022), drawing on Horkheimer's critical theory, social critique is a theoretical framework consciously directed toward social transformation through critical reflection on the conditions that produce inequality.

From the perspective of cultural communication theory, self-expression and collective

identity within SBHC reflect the formation of *shared meaning* among members. Music serves as a symbolic medium that not only delivers messages but also strengthens social relationships, forms collective values, and reproduces structures of identity. Thus, in the SBHC community, Hardcore music functions dually as a personal tool for asserting individual existence and as a cultural instrument for shaping collective identity through repeated and structured social practices.

Hardcore Music as a Medium of Cultural Resistance

Within the SBHC (Surabaya Hardcore Community), Hardcore music is not merely an artistic expression, but a powerful tool of social resistance. Resistance in this context encompasses defiance against social injustice, state repression, capitalism, and the dominance of popular culture that marginalizes alternative forms of expression. The concept of *resistance communication* stems from studies on how marginalized groups or communities utilize various forms of communication to challenge existing power structures. According to (Syahfila, 2019), in *Weapons of the Weak*, resistance often takes subtle and symbolic forms, including cultural media such as music, which implicitly or explicitly critiques and confronts systems of power.

Through bold lyrics, aggressive arrangements, and energetic performances, Hardcore music becomes a channel for collective and outspoken criticism. As expressed by several informants:

"For us, music is not just about headbanging or moshing it's about resistance. If we stay silent, who else will speak out against injustice?"

Informant 2, May 3, 2025

"We often include short speeches before performing about current issues, the exploitation of workers, or protests against government policies. Music becomes a kind of weapon to awaken people."

Informant 8, June 20, 2025

"There's this band, Wolffeet their signature line goes, 'I'm blessed by the streets, you blessed by the streets, you and me blessed by the streets, everyone blessed by the streets.' That's what defines Surabaya Hardcore to me."

Informant 7, June 20, 2025

The statements from Informants 2 and 7 reinforce the idea that Hardcore music serves as an alternative channel for expressing the frustrations and concerns of community members issues often overlooked or ignored by mainstream media. Informant 7's reference to lyrics from bands within the

Surabaya Hardcore scene, such as Wolffeet, Fraud, Full Frontal, and Ruffen, illustrates how these groups consistently engage with social themes in their music. Their songs often highlight structural oppression, intergroup solidarity, human rights, and critiques of social norms and inequalities.

These lyrics are not merely artistic expressions; they serve as instruments of awareness and collective reflection on the everyday realities faced by the community. The line from Wolffeet *"I'm blessed by the streets, you blessed by the streets, you and me blessed by the streets, everyone blessed by the streets"* captures values of affection and collectivity born out of shared experiences in marginalized social spaces. In this context, "the streets" are not merely physical locations but powerful symbols of lived realities, shared struggle, and mutual solidarity among community members.

This suggests that the SBHC community did not emerge from sanitized or institutionalized spaces, but rather from harsh and challenging environments that strengthened the bonds of solidarity. Beyond musical energy, Hardcore music within SBHC functions as a political articulation grounded in collective consciousness. The community's commitment to voicing social inequalities, economic disparity, and cultural hegemony has become a defining characteristic.

Thus, SBHC transforms music into a space of critique and resistance against social injustice, while simultaneously fostering class consciousness and cultural solidarity among its members.

Hardcore Music as a Medium of Social and Political Critique

From the perspective of communication theory, music serves as a contested arena of meaning where dominant discourses are challenged by counter narratives. The Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) creates a safe space where alternative narratives of justice, equality, and solidarity are shaped and disseminated through community activities. SBHC is not merely a scene of musical performance; Hardcore music itself is more than an act of defiance against dominant culture—it is also a form of vocal resistance against capitalism and political authority.

Hardcore music is particularly known for its critical lyrics that directly express dissatisfaction with various social issues, including injustice, capitalism, and oppression. As noted by informants:

"It's basically all the same protests about politics and everyday life." **Informant 7, June 20, 2025**

"Oh yes, the existing norms. Hardcore itself was actually born out of resistance to capitalism." **Informant 13, June 17, 2025**

The statements of Informants 7 and 13 emphasize that Hardcore music within SBHC is a form of cultural communication consciously used to challenge hegemonic social structures, build critical awareness, and shape a resistance-based collective identity. From the standpoint of ethnography of communication, these practices reflect the performative and contextual nature of communication in the SBHC community, where social meaning is created through gig performances that serve as spaces for interaction and collective solidarity.

Importantly, the resistance expressed by the SBHC community is not destructive, but rather articulative, constructive, and educational. Events such as *SBHC Fest* or themed gigs are not only musical showcases they also incorporate social messages, distribute resistance-themed zines, and foster collaboration with other communities to address shared concerns and strengthen the movement. In this way, the community is not merely a geographic entity, but a symbolic construction marked by a strong sense of belonging (Surya & Taibe, 2022).

Hardcore music, as practiced by the SBHC community, functions as a highly significant medium for resistance and social critique. Resistance here is not limited to opposition against formal power; it also involves the rejection of hegemonic social values and dominant political ideologies. Informants 6 and 8 confirmed that Hardcore also confronts structural inequality, legal injustice, and broader issues of humanity. One of the clearest expressions of this resistance comes from their lyrics and performances:

"We never limit ourselves by genre. As long as the band has a message and the same spirit, we can organize gigs together to raise social issues or simply to blast positive energy." **Informant 5, June 21, 2025**

"One of our songs Parabellum has this lyric: 'Life is merely a hunt for position, stabbing sins, lost and wandering.' It criticizes all layers government, society especially people who exploit bureaucracy. We're here because we need to speak up. This is how we express it: through lyrics." **Informant 6, June 20, 2025**

"We often include speeches before songs, talking about Palestine, exploited workers, or government policies. Music becomes a kind of weapon to awaken others." **Informant 8, June 20, 2025**

"For me, Hardcore bands in Surabaya raise awareness like justice for Palestine and human rights. As a fan, that's how I learned these things it made me realize they matter." **Informant 11, June 14, 2025**

Informant 6 emphasized that lyrics are a channel for critiquing social norms that restrict individual freedom. For instance, the band *Ruffen's* song *Parabellum* with lyrics such as *"Life is merely a hunt for position, stabbing sins, lost and wandering"* expresses not only resistance to power structures but also calls for reflection and self-critique. This shows that resistance through music is not destructive, but constructive.

Resistance also takes form in pre-performance speeches, which are used to highlight current issues such as global solidarity, anti-capitalism, and economic injustice. Informant 11 reaffirmed that music here is not merely entertainment, but a medium for social literacy. Songs with confrontational lyrics act as social texts, articulating dissatisfaction and unrest with the existing order. Concerts, gigs, and digital platforms serve as alternative public spaces where critical ideas can be freely exchanged.

In sum, SBHC uses Hardcore music as a conscious, strategic, and collective effort to resist injustice and foster political awareness transforming music into both a cultural critique and a vehicle for social empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussions presented, it can be concluded that Hardcore music within the Surabaya Hardcore Community (SBHC) functions not only as a form of artistic expression but also as an alternative medium of communication used to voice social criticism and resistance against dominant social structures. With its explicit lyrics, fast-paced aggressive rhythms, and strong spirit of defiance, Hardcore music serves as an articulative channel for the community to express dissatisfaction with perceived injustices in social, economic, and political conditions.

SBHC utilizes Hardcore music as a symbolic space to construct collective identity, reinforce

solidarity, and cultivate an alternative culture outside the mainstream. Through cultural practices such as self-organized gigs, anti-capitalist messaging, and the implementation of *Do It Yourself* (DIY) ethics, the community presents a form of resistance that is cultural, symbolic, and ideological. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and social capital illustrates that the community's acts of resistance are not spontaneous, but rather emerge from the accumulation of social experience and relational networks that shape a shared disposition. The Hardcore habitus forms a framework through which members produce and reproduce social practices that reject capitalist cultural domination and the commodification of art. Thus, in the context of SBHC, Hardcore music functions not only as entertainment but also as a tool for social transformation and a vehicle for cultural resistance.

A. Practical Implications

The findings of this research have several practical implications. First, they highlight the potential of grassroots music communities as platforms for critical discourse and civic engagement, suggesting that cultural policymakers and local governments could recognize and support such communities as contributors to democratic participation and cultural diversity. Second, for activists and educators, the SBHC experience demonstrates how music can serve as a medium for fostering social awareness, solidarity, and alternative narratives, providing a model for other community-based cultural movements. Finally, for the broader creative industry, the DIY ethos of SBHC offers insights into sustainable, community-driven production models that prioritize authenticity and autonomy over commercial profit.

B. Suggestions for Further Research

Future studies could explore the role of Hardcore music communities in other regions of Indonesia to provide a comparative understanding of how local socio-political contexts shape cultural resistance. In addition, longitudinal research could examine the evolution of SBHC's cultural practices over time to assess how changes in political climate, technology, and generational shifts influence their forms of expression. Further inquiry might also analyze the intersection of gender, class, and digital media within the Hardcore scene, offering a more

nuanced view of inclusivity, representation, and the transformation of subcultural spaces in the digital age.

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