

Digital Nostalgia and Local Identity in Online Interaction: A Netnographic Perspective

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ABSTRAK

Perkembangan media digital telah menjadikan media sosial sebagai ruang penting bagi interaksi, pembentukan makna, dan produksi budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pembentukan budaya kolektif digital melalui interaksi pengikut akun Instagram @butonstories dalam konteks lokal Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan netnografi kualitatif dengan data utama berupa interaksi pengguna, komentar, dan ekspresi simbolik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa budaya kolektif digital terbentuk melalui interaksi emosional yang berulang, terutama ekspresi nostalgia, identitas lokal, dan pengalaman bersama mengenai Baubau. Interaksi tersebut menjadi mekanisme konstruksi sosial ketika ekspresi individual diulang dan dikenali sebagai makna bersama. Penelitian juga menemukan terbentuknya kedekatan sosial dan komunitas virtual melalui balasan, penyebutan, serta bahasa simbolik. Kreator berperan sebagai mediator budaya yang membentuk narasi dan memfasilitasi interaksi sambil menegosiasikan autentisitas budaya dengan kepentingan komersial. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa interaksi digital merupakan proses budaya yang berkontribusi pada pembentukan identitas, memori kolektif, dan hubungan sosial. Secara konseptual, studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian komunikasi digital melalui analisis interaksi pada tingkat mikro dalam ruang digital lokal.

Kata Kunci: Budaya Kolektif Digital; Netnografi; Interaksi Media Sosial; Nostalgia Digital; Identitas Lokal

ABSTRACT

The development of digital media has transformed social media into an important space for interaction, meaning-making, and cultural production. This study analyzes how digital collective culture is formed through follower interactions on the Instagram account @butonstories in a local Indonesian context. Using a qualitative netnographic approach, the study examines user interactions, comments, and symbolic expressions as primary data. The findings show that digital collective culture emerges through repeated emotional interactions, particularly expressions of nostalgia, local identity, and shared experiences related to Baubau. These interactions operate as mechanisms of social construction as individual expressions are repeated and recognized as shared meanings. The study also identifies social closeness and virtual community formation through replies, mentions, and symbolic language. The creator acts as a cultural mediator by shaping narratives and facilitating interaction while negotiating cultural authenticity and commercial interests. The findings demonstrate that digital interaction is a meaningful cultural process contributing to identity formation, collective memory, and social relationships.

Keywords: Digital Collective Culture; Netnography; Social Media Interaction; Digital Nostalgia; Local Identity

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed how individuals construct social relationships and interpret everyday experiences. Social media is no longer merely a platform for information dissemination, but has evolved into a dynamic social space where interactions, emotions, and shared experiences are collectively produced. Through repeated interactions in digital environments, users develop recognizable communication patterns that contribute to the formation of shared meanings in digital social life. Consequently, social media has become a crucial context for understanding contemporary communication and cultural practices (Sahanaya 2025). In particular, platforms such as Instagram facilitate participatory communication through features like comments, replies, and symbolic expressions such as emojis, enabling users to engage in ongoing social interaction that shapes collective understanding. Within localized digital environments, these interactions also provide opportunities for communities to preserve and reconstruct cultural

memories through everyday online practices.

Recent literature emphasizes that digital media environments play a central role in shaping collective culture through participatory interaction rather than passive consumption. (P. Booth 2020) highlights that user engagement in digital platforms fosters participatory culture, where meaning is co-created through interaction. Similarly, Hepp (2019) argues that deep mediatization transforms social interaction into a continuous, technologically mediated process that influences how individuals perceive reality. These perspectives suggest that digital interaction is not merely communicative but constitutive of social meaning. Within this context, Instagram functions as a digital social space where collective meanings emerge through the interplay of visual content and user responses, particularly when digital platforms become spaces for communities to negotiate local identity and shared memories.

Despite the growing recognition of digital interaction as a meaningful social process, a key problem in communication studies lies in the tendency to treat social media interaction as superficial or

secondary to content. Many existing studies focus primarily on visual or textual content analysis without adequately exploring the interactive practices of users. As a result, the processes through which social meanings are constructed through comments, replies, and symbolic communication remain underexplored. This limitation is particularly significant because collective culture is not formed solely through content but through repeated communicative practices that are shared and recognized among users (P. Booth 2020). Therefore, examining user interactions provides an important perspective for understanding how cultural meanings emerge, especially in digital spaces representing specific local communities.

Another important issue concerns the limited attention given to local digital contexts. Previous research on digital culture often emphasizes large-scale phenomena such as global popular culture or formal online communities. In contrast, studies examining digital collective culture within localized social media environments remain scarce. This gap leads to an incomplete understanding of how collective meanings are constructed in

specific cultural and geographical contexts. Furthermore, methodological limitations persist, as many studies rely on content analysis approaches that fail to capture the dynamic and relational nature of user interaction. These challenges highlight the need for research that focuses on interaction as a cultural practice within localized digital spaces (Shenthya Winarty 2024). One relevant but underexplored example is the Instagram account @butonstories, which represents a local digital space where cultural narratives, historical memories, and expressions of belonging are continuously negotiated through follower interactions. Unlike general social media accounts that primarily distribute information, @butonstories functions as a participatory archive where users contribute personal memories and interpretations related to Buton's cultural identity. Therefore, this case provides an important opportunity to examine how local identity is constructed through digital interaction.

A review of closely related literature reveals that while scholars have explored digital collective culture, participatory interaction, and social construction in digital environments, most studies remain

either macro-oriented or lack empirical focus on specific local platforms. (Kozinets V 2020) provides a methodological foundation for netnography but does not examine a specific local case. (P. Booth 2020) emphasizes participatory culture but focuses on fandom and broader digital communities. (Hepp 2019) discusses mediatization at a theoretical level without analyzing micro-level interactions. More recent studies, such as (Shenthya Winarty 2024) and (Sahanaya 2025), examine digital culture in Indonesian contexts but do not provide an in-depth netnographic analysis of a single local social media account. Therefore, the absence of research examining @butonstories creates an opportunity to understand how local cultural identity is produced through everyday digital interactions, particularly through nostalgic expressions and collective memory practices. This indicates a clear research gap in understanding how digital collective culture emerges through everyday interactions within localized digital environments.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the formation of digital collective culture through follower interactions on the Instagram account

@butonstories. The study focuses on how interaction patterns, emotional expressions, and symbolic communication contribute to the construction of shared meanings within a local digital context. The selection of @butonstories is significant because the account represents a digital space where people from and connected to Buton

engage with cultural narratives, memories, and local experiences that may otherwise be limited to physical communities. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on micro-level interaction as a legitimate site of cultural production, without assuming the existence of formal communities or traditional cultural structures. By applying a netnographic approach and social construction theory, this study seeks to provide a contextual and empirical contribution to the field of communication studies (Discetti and Anderson 2023). The scope of the research is limited to interactions occurring within a single Instagram account, focusing on publicly available content and user engagement related to everyday life in Baubau. Through this approach, the study aims to deepen understanding of how digital

interaction functions as a meaningful social process that shapes collective identity, memory, and relationships in contemporary digital society.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have proposed methodological and theoretical approaches to address these limitations. Netnography, as introduced by (Kozinets V 2020), offers a qualitative framework for analyzing digital interactions as cultural practices in online environments. This approach allows researchers to observe natural user behavior, communication patterns, and meaning-making processes within digital communities. By emphasizing participant observation and contextual interpretation, netnography provides a more nuanced understanding of how digital culture is formed through everyday interaction. In addition, the concept of participatory culture Booth (2020) underscores the importance of user engagement in shaping collective meanings, suggesting that interaction itself should be treated as a primary object of analysis. Through this perspective, @butonstories can be examined not only as a media account but also as an

interactive cultural space where users actively participate in producing and maintaining local narratives.

Theoretical frameworks such as social construction theory further contribute to understanding digital collective culture. (Berger and Luckmann 2021) argue that social reality is constructed through continuous processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. In digital contexts, user interactions can be seen as forms of externalization, where individuals express experiences and emotions through comments and symbolic communication. Through repetition and collective recognition, these expressions become objectified as shared meanings, which are then internalized as part of users' identities and social understanding. Previous studies applying this perspective have demonstrated that digital interaction plays a critical role in constructing collective meanings, although these studies often focus on broader urban or global contexts rather than localized digital spaces (Sahanaya 2025). Applying this framework to @butonstories enables an examination of how individual memories and expressions of cultural

attachment develop into collectively recognized forms of local identity.

C. METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design using a netnographic approach to investigate the formation of digital collective culture through user interactions on social media. Netnography, as an adaptation of ethnography for digital environments, enables the systematic observation and interpretation of online interactions, communication practices, and meaning-making processes within virtual communities (Kozinets V 2020). Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize measurement and generalization, qualitative netnography prioritizes depth, context, and the subjective meanings embedded in social interaction.

The selection of a qualitative netnographic design is grounded in the nature of the research problem, which seeks to understand how collective culture emerges through everyday digital interaction. Digital collective culture is not a static entity but a dynamic process constructed through repeated

communicative practices. Therefore, an interpretive and context-sensitive approach is required to capture the complexity of these processes. Netnography allows the researcher to observe naturally occurring interactions without disrupting the digital environment, thereby ensuring that the data reflects authentic social behavior (P. Booth 2020). In this study, the netnographic approach is particularly appropriate because @butonstories represents a localized digital environment where cultural meanings are produced through continuous interaction among users connected by shared geographical and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, this approach aligns with the theoretical framework of social construction, which emphasizes that reality is produced through continuous interaction. By focusing on interaction patterns, symbolic expressions, and shared meanings, this research design enables an in-depth exploration of how users collectively construct cultural meanings in a localized digital context (Winarty, 2024). The design also enables the researcher to examine how individual expressions of nostalgia, cultural

attachment, and local memories develop into collectively recognized meanings through digital interaction.

2. Research Context and Unit of Analysis

The research is situated within the Instagram platform, with a specific focus on the account @butonstories. This account functions as a digital social space where users engage in communication through comments, replies, and symbolic expressions such as emojis. The account primarily shares visual content depicting everyday life, culture, and social experiences in Baubau, thereby attracting an audience with shared geographical and emotional connections. The selection of @butonstories as the research context is based on its role as a digital archive and interaction space that documents local traditions, historical memories, and everyday experiences of the Buton community. Through comments and discussions, followers do not merely respond to uploaded content but actively participate in reconstructing and maintaining local identity narratives.

The unit of analysis in this study consists of digital interactions occurring within the comment sections of selected posts. These interactions include user-generated

comments, replies between users, and symbolic communication elements. Rather than focusing solely on content, the study emphasizes interaction as a cultural practice, examining how repeated communicative behaviors contribute to the formation of shared meanings. The analyzed interactions include expressions of nostalgia, personal memories, emotional responses, and statements reflecting cultural belonging, which provide empirical evidence of digital collective culture formation.

This localized digital context is particularly significant because it allows for the examination of collective culture at a micro level. While previous studies have often focused on large-scale or global digital phenomena, this research prioritizes a specific social media environment where cultural meanings are constructed through everyday interaction. By focusing on @butonstories, this study provides insight into how local communities utilize digital platforms to preserve cultural memory and negotiate identity within contemporary communication environments.

3. Research Subjects and Objects

The subjects of this research are the followers and active participants who engage with the @butonstories account. These individuals contribute to the formation of digital collective culture through their communicative practices, including commenting, replying, and expressing emotions using symbolic language. Their interactions represent forms of externalized meaning that can be analyzed to understand broader cultural patterns. In addition, the account administrator is included as an interview subject to provide contextual information regarding the objectives, content production process, and role of @butonstories in facilitating digital cultural interaction.

The object of the research is the digital collective culture that emerges from these interactions. This includes patterns of communication, shared emotional expressions, recurring themes, and collectively recognized meanings. The study seeks to identify how these elements develop through repeated interaction and how they contribute to the formation of a shared cultural framework within the digital space.

By distinguishing between subjects and objects, the research maintains analytical clarity while emphasizing the relational nature of digital culture, where users and interactions are inseparable components of meaning construction.

4. Research Scope and Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that define its scope. First, the research focuses exclusively on a single Instagram account, which means that the findings are context-specific and may not be generalized to other platforms or digital communities. However, this limitation is intentional, as the study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of a localized digital environment.

Second, the temporal scope of the study is limited to a three-month observation period. During this time, the researcher systematically monitored interaction patterns to identify recurring themes and communicative practices. While this period allows for sufficient data collection, it may not capture long-term changes in interaction dynamics. During this observation period, the researcher conducted prolonged engagement by repeatedly monitoring posts, comments, and interaction patterns to ensure

familiarity with the digital environment and contextual understanding of user behavior.

Third, the study focuses only on publicly available content, including posts and comments related to everyday life in Baubau. Promotional or commercial content is excluded to maintain analytical focus on cultural interaction rather than marketing practices.

Finally, the methodological scope is limited to netnography, without extensive reliance on offline data collection. Although interviews are conducted to complement observational data, the primary emphasis remains on digital interaction as the main source of analysis. The interviews function as complementary data to strengthen interpretation and provide contextual validation of observed online interactions rather than replacing digital observations as the primary source of evidence.

5. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study is conducted through multiple complementary techniques to ensure depth and reliability. The use of multiple data sources also supports methodological triangulation by

comparing observations, digital documentation, interviews, and archived materials to strengthen the credibility of findings.

6. Passive Participant Observation

The primary method of data collection is passive participant observation, also known as lurking. In this approach, the researcher observes interactions within the @butonstories account without actively participating in conversations. This

method allows for the collection of naturalistic data, as users interact without awareness of being observed (Kozinets V 2020).

The observation focuses on communication patterns, emotional expressions, and symbolic interactions, including the use of emojis and informal language. By systematically recording these interactions, the researcher identifies recurring patterns that indicate the presence of shared cultural meanings. All observation records were documented through an audit trail containing selected posts, screenshots, interaction notes, and thematic coding records to maintain transparency throughout the analysis process.

7. Digital Textual and Visual Documentation

Data is also collected through digital documentation, including screenshots of relevant posts, comments, captions, and visual content. This method ensures that data is preserved accurately and can be revisited during the analysis process.

Visual elements such as images and videos are analyzed alongside textual data to understand how meaning is constructed through the interplay of visual representation and user interaction. This approach reflects the multimodal nature of digital communication, where meaning is conveyed through both text and imagery (Pflaeging, J., & Stöckl 2021).

8. Online Interviews

To enrich the interpretation of observed interactions, the study incorporates online interviews with the account administrator and selected followers. These interviews are conducted through messaging platforms such as direct messages or WhatsApp, with the consent of participants. The interview data were used to understand participants' perspectives regarding cultural memories, motivations for interaction, and interpretations of @butonstories content.

The interviews aim to explore participants' perspectives on their interactions, motivations for engagement, and interpretations of the content. This method provides insight into the internalization of meaning, complementing the external observations obtained through netnography (Triastuti 2021). The combination of observational and interview data enables data triangulation by connecting visible interaction patterns with users' subjective experiences and interpretations.

9. Document Analysis

Additional data is obtained through the analysis of archived posts, hashtags, and historical interactions within the account. This technique allows the researcher to trace the development of interaction patterns over time and identify consistency in themes and meanings (Barron and Bollen 2022).

Document analysis also supports the identification of recurring narratives, such as nostalgia and local identity, which are central to the formation of digital collective culture.

10. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is conducted using a thematic approach, involving several

systematic stages. The analytical process follows an iterative procedure consisting of data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and verification. These stages are conducted systematically to identify recurring interaction patterns and explain how digital collective culture is constructed through user engagement within @butonstories.

11. Data Reduction

The first stage involves data reduction, where raw data is filtered and organized based on relevance to the research objectives. Data such as comments, replies, and visual documentation are selected according to criteria including thematic relevance, emotional expression, and repetition of interaction patterns (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña n.d.). During this process, the researcher maintained an audit trail by recording selected posts, documenting interaction sequences, and noting the initial interpretation of emerging themes to ensure transparency throughout the analysis process.

This process simplifies the dataset while preserving meaningful information, enabling more focused analysis.

12. Data Categorization

Following reduction, the data is categorized into thematic groups based on emerging patterns. Categories include emotional expressions (e.g., nostalgia, pride), local identity references, social interaction patterns, and shared meanings (Louis, D., & Mielly 2023). The categorization process also considers the frequency and contextual relationship between user comments to identify how individual expressions develop into collectively recognized cultural meanings.

Categorization allows the researcher to organize complex data into coherent themes, facilitating the identification of patterns that contribute to collective meaning-making.

13. Interpretation of Meaning

The interpretation stage involves linking categorized data to the theoretical framework of social construction (Berger and Luckmann 2021). Interactions are analyzed through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The researcher interprets how users' expressions of personal memories and cultural attachment represent externalization, how repeated interactions transform these expressions

into shared meanings through objectivation, and how these meanings contribute to users' understanding of local identity through internalization.

Externalization refers to the expression of personal experiences through comments, objectivation occurs when these expressions become shared and recognized meanings, and internalization reflects the incorporation of these meanings into users' identities. This analytical framework enables a deeper understanding of how digital interactions function as cultural practices.

14. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final stage involves synthesizing the findings to draw conclusions that address the research questions. The conclusions are validated through triangulation, comparing data from observation, interviews, and documentation to ensure consistency and credibility (Creswell, J. W., & Poth 2018). In addition to triangulation, the credibility of findings is strengthened through prolonged engagement with the digital environment and an audit trail documenting the stages of data collection, coding, and interpretation. Member checking was not applied as the primary

validation strategy because the study focuses on naturally occurring digital interactions; instead, interpretive accuracy was supported through comparison between multiple data sources.

This process ensures that the findings are not based on isolated observations but are supported by multiple sources of evidence. The combination of observation, documentation, and interview data allows the researcher to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of digital interaction practices.

15. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are central to this research, particularly given the use of digital data. First, user privacy is protected by anonymizing usernames and personal identifiers in the research report. Second, the researcher seeks permission from the account administrator to ensure transparency and ethical data use. Although the observed comments originate from publicly accessible content, the researcher applies ethical sensitivity by avoiding unnecessary disclosure of individual identities and presenting interaction data only for analytical purposes.

Third, all data is used solely for academic purposes and not for commercial exploitation. Finally, the researcher maintains interpretive sensitivity, avoiding judgments or representations that may harm participants. These measures ensure that the research adheres to ethical standards while respecting the rights of digital participants.

16. Research Timeline and Location

The research is conducted within the digital environment of Instagram, focusing on interactions related to the @butonstories account. Data collection and analysis take place over a four-month period, from December 2025 to March 2026. This timeline includes stages of observation, data collection, analysis, and reporting. During this period, the researcher conducted repeated observations of posts and interactions to achieve sufficient familiarity with the digital context and identify consistent patterns of communication.

By situating the research within a defined temporal and digital context, the study ensures methodological consistency while capturing the dynamics of interaction within a specific period.

Overall, the methodological framework of this study integrates qualitative netnography, thematic analysis, and social construction theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital collective culture emerges through interaction. This approach enables the research to address both empirical and theoretical dimensions of digital communication in a localized context. By combining digital observation, documentation, interviews, and systematic thematic analysis, this methodological framework enables the study to examine both the observable patterns of interaction and the underlying processes through which users construct shared cultural meanings in a localized digital environment.

D. FINDING

1. Overview of Research Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings derived from a netnographic analysis of interactions among followers of the Instagram account @butonstories. The data were collected through passive observation of twenty selected posts, including visual content, captions, and

user comments. The dataset was complemented by interview responses from the account administrator and selected followers, providing additional contextual understanding of users' motivations and interpretations of digital interactions. The findings demonstrate that interactions within the comment sections are not merely informational but are deeply embedded with emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.

The results indicate that the @butonstories account functions as a digital social space where shared meanings are continuously constructed through repeated interaction. Content uploaded by the account serves as a trigger for personal memories, expressions of local identity, and emotional attachment to Baubau. For example, comments expressing longing for Baubau, memories of childhood experiences, and appreciation of local traditions demonstrate how users transform personal experiences into collective narratives. In this context, social media operates not only as a medium of content distribution but also as a site of collective meaning-making within a

localized digital environment (Booth, 2020b & Kozinets V, 2020).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that interaction patterns among users are relatively consistent and revolve around recurring themes such as nostalgia, belonging, pride in local identity, and social bonding. These themes were identified through repeated observation and thematic coding of user comments, replies, and symbolic expressions. These recurring patterns form the basis for what can be conceptualized as digital collective culture (Jacobsen and Beer 2021).

2. Patterns of Digital Interaction Among Followers

The findings indicate that interaction among followers is characterized by emotional, reflective, and relational communication. Users respond not only to uploaded content but also to one another through replies, mentions, and conversational exchanges. These recurring interaction patterns demonstrate that communication within @butonstories extends beyond user-content engagement and becomes a cultural practice through which users express nostalgia, belonging, pride in local identity, and social closeness. The use of

informal language, culturally specific expressions, and symbolic elements such as emojis further contributes to the development of shared meanings within the digital space (Logi & Zappavigna, 2023).

3. Emotional and Reflective Interactions

The analysis shows that a significant proportion of comments reflects emotional engagement, particularly expressions of nostalgia and longing for one's hometown. Comments such as "I miss Baubau" or "I want to go home soon" illustrate how users project personal memories into the digital space. These expressions indicate that @butonstories operates as a digital memory space where individual experiences become connected with broader collective memories of place and belonging.

These expressions are not isolated; rather, they are often repeated and echoed by other users, forming a pattern of shared emotional discourse. This repetition transforms individual expressions into collective narratives, indicating the emergence of shared meaning.

4. Interactive and Relational Communication

In addition to emotional expression, users actively engage with one another through replies, mentions, and conversational exchanges. This interaction demonstrates that communication is not limited to user-content engagement but extends to user-user interaction.

Such relational communication contributes to the formation of social bonds within the digital space. The use of informal language, emojis, and culturally specific expressions further strengthens the sense of familiarity and intimacy among participants (Logi, L., & Zappavigna 2023).

5. Symbolic Interaction and Emoji Usage

Symbolic communication, particularly through emojis, plays a significant role in shaping interaction patterns. Emojis such as hearts, fire, and laughter are frequently used to convey affective responses. These symbolic expressions function as shared communicative resources that allow users to express agreement, appreciation, and emotional connection even without extended textual responses.

Although some emoji-based interactions remain individual, others

become part of a shared symbolic language when repeatedly used and acknowledged by multiple users. This shared symbolic system contributes to the development of collective meaning within the digital environment.

6. Digital Nostalgia as a Collective Cultural Practice

Digital nostalgia emerges as one of the central cultural practices identified in the interactions within @butonstories. Users express memories of their hometown, childhood experiences, and past social environments, while similar expressions are repeatedly responded to and reinforced by other users. Through this repetition and mutual recognition, individual memories become connected to broader narratives of place, belonging, and local identity. The interaction therefore transforms nostalgia from an individual emotional response into a shared cultural resource within the digital environment (Booth, 2020; Kozinets, 2020).

7. Empirical Findings on Nostalgia

One of the most dominant themes identified in the data is digital nostalgia. Many users express longing for their hometown, childhood experiences, and

past social environments. Based on the analysis of comments from selected @butonstories posts, users frequently responded to cultural and historical content by sharing personal memories, emotional attachment, and experiences related to Baubau. For example, comments expressing feelings such as "This place brings back so many memories" and "I really miss living there" demonstrate how digital content stimulates personal recollection and emotional engagement.

These comments are particularly common among users who are currently living outside Baubau, suggesting that digital platforms serve as a bridge connecting individuals to their place of origin. The interview data also indicate that followers who live outside Baubau perceive @butonstories as a medium that allows them to maintain emotional connections with their hometown despite physical distance. This finding strengthens the interpretation that the account functions as a digital space for maintaining cultural memory and belonging.

8. Interpretation of Nostalgia as Collective Meaning

From an analytical perspective, nostalgia functions as a medium that connects personal experience to collective identity. When multiple users express similar emotions and narratives, these individual experiences become objectified as shared cultural meanings. The repeated appearance of similar memories, emotional expressions, and references to local places demonstrates the process through which individual experiences are transformed into collective narratives within the digital environment.

This phenomenon can be understood as digital collective nostalgia, where memory is not only remembered individually but is also collectively constructed and reinforced through interaction. In netnographic terms, such interactions represent cultural practices within online communities, where shared meanings emerge from repeated communicative acts (Booth, 2020; Kozinets, 2020). In the context of @butonstories, nostalgic expressions do not remain individual reflections but become collective cultural resources

through comments, replies, and symbolic responses from other users.

9. Formation of Social Closeness in Digital Space

The findings show that repeated interaction among followers contributes to the formation of social closeness within the @butonstories account. Users communicate through informal expressions, greetings, emotional statements, replies, mentions, and supportive responses, creating an atmosphere that resembles interpersonal communication rather than one-way media consumption. These practices enable followers to recognize shared experiences and maintain communication networks, providing a basis for the emergence of a digital community through shared language, symbols, and experiences.

10. Findings on Social Bonding

The findings indicate that the @butonstories account fosters a sense of social closeness among its followers. Observation of interaction patterns shows that users frequently respond to each other using informal expressions, greetings, emotional statements, and supportive responses, creating an

atmosphere resembling interpersonal communication rather than one-way media consumption. The account administrator intentionally creates an atmosphere resembling familial or friendly relationships, encouraging users to engage more openly.

Interactions among users, including replies and tagging behavior, further reinforce this sense of community. These interaction practices demonstrate that followers actively participate in sustaining communication networks, where users recognize shared experiences and establish connections beyond the original content. These practices create a network of relationships that extend beyond passive content consumption.

11. Digital Community Construction

The development of social closeness reflects the emergence of a digital community. Unlike traditional communities based on physical proximity, this community is constructed through shared language, symbols, and experiences (Puumala & Shindo, 2021).

Repeated interaction plays a crucial role in sustaining this community. As users continue to engage with one another, they develop a sense of belonging and mutual

recognition. This aligns with netnographic perspectives that view online interaction as a foundation for virtual community formation.

12. Content as a Trigger for Collective Meaning

The findings demonstrate that content uploaded by @butonstories functions as a trigger for interaction and collective meaning-making. Captions, visual representations of everyday life, landscapes, and cultural practices provide narrative and symbolic resources that invite users to respond, remember, and reflect on local experiences. Meaning is therefore not produced solely by the creator; it develops through the interaction between content and audience, as users reinterpret and extend the meanings presented through their comments and responses.

13. Narrative and Visual Content

The analysis shows that both captions and visual elements play a crucial role in shaping interaction. The findings indicate that @butonstories does not simply present information about Baubau but constructs narratives that encourage emotional

responses and cultural reflection. For example, emotionally charged captions such as “You can fall in love with Baubau” create a narrative framework that invites user engagement.

Visual content depicting everyday life, landscapes, and cultural practices serves as a stimulus for user responses. Users’ comments demonstrate that visual representations of local places and traditions function as triggers for memory recall, identity affirmation, and collective discussion. These elements evoke emotional and cognitive reactions that are subsequently expressed in the comment section.

14. Interaction Between Content and Audience

Meaning is not solely produced by the content creator but emerges through interaction between content and audience. The comment interactions show that audiences actively reinterpret and extend the meaning of uploaded content by adding personal memories, local knowledge, and emotional responses. For instance, a caption expressing longing does not become a collective meaning unless it is echoed and reinforced by user responses.

When users respond with similar sentiments, the initial narrative becomes objectified as a shared understanding. This process illustrates the dynamic relationship between content production and audience participation in constructing digital culture.

15. The Role of the Creator as Cultural Mediator

The creator plays an active role in shaping interaction and cultural meaning within the @butonstories account. By selecting themes, framing narratives, presenting local perspectives, and engaging with followers through replies and conversational language, the creator connects offline cultural experiences with their online representation. The findings indicate that the creator functions not merely as a content producer but as a cultural mediator who facilitates interaction and contributes to the construction of shared meanings within the digital community (Booth, 2020; Kozinets, 2020).

16. Empirical Findings on Creator Practices

The account administrator plays an active role in shaping interaction by adopting a perspective aligned with local

community values. Interview findings reveal that the creator consciously positions the account as a representation of Baubau's identity by attempting to present content from the perspective of local residents. Statements such as "thinking as if I am a Baubau resident" indicate a deliberate effort to represent local culture authentically.

The creator also engages with users through replies and conversational language, reinforcing the sense of closeness and participation. This interactive practice demonstrates that the creator contributes not only to content production but also to maintaining the relational atmosphere of the digital community.

17. Interpretation of the Creator's Role

These findings suggest that the creator functions as a cultural mediator rather than merely a content producer. The creator bridges offline cultural experiences with online representation, enabling users to connect their lived experiences with digital narratives. Through the selection of themes, visual materials, and interaction styles, the creator facilitates the transformation of local experiences into shared digital narratives.

From a netnographic perspective, the creator is an active agent in constructing cultural meaning, guiding interaction patterns and shaping the overall tone of the digital community (Booth, 2020b & Kozinets V, 2020).

18. Content Production as Identity Expression

The findings indicate that content production within @butonstories carries personal as well as social significance for the creator. Content creation is described as a form of self-expression and is also associated with personal development and digital legacy. At the same time, the content facilitates interaction and collective meaning-making among followers. Thus, content production operates simultaneously as a personal expression of identity and as a social practice through which identity and cultural meanings are represented and negotiated in digital space (Davidson and Joinson, 2021).

19. Findings on Personal Meaning of Content Creation

The study also reveals that content production is not purely functional but carries personal significance for the creator. Content creation is described as a

form of self-expression and even as a therapeutic activity (Chou & Lu, 2022)

In addition, the account is perceived as a medium for personal development and as a form of digital legacy. This indicates that digital content creation simultaneously represents personal identity expression and an attempt to preserve cultural narratives for future audiences.

20. Interpretation in Digital Culture

Context

These findings indicate that digital content production operates at both social and personal levels. While content facilitates interaction and collective meaning-making, it also serves as a tool for identity construction.

In digital culture, identity is not fixed but continuously shaped through communication and representation (Davidson and Joinson 2021). The creator's practices reflect this dynamic process, where personal experiences are transformed into shared cultural narratives.

21. Negotiation Between Cultural Values and Commercial Elements

The findings identify the coexistence of cultural and commercial elements within

the @butonstories account. Commercial collaboration is present, while the creator emphasizes maintaining content consistency and authenticity. This demonstrates a negotiation between cultural values and economic interests rather than a complete separation between them. From a digital culture perspective, cultural production and monetization can coexist within the same digital space, provided that commercial activities remain connected to the identity and values represented by the account (Hutchinson, 2023).

22. Empirical Findings

The analysis identifies the presence of commercial collaboration within the account. However, the creator emphasizes the importance of maintaining content consistency and authenticity. The coexistence of cultural and commercial elements suggests that digital content production involves strategic negotiation.

23. Interpretation of Economic

Dynamics

This negotiation reflects broader dynamics within digital culture, where economic and cultural values intersect. Commercial activities do not necessarily undermine cultural authenticity as long as

they align with the identity and expectations of the audience.

From a netnographic perspective, this phenomenon highlights the economic dimension of digital communities, where cultural production and monetization coexist within the same space (Hutchinson 2023)

24. Synthesis of Findings

The findings of this study collectively demonstrate that the @butonstories account functions as a space for the formation of digital collective culture. Based on empirical observations, interviews, and thematic analysis, this culture is characterized by several interconnected elements:

The dominance of nostalgic expression as a form of collective memory

The emergence of social closeness and digital community

The active role of the creator as a cultural mediator

The use of content production as a form of identity expression

The negotiation between cultural authenticity and commercial interests

These elements are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Nostalgia stimulates emotional engagement,

emotional engagement strengthens social relationships, and creator mediation facilitates the continuous production and negotiation of cultural meanings within the digital space.

25. Alignment with Research Questions and Objectives

The findings address the research focus by demonstrating how follower interaction, repeated emotional and symbolic communication, and creator mediation contribute to the formation of digital collective culture within @butonstories. The interaction patterns show that users construct shared meanings through comments, replies, and symbolic expressions. The findings also demonstrate the emergence of digital collective culture through shared emotional experiences and common symbolic language, while the creator contributes by directing content themes and engaging with users. These findings collectively correspond to the study's objective of examining digital interaction as a cultural process within a localized social media context.

26. Interaction Patterns

The findings confirm that follower interaction is characterized by emotional,

reflective, and relational communication. The presence of repeated comments, replies, and symbolic expressions demonstrates that interaction itself becomes a cultural practice through which users construct shared meanings

27. Formation of Digital Collective Culture

Digital collective culture emerges through repeated interaction, shared emotional experiences, and the use of common symbolic language. The presence of recurring themes and narratives indicates the existence of collective meaning.

28. Role of the Creator

The creator plays a central role in shaping both interaction and culture. By directing content themes and engaging with users, the creator acts as a facilitator of digital social processes.

29. Concluding Remarks on Results

Overall, the results demonstrate that interaction within the @butonstories account is not merely communicative but constitutes a complex social process. The combination of observational evidence, user interactions, and interview insights demonstrates that digital spaces can

function as arenas for cultural reproduction and identity negotiation. Through repeated interaction, users collectively construct meaning, identity, and social relationships within a digital environment.

These findings reinforce the argument that digital interaction should be understood as a cultural practice rather than a superficial activity. The formation of digital collective culture in this context reflects the broader transformation of social life in the digital era, where meaning is continuously negotiated and reproduced through communication.

E. DISCUSSION

1. Interpretation of Digital Collective Culture Formation

The findings of this study demonstrate that digital collective culture is not a spontaneous or incidental phenomenon, but rather a structured social process emerging from repeated interaction among users. Through the lens of social construction theory, digital interaction can be understood as a continuous cycle of meaning production. Followers of the @butonstories account engage in expressive communication that reflects

personal experiences, particularly nostalgia, local identity, and emotional attachment to Baubau. The observed comments, replies, and symbolic expressions show that users actively contribute to constructing cultural meanings by connecting personal memories with broader narratives of belonging. These expressions represent the process of externalization, where individuals articulate their subjective realities through comments and symbolic communication (Berger and Luckmann 2021).

Over time, repeated expressions—such as recurring narratives of longing, pride, and belonging—become objectified as shared meanings. When multiple users reproduce similar sentiments, these meanings gain legitimacy and are recognized collectively within the digital space. For example, repeated references to hometown memories and appreciation of Baubau culture demonstrate how individual experiences gradually develop into collectively acknowledged narratives. This objectification process transforms individual experiences into collective cultural patterns. Subsequently, these shared meanings are internalized by users,

shaping their perception of identity and their way of interacting within the platform. Thus, digital collective culture emerges as a socially constructed reality sustained through ongoing interaction.

2. Digital Nostalgia as a Central Cultural Mechanism

One of the most significant findings is the dominance of nostalgia as a core element in the formation of digital collective culture. Nostalgia in this context operates not merely as an individual emotional response, but as a collective cultural practice. Users consistently express memories of their hometown, childhood experiences, and past social environments. The interaction patterns identified in @butonstories indicate that nostalgic expressions frequently generate responses from other users, transforming personal memories into shared conversations about place, history, and cultural identity. These expressions are echoed and reinforced by others, creating a shared emotional narrative.

From a netnographic perspective, such patterns indicate that nostalgia functions as a cultural connector, linking individual memory to collective identity (Kozinets V 2020). The digital interactions observed in

this study demonstrate that nostalgic communication operates through repeated storytelling, emotional affirmation, and symbolic recognition among users. The repeated articulation of similar sentiments—such as “missing home” or “remembering childhood”—creates a shared symbolic framework that users recognize and participate in. This process transforms nostalgia into a collective memory, which becomes a defining feature of the digital community.

Moreover, digital nostalgia reflects broader dynamics of migration and mobility. Many users appear to be geographically distant from Baubau, and social media serves as a bridge that reconnects them with their place of origin. The interview findings further support this interpretation, as followers described @butonstories as a medium that enables them to maintain emotional connections with Baubau despite geographical distance. In this sense, nostalgia is not only emotional but also spatial, reinforcing a sense of belonging despite physical separation. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing the role of digital media in maintaining emotional and

cultural ties across distance (P Booth 2020).

3. Construction of Social Closeness and Digital Community

The findings also reveal that repeated interaction fosters the development of social closeness among users, which gradually evolves into a form of digital community. Evidence from comment interactions shows that users do not only respond to uploaded content but also communicate with one another through replies, greetings, emotional support, and shared references to local experiences. Unlike traditional communities based on physical proximity, this community is constructed through communication practices such as replying, mentioning, and using shared language and symbols.

The role of interaction is central in this process. Through continuous engagement, users develop familiarity with one another's expressions, leading to mutual recognition and a sense of belonging. The recurring use of informal expressions, local references, and emojis functions as symbolic communication that strengthens familiarity among followers. The use of informal language and emojis further enhances this relational dimension,

creating an atmosphere that resembles offline social interaction.

In netnographic terms, this phenomenon can be understood as the emergence of a virtual community, where social bonds are formed through repeated interaction and shared meaning-making (Kozinets V 2020). The @butonstories account thus functions as a social hub, enabling users to participate in a collective experience that transcends individual engagement with content.

4. The Creator as a Cultural Mediator

An important contribution of this study lies in highlighting the active role of the content creator in shaping digital collective culture. The creator does not merely produce content but actively mediates cultural meaning by selecting themes, framing narratives, and engaging with followers. Interview findings indicate that the creator consciously develops content based on local perspectives and cultural values, positioning @butonstories as a representation of Baubau's identity in digital space.

By adopting a perspective aligned with local identity—such as “thinking as if I am a Baubau resident”—the creator constructs content that resonates with the audience's

experiences. This approach enables followers to perceive the content as authentic and culturally relevant, which encourages emotional participation and the sharing of personal memories. Furthermore, the creator's active involvement in responding to comments reinforces the relational aspect of the platform, contributing to the formation of a cohesive digital community.

From a theoretical standpoint, the creator can be conceptualized as a cultural intermediary who bridges offline cultural realities with online representation (Yuan 2025). The findings demonstrate that the creator's role extends beyond content production by facilitating cultural translation between local experiences and digital narratives. This role is essential in guiding the direction of interaction and shaping the tone of communication within the digital space. The findings suggest that digital culture is co-constructed through the interplay between creator and audience, rather than being solely user-driven or content-driven.

5. Content Production as Identity Construction

The discussion also highlights the dual function of content production as both a

social and personal practice. For the creator, producing content is not only a means of communication but also a form of self-expression and identity construction. The creator's motivation to document Baubau-related experiences demonstrates that digital production can become a personal practice of preserving memories and expressing attachment to local culture. Descriptions of content creation as "therapeutic" or as a "digital legacy" indicate that digital practices are deeply embedded in personal meaning.

In the broader context of digital culture, identity is not a fixed attribute but an ongoing process shaped through interaction and representation. Social media provides a platform where individuals can construct and negotiate their identities in relation to others (Gorea 2021). The content produced by the creator reflects a curated representation of local culture, which is then interpreted and reinterpreted by the audience.

This process aligns with the concept of participatory culture, where meaning is co-created through interaction between producers and consumers (P Booth 2020). Therefore, the @butonstories case demonstrates that digital identity

construction is a collaborative process in which creators provide cultural narratives while audiences actively contribute interpretations, memories, and emotional meanings. The findings suggest that identity construction occurs at multiple levels, involving both the creator and the audience in a dynamic process of cultural production.

6. Negotiation Between Cultural Values and Commercialization

Another significant aspect of the findings is the coexistence of cultural and commercial elements within the digital space. The presence of brand collaborations indicates that the account operates within an economic framework, where content can generate financial value. However, based on the creator's explanation, commercial involvement is not positioned as the primary purpose of @butonstories; rather, it functions as a complementary activity that supports the sustainability of digital content production while maintaining the account's cultural orientation.

However, the creator emphasizes the importance of maintaining authenticity and consistency in content. The findings indicate that the creator applies selective

consideration when accepting commercial collaborations to ensure that promotional elements remain consistent with the cultural narratives and audience expectations associated with Baubau identity. This suggests that commercialization does not necessarily undermine cultural values, but rather requires careful negotiation. As long as commercial activities align with the identity and expectations of the audience, they can coexist with cultural expression.

From a netnographic perspective, this phenomenon reflects the hybrid nature of digital communities, where cultural and economic dynamics are intertwined. Digital platforms enable the monetization of cultural content, while simultaneously preserving its symbolic and emotional value. In the context of @butonstories, economic activities are negotiated within existing cultural practices, demonstrating that digital cultural production involves both symbolic exchange and practical sustainability considerations. This finding contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital culture, where economic considerations are integrated into cultural practices.

7. Synthesis of Theoretical and Empirical Insights

Integrating the findings with the theoretical framework, this study demonstrates that digital collective culture is formed through the interaction of several interconnected processes: emotional expression, repeated communication, symbolic interaction, and mediation by the content creator. The empirical evidence from comments, user interactions, and interviews confirms that these processes operate simultaneously rather than independently, creating a continuous cycle of digital cultural production.

The process begins with individual expressions of experience (externalization), which are then shared and repeated within the digital space. Through interaction, these expressions become collective meanings (objectivation), which are subsequently internalized by users as part of their identity and social understanding. For example, individual memories expressed through comments about Baubau gradually become shared narratives of belonging when they are repeatedly acknowledged and reinforced by other

users. This cyclical process illustrates the applicability of social construction theory in explaining digital cultural phenomena (Berger and Luckmann 2021).

Furthermore, the findings extend existing literature by providing a micro-level analysis of digital interaction within a localized context. While previous studies have emphasized macro-level dynamics of digital culture, this study highlights the importance of everyday interaction as a site of cultural production. The @butonstories case demonstrates that localized digital spaces can become important arenas where cultural memory, identity, and social relationships are continuously reproduced through routine communication practices. By focusing on a specific Instagram account, the research demonstrates how collective culture can emerge from ordinary communication practices.

8. Implications for Communication and Digital Culture Studies

The findings have several implications for the field of communication studies. First, they challenge the assumption that social media interaction is superficial, demonstrating instead that it constitutes a meaningful cultural practice. Second, they

highlight the importance of studying interaction, rather than content alone, as the primary mechanism of meaning-making in digital environments. The findings suggest that comments, replies, and symbolic responses should be considered valuable communication data because they reveal how users negotiate meanings and construct social realities online.

Third, the study underscores the relevance of localized digital contexts in understanding global digital phenomena. By examining a local Instagram account, the research reveals how cultural identity, memory, and social relationships are constructed within specific socio-cultural settings. This finding emphasizes that digital culture should not only be understood through dominant global platforms or large online communities but also through smaller localized spaces where unique cultural meanings are produced. This perspective contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digital culture that accounts for diversity and contextual variation.

Overall, the discussion confirms that digital interaction is a complex and dynamic process that shapes collective

meaning, identity, and social relations. Through the case of @butonstories, this study demonstrates how digital platforms function not only as communication channels but also as cultural spaces where communities preserve, negotiate, and reproduce identity. The formation of digital collective culture in this study reflects broader transformations in contemporary society, where communication technologies play a central role in constructing social reality.

F. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital collective culture within the Instagram account @butonstories is formed through repeated, emotionally driven interactions that transform individual experiences into shared social meanings. The findings reveal that follower interactions are predominantly characterized by expressions of nostalgia, local identity, and emotional attachment to Baubau, which, through continuous repetition and mutual recognition, evolve into collective memory and digital cultural practices. The study confirms that @butonstories functions as a localized digital cultural space where users actively participate in preserving and

reconstructing meanings associated with place, memory, and identity.

The discussion highlights that digital interaction is not merely superficial communication but a meaningful social process involving the construction of identity, social closeness, and community belonging. Rather than functioning only as a content distributor, the creator acts as a cultural mediator who connects offline cultural experiences with online representations and facilitates interaction among users. The creator plays a crucial mediating role by shaping narratives, fostering engagement, and maintaining cultural authenticity while negotiating commercial elements. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a micro-level, netnographic analysis of how digital collective culture emerges within a localized social media context, thereby addressing gaps in previous macro-oriented research. By demonstrating how everyday online interactions contribute to cultural production, this research expands understanding of digital communication beyond content analysis toward interaction-based cultural interpretation.

Furthermore, it reinforces the relevance of social construction theory in digital environments and expands the application of netnography in communication studies.

Future research is recommended to explore deeper interaction patterns among users, incorporate larger datasets, and examine the role of linguistic and symbolic elements in shaping digital cultural dynamics. Future studies may also compare different local digital communities to examine how cultural contexts influence patterns of digital identity construction. Overall, this study affirms the significance of social media as an active space for cultural production, identity formation, and collective meaning-making in contemporary digital society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere appreciation to all individuals and parties who contributed to the completion of this study. Special gratitude is extended to the Instagram community of @butonstories for their valuable interactions and participation, which became an important part of this research process. The author also gratefully acknowledges the guidance, support, and constructive feedback provided by academic supervisors and colleagues throughout the development of this study. Finally, heartfelt appreciation is dedicated to family and close supporters for their continuous encouragement and motivation during the completion of this research.

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