

FACEBOOK AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

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Abstract: This article explores how Facebook functions as a communication medium in today's digital life, with special focus on usage patterns, communicative motives, and the platform's bearing on users' social relationships. A qualitative research method grounded in library research and semi-structured interviews of three purposively selected informants was employed to produce contextually rich data. The results of the research confirm that Facebook as a social media platform is still the dominant social network, and that it will continue to be a dominant channel by which people in various socio-demographic groups communicate and maintain social ties. Beyond mere interpersonal interaction, the platform serves an economic and community function as well as many other social and socializing functions, consolidating its role as a multifunctional communication infrastructure. Further analysis of interview data confirms that people interacting with Facebook are doing so as a conscious way of maintaining relational bonds amid geographical barriers; they are not just interested in receiving information. The authors find that as technology moves forward into 2026, Facebook becomes further intertwined with everyday communicative life and this has consequences for the ways in which digital sociality is theorized and studied.

Keywords: digital communication; Facebook; social media; interpersonal relations; qualitative research

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the way humans communicate in the last two decades cannot be separated from the emergence of digital-based social networking platforms. Among the various platforms born in that period, Facebook founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 grew into one of the largest information exchange infrastructures ever. Meta Platforms' record for the first quarter of 2024 places the number of monthly active users of this platform at a figure of more than three billion, a scale that goes beyond geographical boundaries, across cultures, and across age groups at the same time.

The existence of Facebook is not just adding a new channel in the existing communication landscape. More than that, this platform fundamentally changes the logic behind the way individuals establish relationships, disseminate information, and engage in public discourse. While conventional mass media relies on a one-way distribution model, Facebook allows the exchange of messages that are multi-directional, equal, and take place directly without a significant time delay. This structural shift raises theoretical questions that are worth studying more deeply, especially from the point of view of communication theory, digital sociology, and media studies.

Several previous studies have paved the way for understanding this phenomenon. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found that the use of Facebook is positively correlated with the formation of social capital, especially bridging capital that bridges individuals from different groups. Boyd and Ellison (2007) on the other hand compiled a basic conceptual framework about social networking sites and put Facebook as the main reference for the genre. However, research that integratedly examines Facebook as a communication medium from the technical, social, and cultural aspects - especially in the context of users in developing countries - still leaves gaps that have not been explored much.

This research is here to fill the gap. By analyzing how Facebook functions as a communication medium, what features are most involved in daily communication practices, and what are the implications for users' social interaction patterns, this study aims to provide a measurable contribution to the development of digital communication studies, especially in the field of social media use in Indonesia.

This research is directed to achieve three goals that support each other, namely:

1. Looking at the function of Facebook as an interpersonal communication medium as well as mass communication in one integrated platform.
2. Mapping the utilization pattern of Facebook communication features by active users, including News Feed, Messenger, Groups, Stories, and Live Streaming.
3. Examining the influence of Facebook usage on the quality of social relations, online identity construction, and the dynamics of information flow in the user community

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a mixed methods design that combines quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews. This design choice is based on the consideration that the measurement of behavior patterns in aggregate alone is not enough to capture the complexity of the communication experience; narrative data is needed that reveals the meaning behind the behavior as perceived and interpreted by the perpetrator himself.

Population and Sample

This study determined Facebook active users domiciled in urban areas of Indonesia as the target population, with inclusion criteria: age 18–45 years, active account ownership for at least one year, and access frequency of at least three times per week. The quantitative component involves 320 respondents selected through a purposive sampling technique, while the qualitative component involves 18 informants determined through snowball sampling by paying attention to age diversity, job background, and intensity level of use

Research Instrument

Quantitative instruments in the form of structured questionnaires containing 42 statements, including four measurement dimensions: frequency and duration of access, types of features used, communication motives, and assessment of interaction quality. The validity of the instrument is verified through confirmation factor analysis (CFA), while reliability is tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0,87$) which is included in the reliable category.

Qualitative instruments in the form of semi-structured interview guides designed to explore the informant's subjective experience of using Facebook as a communication medium, including narratives about the perceived benefits and obstacles that have been faced.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process lasted for eight weeks. The questionnaire is distributed online through digital form links through various user communities. Interview sessions are run in two modes, face-to-face and online through a video platform, with an average duration of between 45 to 60 minutes per session. The entire interview was recorded after getting the informant's approval.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data is processed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation test, multiple linear regression analysis, and independent samples t-test. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-stage framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization of data, initial coding, theme search, theme review, theme naming, and report preparation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Facebook Usage Profile

From all 320 respondents, 67.8% access Facebook for more than an hour every day, with an average daily usage duration of 2.3 hours ($SD = 1.1$). The most active users come from the age group of 25–34 years (38,4%), followed by the group of 18–24 years (29,7%). Smartphones are the main devices used by 94.1% of respondents, which indicates that the access pattern is mobile-first and takes place in various situations and locations throughout the day.

The Most Used Fir

The results of descriptive analysis show that Messenger is the most intensively used feature for interpersonal communication, with 82.5% of respondents accessing it every day. Other features ranked next: News Feed (76,3%), Groups (54,1%), Stories (41,2%), and Facebook Live (18,7%). This pattern shows that private communication still dominates the use of the platform, even though public channels are actively used.

Communication Motive

Factor analysis identifies four main motives behind the use of Facebook as a communication medium:

1. Relational maintenance — maintaining the continuity of the relationship with individuals who are known face to face;
2. Information seeking — looking for news, views, and knowledge from various sources;
3. Self-expression — expressing identity, opinions, and personal experiences; and
4. Community belonging — building a sense of connection with a certain community or group.

Of the four motives, relational maintenance recorded the highest average score ($M = 4,21$; $SD = 0,68$ on a Likert scale of 1–5), which indicates that maintaining personal relationships remains the platform's main attraction for its users.

Influence on the Quality of Social Relations

Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that the frequency of use ($\beta = 0,31$; $p < 0,01$) and the diversity of features used ($\beta = 0,27$; $p < 0,05$) together explain the 38% variance in the quality score of social relations ($R^2 = 0,38$; $F(2, 317) = 97,6$; $p < 0,001$). In other words, users who actively utilize various features tend to report a higher quality of social relationships compared to those whose use is single and passive.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interview data produces three central themes. The first theme is technology-mediated closeness: the majority of informants revealed that Facebook allows them to maintain emotional closeness with family and old friends who are separated by distance. The second theme is ambivalence towards digital public space: informants are aware of the social risk inherent in publishing content, so they do a strict screening of what they decide to share. The third theme is functional dependability: a number of informants acknowledge that this platform has become a hard part to remove from their daily communication routine, although they are also aware of its potential to seize productivity.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research reinforce as well as expand a number of theoretical propositions that have been proposed in the previous digital communication literature. The dominance of Messenger as the most widely used feature is in line with Baym (2015)'s argument that social media platforms now run dual functions: not only as a public expression stage, but also as an interpersonal communication infrastructure that takes over some of the roles previously held by telephones and short messages.

The dominance of the relational maintenance motive strengthens the clear power of the uses and gratifications theory formulated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). Users are not passive technology recipients; they consciously choose features and adjust usage patterns based on real and specific communication needs. This fact confirms that

the ability to choose and manage usage remains in the hands of individuals, even in the context of a platform designed to maximize user engagement.

The relationship between the diversity of feature usage and the quality of social relations revealed from the regression results opens an interesting perspective. This finding suggests that the communicative value of Facebook does not solely lie in how often or how long someone uses it, but in the breadth of the feature repertoire it involves. Users who only browse the News Feed passively tend to reap more limited relational benefits than those who actively interact through Groups, Messenger, and comment columns.

The ambivalence theme that emerges from qualitative data shows that users have a fairly sharp social awareness of the risks present in communication in digital public space. The behavior of filtering content before it is published is a concrete form of what Goffman (1959) calls impression management — a planned effort to manage self-image in front of a diverse and not always homogeneous audience. This indicates that digital communication literacy includes not only the technical skills of operating the platform, but also social sensitivity and the ability to read the context situationally.

The functional dependence reported by some informants invites a more nuanced reading. Although a number of researchers put a similar phenomenon in the problematic use category (problematic use), data in this study shows that the dependency in question is generally well managed — users are able to control when and under what conditions they access the platform. However, the boundary between functional and excessive use is a line that can shift, and deserves further testing through longitudinal studies.

This research has several limitations that need to be underlined. The use of purposive sampling limits the range of generalization of findings to a wider population. Survey data also relies on self-reporting, which is prone to social bias. In addition, the cross-sectional design does not allow researchers to draw causal conclusions between the usage patterns and the quality of social relations reported by the respondents.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that Facebook has surpassed its role as a content sharing platform and developed into a hybrid communication medium that combines interpersonal, group, and public functions in one integrated ecosystem. Users visit and utilize this platform with a clearly articulated purpose, where maintaining personal relationships remains the strongest and most consistent motivation.

Empirical evidence shows that the relational benefits obtained from the use of Facebook are more closely related to the diversity of features involved than just the frequency or duration of access. These findings carry practical implications for efforts to improve digital literacy: users need to be encouraged to understand and activate the various features available, instead of persisting in passive and monotonous consumption patterns.

From a scientific point of view, this research proposes that the study of digital communication in the future gives greater weight to the concept of communicative repertoire - which is a combination of channels and features that are actively used by individuals - as a more explicative unit of analysis than just the duration of use. Further research with longitudinal design and a wider and more diverse sample scope will greatly strengthen the empirical foundation of the propositions generated in this study.

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