

VIRTUAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE CULTURE AND BEHAVIOR OF THE CIBALIUNG COMMUNITY IN UTILIZING FACEBOOK PRO AS A SPACE FOR EXPRESSION AND A SOURCE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the function of social media from merely a communication platform into a space for self-expression and a new source of economic opportunities for society, including rural communities. This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how culture and behavior are constructed within the Cibaliung Community, a public Facebook group with approximately 46.5 thousand members, in utilizing the Facebook Pro feature as a space for expression and a source of economic opportunities. The study employed a qualitative approach using a virtual ethnography method based on Christine Hine's framework, supported by Henry Jenkins' theory of Participatory Culture and the concept of Digital Empowerment. Data were collected through participant observation and digital documentation of posts, comments, and interactions among community members over a period of approximately three months. The data were then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, while the trustworthiness of the findings was established through source, technique, and time triangulation. The findings indicate that Facebook Pro is utilized as a space for personal expression, religious expression, local Sundanese-language humor, and digital creativity; as a source of economic opportunities through content monetization, product promotion and sales, and access to employment information; and as a discussion forum in which the comment section has evolved into a collective deliberative space for addressing both local and national issues. These findings demonstrate that the boundary between online and offline spaces has become increasingly blurred and illustrate how rural communities are capable of achieving digital empowerment without requiring substantial capital investment.

Keywords: virtual ethnography; Facebook Pro; participatory culture; space for expression; source of economic opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology in recent years has brought significant changes to society, particularly in the ways people communicate and interact. The Internet, which was previously used primarily as a source of information, has evolved into a new social space that enables individuals to interact, express themselves, and build relationships beyond geographical boundaries (Fadilla Noorikhshan et al., 2023). According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2024, the number of Internet users in Indonesia has exceeded 215 million, representing

approximately 78% of the total population, with growth occurring not only in urban areas but also across rural communities (Hidayat, 2016).

Unlike platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which tend to be more popular among urban youth, Facebook has maintained a strong user base within rural communities. This is largely attributable to its ease of use, relatively low data consumption, and the availability of community (group) features that enable users to remain closely connected with their social environments (Jakariah & Hersusetyati, 2021). According to the We Are Social report (2025), WhatsApp (90.8%), Instagram (82.4%), and Facebook (81.0%) continue to dominate social media usage in Indonesia, with Facebook even surpassing TikTok (78.4%) in terms of user adoption.

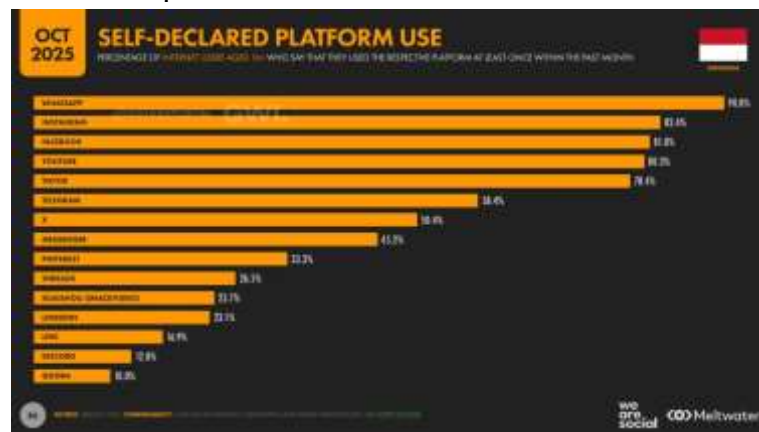


Figure 1. Social Media Users in Indonesia in 2025 According to We Are Social

In this context, Facebook Pro (Professional Mode) provides added value by enabling users to monetize their content without migrating to another platform (Setiawan & Widyadari, 2025). The popularity of Facebook Pro among rural communities is closely associated with limited economic conditions and restricted access to formal employment, making social media an increasingly important source of informal economic opportunities, particularly for communities with constrained economic resources (Sutopo, 2025). Beyond serving as a source of income, Facebook Pro also functions as a space for self-expression, allowing users to share everyday activities that are perceived as authentic and closely connected to community life.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in a Facebook group known as the Cibaliung Community, which has evolved beyond a platform for information sharing into an active space for social interaction, where members communicate, exchange experiences, and produce various forms of digital content. The behavioral patterns exhibited by members of this community present an interesting subject for investigation, reflecting how digital identities are constructed and negotiated within a virtual community environment (Rusli & Fatra Emil, 2025). This phenomenon illustrates a shift in the function of social media from merely a communication tool to a platform that simultaneously embodies social, cultural, and economic value (Agustinus Gulo, 2023).

Despite the growing prominence of this phenomenon, academic studies specifically examining Facebook communities, particularly in relation to the utilization of Facebook

Pro within rural communities, remain relatively limited. Most previous studies have focused primarily on individuals as social media users and have generally adopted descriptive approaches, leaving the cultural and behavioral dimensions underexplored through the lens of virtual ethnography. Based on this background, the research question addressed in this study is: How do the cultural dynamics and behavioral patterns of members of the Cibaliung Community emerge in utilizing Facebook Pro as a space for self-expression and a source of economic opportunities?

Accordingly, this study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of how culture and behavior are formed within the Cibaliung Community as an active digital community utilizing Facebook Pro, with particular attention to how members express themselves, how patterns of social interaction are established, and how these activities evolve into economic opportunities through the platform's monetization features.

From a theoretical perspective, this study is expected to enrich communication studies, particularly in the areas of social media, digital culture, and virtual ethnography, while serving as a reference for future research examining the relationship between social media, self-expression, and economic activities within rural communities. From a practical perspective, the findings are expected to benefit rural digital communities in recognizing the potential of social media, assist Facebook Pro users in optimizing the platform's available features, and provide government agencies and relevant institutions with valuable insights for designing digital community empowerment programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Communication in Rural Communities

Rural communities now have the opportunity to participate actively in the process of message production through digital media. Consequently, the Internet has evolved beyond being merely a tool for accessing information to becoming a space for expressing identity and creativity (Diana & Sari, 2024). This transformation is closely related to Manuel Castells' concept of the network society, which argues that contemporary society exists within interconnected networks that enable individuals from different locations to communicate beyond geographical boundaries. As a result, rural areas are no longer isolated spaces but have become active participants in the global digital communication network (Susanto, 2025).

Participatory Culture Theory

The phenomenon of rural communities actively producing digital content can be understood through Henry Jenkins' theory of Participatory Culture. According to Jenkins, contemporary society no longer functions merely as media consumers but also participates in the production, distribution, and remixing of media content (Jenkins, 2009). Participatory culture is characterized by a high level of user engagement, user-generated production and distribution of content, and the availability of interactive spaces that facilitate communication among users. Jenkins (2006) further identifies four key characteristics of participatory culture: low barriers to participation, support for creating

and sharing creative works, the presence of informal mentoring, and a sense of social connection that enables individuals to perceive their contributions as valued by the community.

Social Media, Identity, and Self-Expression

Social media functions not only as a communication medium but also as a space for self-representation (Nicke Kakiay, 2025). It provides a digital platform through which users can create, share, and interact with content in the form of text, images, and videos (Qadir, 2016). Identity on social media is continuously negotiated through posts, comments, photographs, and ongoing interactions (Rusli & Fatra Emil, 2025), while simultaneously serving as a performative space in which identity is not merely possessed but actively performed (Wahyuni & Fajarini, 2025). To better understand this process of identity construction, the present study adopts Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy, which conceptualizes social interaction as a theatrical performance consisting of the front stage, back stage, and impression management. This perspective provides a useful framework for explaining how members of the Cibaliung Community construct and negotiate their digital identities.

Facebook Pro as a Platform for Digital Economic Empowerment

Facebook is a social networking platform that enables users to interact, exchange information, and establish social relationships without spatial or geographical limitations (Sosiawan, 2020). Features available in Facebook Pro, such as content monetization and performance analytics, provide users—particularly those in rural areas—with opportunities to develop creative activities while generating economic benefits, owing to the platform's user-friendly interface and relatively low device requirements (M. Syarif Taufiq Hidayatullah & Fitria Nur 'Aini, 2025). Content monetization refers to the process of transforming content production activities into a source of income (Setiawan & Widyadari, 2025), reflecting the emergence of the creator economy, in which individuals generate earnings through digital activities (Riandi et al., 2020). According to Cunningham and Craig (2019), the monetization of digital content generally involves four stages: content creation, audience building, engagement, and monetization.

The concept of digital empowerment refers to the ways in which digital technologies enhance the capacity of individuals and communities to achieve social, economic, and cultural empowerment (Purborini & Suryanatha, 2025; Andriyani, 2021). Van Dijk's framework of digital access identifies four sequential dimensions: motivational access, material access, skills access, and usage access (Van Dijk & Van Deursen, 2014). Within the context of this study, this framework helps explain how members of the Cibaliung Community not only have access to Facebook but are also able to utilize Facebook Pro productively for economic and creative purposes.

Virtual Ethnography

The virtual ethnography method developed by Christine Hine conceptualizes the Internet not merely as a communication tool but as a social space in which cultural practices are produced, negotiated, and interpreted by its users (Hine, 2012). Virtual

ethnography consists of several stages, including engagement, immersion, data collection, and interpretative analysis, while emphasizing that the Internet is embedded, embodied, and part of everyday life. Other scholars likewise argue that digital spaces should be understood as cultural environments with their own complexities, encompassing language, interactional patterns, and symbolic practices through which social meaning is constructed (Boellstorff et al., 2012).

Previous Studies

Several previous studies are closely related to the present research. Setiawan and Widyadari (2025) examined the impact of Facebook Pro monetization on changes in the orientation of individual content creators but did not investigate these practices within the context of a digital community. Nuzuli (2023) explored Facebook usage among housewives, who were positioned primarily as passive users, whereas the present study examines users as active content producers. Suprajang, Murdinar, and Latifah (2024) focused on the marketing communication practices of housewives through Facebook Pages, Groups, and Marketplace, while the current study additionally emphasizes the dimensions of self-expression and digital identity. Rahma (2024) investigated the influence of Facebook on the social interactions of rural housewives without examining the role of content creators or the utilization of Facebook Pro. The fundamental distinction of the present study lies in its focus on a digital community as an integrated socio-cultural entity, rather than on individual users, analyzed through the lens of virtual ethnography.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach because it seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, meanings, and social practices of members of the Cibaliung Community Facebook Group, rather than representing the phenomenon solely through numerical data (Yusanto Yoki, 2019). The research adopted a virtual ethnography method based on Christine Hine's framework, positioning Facebook Pro as the research field site, where the researcher observed members' interactions, self-expression, and economic activities. Throughout the research process, participant observation was conducted online by following the research participants' accounts and digital activities.



Figure 3. Interface of the Cibaliung Community Facebook Group

The study was conducted within the Info Cibaliung dan Sekitarnya Facebook group, which served as the primary research setting, while the broader social context referred to the Cibaliung area of Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia. The research was carried out over a period of approximately three months, encompassing preliminary observation, data collection, and data analysis, in accordance with the principle of data saturation in qualitative research. The research participants consisted of group members who actively interacted within the community and utilized Facebook Pro. They were selected through purposive sampling, whereas the object of the study was the culture and behavioral patterns that emerged from the use of Facebook Pro as a space for self-expression and a source of economic opportunities.

Data were collected through participant observation of members' posts, comments, and interaction patterns, as well as digital documentation in the form of screenshots of relevant content, which served both as visual evidence and as supporting materials for data validation. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, all of which were carried out simultaneously throughout the research process. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher employed source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation (Ilhami et al., 2014), thereby enhancing the accuracy of the study in portraying the cultural dynamics and behavioral patterns within the Cibaliung Community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Cibaliung Community

Cibaliung is a subdistrict in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, where the socio-economic life of the community remains closely associated with agriculture, plantations, and small-scale home-based enterprises. Relatively limited economic conditions have encouraged residents to seek more flexible alternative sources of income, while the increasing penetration of Internet access has created opportunities for the Cibaliung community to engage with the digital world. The strong values of mutual cooperation

(gotong royong) and social solidarity embedded in everyday life are also reflected in the interaction patterns of members of the Cibaliung Community within digital spaces.



Figure 4.1. Profile of the "Info Cibaliung & Sekitarnya" Facebook Group

Based on the findings of the observation, Info Cibaliung & Sekitarnya is a public Facebook group with approximately 46.5 thousand members at the time of the study. The group developed organically from the community's need to share local information and has since evolved into a complex space for social interaction, encompassing information about community activities, business promotion, buying and selling, job opportunities, event documentation, entertainment, and discussions of current issues. Group members come from diverse backgrounds, including local residents, migrants, micro-entrepreneurs, informal workers, community leaders, and younger generations. While some members actively create posts, others primarily participate by commenting or reacting with likes, reflecting a division of roles between content producers and audiences who nevertheless contribute to sustaining the community's activities.

Facebook Pro as a Space for Self-Expression among Members of the Cibaliung Community

Facebook Pro is utilized not only as a medium for sharing information but also as a space for expressing personal experiences, emotions, identities, and everyday activities. One example of personal expression can be observed in a post by the account @Bian Diamond, which shared a video regarding the illness of the user's child while requesting recommendations for appropriate medication. The post received 11 likes and 22 comments, consisting of various suggestions and advice from other community members.



Figure 4.2. Post by Bian Diamond Regarding the Child's Health Condition



Figure 4.3. Audience Interaction on Bian Diamond's Post

From the perspective of Hine's virtual ethnography, this post illustrates how the boundary between online and offline life has become increasingly blurred, as real-life personal concerns are transferred into digital spaces and receive responses from the online community. The interactions within the comment section also demonstrate the characteristics of participatory culture as described by Jenkins, in which audiences do not function merely as passive recipients of information but actively contribute by offering solutions and sharing personal experiences.

Other forms of self-expression were identified in posts by @Sity Afifah, who shared photographs with her child as a life update; @Arka Begal Al Fajar, who documented aspects of family life; and @Ani Karsilah, who shared an image created using artificial intelligence (AI) accompanied by a creative caption. These examples demonstrate that the

digital identities of community members are constructed through authentic representations of everyday experiences while simultaneously reflecting their adaptation to technological developments as a manifestation of digital empowerment.



Figure 4.4. Post by Sity Afifah



Figure 4.5. Post by Arka Begal Al Fajar



Figure 4.6. Post by Ani Karsilah

Expressions of local humor were likewise observed in a post by @Karti Boni, who shared a photograph accompanied by a humorous caption written in the Sundanese language. The post received 46 likes and 6 comments, indicating that digitalization has not diminished local cultural elements but instead has provided a new space in which they can be represented and preserved. Meanwhile, religious expression was evident in a post by @Sobandi Bandi, who shared a photograph with colleagues at a mosque accompanied by an expression of gratitude. Emotional self-disclosure was observed in a post by @Yanti Suryati, who expressed her personal struggles as a mother and wife. This post received 18 likes and 13 comments, most of which contained moral support and encouragement from fellow community members. Overall, these diverse forms of posting demonstrate that Facebook Pro has evolved into a multifaceted space for self-expression. These findings reinforce Jenkins' concept of participatory culture, while simultaneously supporting Hine's perspective regarding the increasingly interconnected nature of online and offline social spaces.



Figure 4.7. Post by Karti Boni



Figure 4.8. Post by Yanti Suryati

Facebook Pro as a Source of Economic Opportunities for Members of the Cibaliung Community

Based on the observational findings, the utilization of Facebook Pro as a source of economic opportunities can be categorized into three main forms: content monetization and the creator economy, product promotion and sales, and access to income-generating opportunities. One example of content monetization is illustrated by a post from the account @Atieb Thobroni, who shared their excitement after receiving monetization approval from Meta, while encouraging others to continue producing digital content.



Figure 4.9. Post by Atieb Thobroni Regarding Facebook Pro Monetization Achievement

From the perspective of digital empowerment, this achievement reflects the increasing capacity of rural communities to utilize digital technologies for economic purposes while simultaneously generating symbolic value in the form of social recognition within the community. Evidence of the creator economy was also observed in a post by @Muhammad Athar Al Ghifari, which received 284 likes and 100 comments, demonstrating that high levels of engagement possess significant economic value by enhancing content reach and increasing monetization potential.



Figure 4.10. Post by @Muhammad Athar Al Ghifari

The most prevalent form of utilization identified in this study involved product promotion and sales, ranging from electronic devices and motor vehicles to agricultural products and real estate. One example is a post by @Apho Frta, who advertised a second-hand mobile phone for sale.



Figure 4.11. Product Promotion Post by @Apoh Frta

The post received 22 likes and 12 comments, most of which consisted of inquiries regarding the selling price, indicating that the comment section functions as an initial negotiation space between sellers and prospective buyers. The trust established through a shared identity as members of the Cibaliung Community serves as an important factor facilitating transactions. Consequently, the economic value generated within the community is derived not only from the technological affordances of the platform but also from the community's social capital.



Figure 4.12. Post by @Neng

In addition to monetization and product promotion, Facebook Pro is also utilized as a medium for seeking income-generating opportunities. This is exemplified by a post from @Neng, who requested information regarding job vacancies in the Cibaliung area. The post received 43 likes and 9 comments. This finding suggests that the economic value of Facebook Pro is not limited to direct commercial transactions but also emerges through access to information that may generate future income. Accordingly, Facebook Pro functions as a digital social infrastructure that enables community members to establish connections and create new economic opportunities.

Facebook Pro as a Space for Community Discussion and Information Exchange

In addition to functioning as a space for self-expression and a source of economic opportunities, several posts evolved into platforms for information exchange and

collective discussion. On May 19, 2026, the account @Dii Saputra uploaded an artificial intelligence (AI)-generated image expressing political support for the continuation of the Free Nutritious Meals (Makan Bergizi Gratis/MBG) program. The post received 59 likes and 33 comments. Most community members expressed disagreement, accompanied by arguments concerning economic conditions and policy evaluation, demonstrating that the post evolved from merely stimulating public opinion into a community-level public communication forum.



Figure 4.13. Post by @Dii Saputra



Figure 4.14. Post by @Dedi Saputra

Meanwhile, a post by @Dedi Saputra regarding complaints about electricity outages received 50 likes and 20 comments, the majority of which consisted of community members confirming that they had experienced similar situations. This finding indicates that the comment section functions as a space for building collective awareness of shared infrastructure-related issues. These phenomena reinforce Jenkins' concept of participatory culture, in which audiences actively participate in constructing meaning, while simultaneously supporting Hine's perspective of virtual ethnography, which views digital interaction as a form of social practice that is inseparable from people's everyday lives.

The Dynamics of Facebook Pro Usage in Building Interaction and Audience Engagement

Audience engagement within the Cibaliung Community's Facebook Pro environment does not necessarily arise from professionally produced content. Instead, it develops primarily from simple posts that closely reflect everyday life. One notable example is a post by @Andika Vlog, who shared a viral video of a female student participating in a quiz competition. The post received 64 likes, 31 comments, and 3,400 views. The comment section evolved into a space for collective evaluation of the judges' performance, with numerous members responding directly to one another's comments, thereby creating a pattern of horizontal communication among community members.



Figure 4.15. Post by @Andika Vlog



Figure 4.16. Interaction on @Andika Vlog's Post



Figure 4.17. Post by @Alex Bae



Figure 4.18. Interaction on @Alex Bae's Post

Another example is a post by @Alex Bae concerning a legal case that associated a criminal suspect with symbols of evil in Islamic culture. The post received 64 likes and 17 comments, many of which expressed collective anger and moral condemnation. These interactions demonstrate how the moral values embedded within the community are carried into digital spaces, further emphasizing that digital environments are not value-neutral spaces detached from social consequences. Overall, these findings indicate that

audience engagement on Facebook Pro reflects the evolution of digital media from a platform solely for content publication into a social space that facilitates the development of relationships, conversations, and collective experiences at the community level. This observation is consistent with Jenkins' theory of Participatory Culture, Hine's framework of Virtual Ethnography, and the concept of Digital Empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Facebook Pro has evolved far beyond its original function as a conventional communication platform, becoming a digital social space that simultaneously facilitates self-expression, social interaction, information exchange, and economic opportunities for members of the Cibaliung Community. As a space for self-expression, community members utilize Facebook Pro to share family experiences, local humor expressed in the Sundanese language, digital creativity, and religious expression, illustrating that the digital identities they construct remain closely connected to their local cultural roots. As a source of economic opportunities, Facebook Pro supports three primary forms of activity: content monetization, community-based product promotion and sales, and the utilization of digital networks to access employment information. These findings demonstrate how digital technology can create inclusive economic opportunities for rural communities without requiring substantial capital investment.

Furthermore, the comment sections of various posts have evolved into spaces for collective discussion addressing issues ranging from local concerns to national affairs, indicating that community members function not only as consumers of information but also as producers of meaning. These findings reinforce Jenkins' theory of Participatory Culture while simultaneously supporting Hine's perspective that online and offline spaces are inseparable. Future research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal approach, integrate semiotic analysis of visual content, and further explore gender-related dimensions in the use of Facebook Pro. From a practical perspective, informal mentoring processes within digital communities should be strengthened; local governments are encouraged to develop digital literacy programs based on the findings of this study; Meta, as the operator of Facebook Pro, should provide greater support for content creators from rural communities; and scholars should expand the scope of digital communication research beyond urban settings to include rural communities, which likewise exhibit rich and complex digital dynamics.

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