

Literacy Enhancement for Promoting the Cikareumbi Tomato War Festival as a Post-Pandemic Sundanese Cultural Tradition

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of digital literacy in revitalizing the Perang Tomat (Tomato War) tradition in Cikareumbi Village during the post-pandemic period. The program employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology, engaging artists, youth, and community elders in training on digital content related to cultural branding and creative media production. Participants were trained to create cultural content with smartphones, manage social media accounts, and reinterpret digital platforms as instruments for cultural representation. Empirical evidence indicates notable enhancements in the digital capacity of the community. The Instagram insights for the newly established “Mekar Budaya Lembang” account indicate 3,299 views and 128 interactions over the course of one month, with 61.3% of viewers classified as non-followers. Furthermore, 85% of participants demonstrated proficiency in content creation, 78% acquired skills for independent media management, and 60% grasped the principles of cultural branding. The findings indicate that digital literacy enables individuals to narrate stories within their communities and enhances the visibility of Perang Tomat beyond its local context. The study concludes that digital literacy serves as both a technical skill and a cultural strategy, enhancing community agency and promoting cultural sustainability. This model of community-based digital empowerment provides a replicable framework for the promotion of intangible heritage in digitally mediated contexts.

Keyword: Cultural Festival, Community Empowerment, Creative Economy, Digital Literacy, Perang Tomat

INTRODUCTION

Amid the rapid currents of globalization and technological disruption, Indonesia’s intangible cultural heritage faces increasingly complex existential challenges. Communal traditions that once served as intergenerational spaces for transmitting values have been eroded by lifestyle changes,

youth migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which suspended many cultural practices for years. In this context, cultural preservation requires more than merely maintaining inherited forms; it demands adaptive strategies that safeguard the meanings and values of tradition while

keeping them relevant within contemporary society.

One of the most compelling expressions of such creative adaptation is the phenomenon of invented tradition, a concept introduced by Hobsbawm and Ranger referring not to artificial constructions but to social innovations designed to maintain symbolic continuity between past and present (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012).

Although Perang Tomat is a relatively young invented tradition, the use of tomatoes as a medium for collective festivity is not entirely new in global cultural history. A prominent example is La Tomatina in Buñol, Spain, which originated from an altercation among local youths in the 1940s and later developed into a major annual cultural event. The festival is now internationally recognized, drawing thousands of participants each year. Acknowledging this global parallel situates Perang Tomat within a broader comparative framework of agrarian-based communal rituals, demonstrating that similar symbolic practices emerge across different societies. This contextualization reinforces the relevance of the present study by showing that Perang Tomat is part of a wider tradition in which agricultural products become expressions of cultural identity, solidarity, and communal resilience.

When these new traditions take root within the collective experience of a community, they gain authenticity and cultural legitimacy. The *Perang Tomat* (Tomato War) tradition in Kampung Cikareumbi, Cikidang Village, Lembang

District, exemplifies this idea. Conceived by Sundanese cultural figure Abah Nanu Munajar Dahlan in 2011, the tradition emerged as an agrarian response to the economic collapse following a tomato price crash. The act of throwing tomatoes among villagers became both a ritual of self-purification (*miceun geugeuleuh keukeumeuh*) and an expression of communal solidarity. Over the past fourteen years, *Perang Tomat* has evolved into a cultural icon and leading tourism attraction in West Bandung Regency, even drawing international visitors, and has been officially recognized by the West Java Department of Culture and Tourism (Decree No. 430/KEP.009-DISBUDPAR/2016).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the tradition to a halt for over four years, interrupting intergenerational knowledge transmission and diminishing youth participation. As a relatively young cultural practice, *Perang Tomat* risks losing its vitality without strategic intervention. The pandemic has also sped up the shift to digital methods of promoting culture, making online spaces the main places for sharing and expressing heritage. For communities such as Cikareumbi, adaptation to this digital ecosystem is essential to sustaining their cultural identity. Findings from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted in July 2025 reveal an interesting paradox: while the community possesses rich cultural assets and a strategic geographical position within the Lembang tourism area, their digital literacy skills remain limited. There is no official social media management, cultural content production is sporadic, and most residents

lack a basic understanding of communication strategy and media ethics. Consequently, the narrative of *Perang Tomat* is largely shaped by external actors—media outlets, bloggers, and travel vloggers—while the cultural owners themselves remain underrepresented in shaping their public image.

This study aims to empower the Cikareumbi community through digital literacy training as a strategic effort to revitalize the *Perang Tomat* tradition in the post-pandemic era. By integrating participatory action and community-based learning, the program seeks to enhance the community's capacity in managing digital platforms, promoting cultural tourism, and sustaining cultural identity through self-managed narratives. The rationale lies in addressing the digital divide that limits rural communities' ability to represent and preserve their own heritage. Through this initiative, the research not only contributes to the sustainability of a locally *invented tradition* but also offers a model of how digital empowerment can become a transformative tool for cultural resilience in the face of global change.

Recent studies emphasize the crucial role of digital literacy as a strategic approach to cultural preservation in the post-pandemic era. Digitalization has been shown not only to expand access and participation but also to enhance the visibility of local traditions within virtual public spaces. (David Adi Saputra (Saputra, 2023); Mauluddin et al. (Mauluddin et al., 2022); Profetik et al. (Profetik et al., 2024); Riski Dwi Putri et al. (Putri et al., 2024)). Sekarningrum and Lokita

(Sekarningrum & Lokita, 2024) highlight the role of digital media in maintaining public engagement with palace culture, while Ratih et al. (Ratih et al., 2025) demonstrate the effectiveness of historical e-books in strengthening cultural education among students.

Aligned with these findings, several applied studies show how digital literacy training directly contributes to the promotion and sustainability of local cultural festivals. Kobis et al. (Kobis et al., 2025) found that digital literacy workshops in Talawaan Tourism Village enabled residents to create and manage digital promotional content, significantly improving the visibility of local cultural attractions. Similarly, Rohimah et al. (Rohimah et al., 2024) revealed that digital mentoring programs in Jelekong Art and Cultural Village enhanced community capacity in website and social media management, effectively supporting the promotion of traditional arts. In Lamongan, Munajah and Sumiati (Mujanah & Sumiati, 2025) demonstrated that strengthening digital literacy within religious tourism communities empowered participants to construct cultural narratives that reinforce local identity and attract visitors. Furthermore, Sari et al. (Sari & Virgy, 2025) emphasize that digital literacy among Indigenous communities is crucial for understanding Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights to prevent symbolic exploitation in digital spaces. Complementarily, Ahadiyah et al. (Ahadiyah et al., 2024) introduce a pedagogical dimension by showing that

project-based digital learning fosters intercultural participation and appreciation of cultural diversity.

From a global perspective, Ricciardelli et al. (Ricciardelli et al., 2025) and Svitlana Semenko et al. (Semenko et al., 2024) argue that digitalization plays a pivotal role in sustaining cultural activities across Europe during crises, functioning both as a means of documentation and as a catalyst for community participation. Meanwhile, Lahpan et al. (Lahpan et al., 2025) and Nirwana and Nugroho (Nirwana & Nugroho, 2024) underline that successful digitalization of culture depends on participatory approaches, where communities act not merely as passive recipients of technology but as active agents articulating their cultural identity in digital spaces.

Collectively, these studies suggest that digital literacy transcends technical skills; it serves as a transformative strategy for ensuring the continuity of traditions within an ever-evolving cultural landscape. Within this discourse, prior research specifically addressing the Tomato War Festival in Cikareumbi provides essential contextual foundations for the present study. Rahmat et al. (Rahmat et al., 2021) examined cultural branding as a communication strategy for sustainable tourism, and Adelia et al. (Adelia & Setyobudi, n.d.) explored the commodification of cultural practices and their socio-economic impacts, while Abdullah and Nulaena (Abdullah & Nulaena, 2022) focused on social solidarity and collective cohesion within the *Rempug*

Tarung Adu Tomat ritual. Although these studies offer valuable insights into the social, economic, and symbolic dimensions of the tradition, none have explored digital empowerment as a revitalization strategy in the post-pandemic context. This research therefore fills that gap by examining digital literacy as a community-based instrument for the revitalization and sustainability of local traditions.

This study was designed to address these gaps through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, positioning the community not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents engaged in every stage, from planning and implementation to reflection and evaluation. Consistent with empowerment principles emphasizing community agency and ownership (Ife & Tesoriero, 2016), this program aims to strengthen the digital capacity of Cikareumbi residents to revitalize the Tomato War Festival through digital branding and community-managed online platforms.

Moreover, the initiative aligns with several national and international development frameworks: (1) SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), promoting culture-based economic opportunities; (2) SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), preserving cultural heritage while enhancing local tourism; (3) Asta Cita 4, increasing public productivity and competitiveness through digital branding; and (4) Indonesia's Higher Education Key Performance Indicators (IKU), encouraging lecturers and students to engage in community service programs with

measurable societal impact. Beyond merely fulfilling administrative indicators, this program aspires to build an ecosystem where local traditions and global technologies coexist symbiotically, negotiating cultural continuity and digital innovation for the collective well-being of society.

METHODS

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, positioning the community as active co-researchers rather than passive beneficiaries. PAR was chosen because it facilitates a continuous cycle of reflection and action, enabling participants not only to receive knowledge transfer but also to identify problems, design context-based solutions, implement interventions, and evaluate outcomes (Chan & Saidon, 2021). This approach aligns with the principles of community empowerment that emphasize agency and ownership in driving social change (Ife et al., 2008).

Complementing the PAR framework, the study adopted Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, which asserts that adult learning must be experiential, problem-centered, and relevant to real-life contexts (Knowles et al., 2020). Accordingly, the training modules were designed through a learning-by-doing approach, in which participants directly practiced digital content creation using their own smartphones. The contents were locally contextualized, focusing on documenting the Perang Tomat tradition and promoting the tourism potential of Kampung Cikareumbi.

A. Study Site and Participants

The research was conducted in Kampung Cikareumbi RW 03, Cikidang Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency, approximately 25 km from the Indonesian Institute of Arts and Culture (ISBI) Bandung. The site was selected based on three considerations: (1) the presence of Perang Tomat as an invented tradition requiring post-pandemic revitalization strategies; (2) the community's enthusiasm for enhancing digital capacity; and (3) its potential to develop a culture-based creative economy. A total of 30 participants were involved, categorized into three groups:

1. Artists and cultural practitioners (\approx 15 participants) actively involved in the Perang Tomat festival and related traditional arts (such as *gotong singa*, *karinding*, *helaran*, *pencak silat*, and *gembyung*). Youth members of Karang Taruna (\approx 7 participants) are responsible for managing digital platforms and sustaining activities beyond the project period.
2. Community elders (\approx 8 participants) serving as custodians of collective memory and community decision-makers.

This composition ensured intergenerational collaboration and sustainable knowledge transfer.

B. Stage of Implementation

The research and community engagement were conducted over a two-month period (August-September 2025), structured into five main phases:

1. Socialization and Needs Assessment— Conducted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving community leaders, youth, and local authorities to map digital readiness, local potentials, and technological needs.
2. Digital Literacy and Cultural Branding Training—Delivered through three interactive sessions:
 - a. Session 1: Digital literacy and social media management (Sheila Kurnia Putri)
 - b. Session 2: Photography, videography, and creative content production (Shauma Silmi Faza)
 - c. Session 3: Branding strategies and website optimization (Arif Budiman)

Each session lasted 4–5 hours, employing a participatory format consisting of 30% theoretical input, 50% practice, and 20% reflective discussion. Activities were scheduled between 15:30 and 19:30 local time to accommodate community routines.
3. Implementation and Mentoring— Participants formed a village media team managing official social media accounts (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and a dedicated website). Mentorship was provided through eight on-site visits and online consultations via WhatsApp for real-time troubleshooting.
4. Participatory Evaluation – Evaluation combined social media performance analytics, participant reflection, and satisfaction surveys to measure improvement in digital capacity, content quality, and training effectiveness.

5. Infrastructure Strengthening and Closure – Provision of supporting tools (Wi-Fi router, microphone, smartphone, and signage labeled “Mekar Budaya”) symbolizing the community’s digital independence.

C. Community Roles and Data Analysis Techniques

All activities were collaboratively executed. Community leaders provided legitimacy and coordination, youth groups acted as implementers, cultural practitioners contributed creative content, and village officials facilitated logistical and institutional support.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, visual documentation, and social media analytics. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis Miles & Huberman to identify patterns of capacity transformation, adaptive strategies, and critical reflections on the process of digital culture-based empowerment (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This analytical framework allowed the study to reveal not only technical outcomes but also shifts in community agency, cultural representation, and digital engagement practices.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Tomato War Tradition as Cultural Capital of Cikareumbi Community

The Tomato War tradition represents the cultural identity of the Cikareumbi community by combining agrarian values, Sundanese spirituality, and communal creativity. Initiated in 2011 by the Sundanese cultural figure Abah Nanu Munajar Dahlan

as a creative response to the tomato price crisis, this ritual has transcended mere festivity; it has become a mechanism of collective solidarity and cultural resilience. In the framework of cultural capital Bourdieu, the Tomato War functions as a symbolic asset that reinforces social cohesion and legitimizes the community's cultural agency within the broader context of West Javanese traditions (Huang, 2019).



Figure 1 The "Tomato War" tradition in Cikareumbi Village as a symbol of solidarity and collective gratitude among the community.

(Source: Djuli Pamungkas, 2014)

After recognition as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of West Bandung Regency in 2016, the festival evolved into a key driver of local economic growth and cultural education. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a four-year hiatus that disrupted the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and weakened youth participation. This condition illustrates how cultural capital, when not supported by adaptive digital media strategies, can easily lose its vitality in the digital age.

The community service program on digital literacy provided a strategic avenue to

transform traditional cultural capital into digital capital. This transformation positioned the Cikareumbi community as narrators and curators of their own culture, reclaiming authority over representation and resisting external exoticization often perpetuated by outsider media.

Furthermore, the Tomato War illustrates the dynamic nature of intangible heritage. While rooted in ritual and performance, its value extends beyond the cultural to the socio-economic. Local entrepreneurs leverage the event for small-scale commerce, producing souvenirs and culinary experiences tied to the festival. The recognition of such activities highlights that cultural capital can also be a catalyst for microeconomic development, enhancing livelihoods while preserving identity. Additionally, it shows that intangible heritage requires active stewardship; without community engagement and strategic adaptation, the tradition risks becoming a static spectacle rather than a living practice.

Based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the Perang Tomat tradition represents symbolic resources that reinforce community identity and social cohesion. The digital literacy program enabled this cultural capital to be transformed into digital capital, demonstrated by measurable increases in audience engagement on the Mekar Budaya Lembang platform. The improvement in content creation skills (85%) and social media visibility (3,299 views in one month) indicates that cultural practices can gain renewed vitality when mediated through digital platforms. Thus, the findings empirically

support Bourdieu's idea that cultural assets acquire new value when adapted to contemporary fields of social practice.

2. Digital Literacy as a New Space of Cultural Expression

The digital literacy initiative in Cikareumbi Village was more than a technical training; it was an epistemic intervention that redefined how a community sees and narrates itself in the digital era. Participants were not merely taught to use social media; they were guided to reinterpret technology as a medium of self-expression and cultural reclamation. The act of producing photos, videos, and captions about Perang Tomat became a process of reclaiming narrative agency, shifting from being represented to representing themselves.

Empirical outcomes reinforce this transformation. The *Mekar Budaya Lembang* Instagram account, which was newly established and managed by participants after the completion of the digital literacy training in September 2025, recorded 3,299 views and 128 interactions between 21 September and 20 October 2025, with 61.3% of viewers being non-followers. This digital outreach demonstrates that the community successfully extended its cultural presence beyond local boundaries. The engagement rate dominated by posts (99.3%) rather than stories reveals the effectiveness of static and short-form visual storytelling in building audience connection. Furthermore, internal assessments showed that 85% of participants

mastered content production, 78% learned to manage media independently, and 60% understood the fundamentals of cultural branding. These metrics are not merely indicators of skill acquisition but represent a shift in epistemic power: from passive recipients of media narratives to active cultural narrators in the digital public sphere.

To provide a clearer overview of the community's capacity transformation, the following table summarizes the improvement in participants' digital competencies during the program.

Table 1. Improvement of Participants' Digital Capacity

| No | Competency | Mastery Percentage |
|----|--|--------------------|
| 1 | Content creation (photo/video) | 85% |
| 2 | Social media management | 78% |
| 3 | Cultural branding essentials | 60% |
| 4 | Basic digital ethics | 70% |
| 5 | Caption writing and digital storytelling | 72% |

The data in Table 1 shows a significant increase in participants' technical and creative skills following the digital literacy program. The highest improvement appears in content creation (85%), indicating that hands-on practice using smartphones and guided exercises effectively strengthened participants' ability to produce visual and audiovisual materials. Social media

management (78%) and digital storytelling (72%) also show strong results, reflecting the participants' growing confidence in handling posting schedules, captions, audience interaction, and platform analytics. Meanwhile, cultural branding essentials (60%) and digital ethics (70%) illustrate that while foundational understanding has been achieved, continued mentoring is still needed to deepen participants' strategic and ethical considerations when representing cultural traditions online. Overall, these indicators show that the program effectively fostered both technical competence and reflective awareness among community members.

Beyond individual skill development, the impact of the digital literacy program can also be observed through the performance of the community's newly established social media platforms. The Instagram analytics during the first month of operation reflect the most notable results.

Empirical outcomes reinforce this transformation. The Mekar Budaya Lembang Instagram account recorded 3,299 views and 128 interactions during its first month, with a significant 61.3% of the audience consisting of non-followers. This result demonstrates that the content produced by the community began reaching a wider public beyond the immediate local network. These analytics are visually presented in Figure 2.

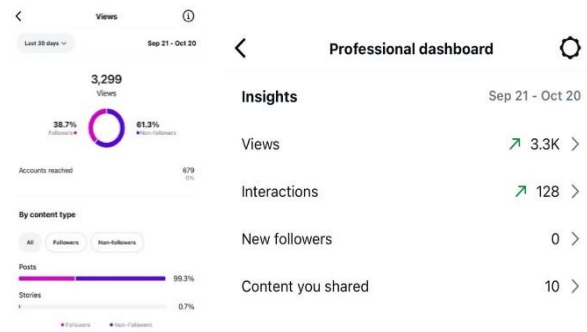


Figure 2
Instagram insight of the Mekar Budaya Lembang account showing audience engagement and visibility one month after the digital literacy training (September–October 2025). (Source: Field data, 2025)

To complement the visual information in Figure 2, the numerical breakdown of the Instagram metrics is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Instagram Insights of “Mekar Budaya Lembang” (21 September – 20 October 2025)

| No | Indicator | Value |
|----|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Total views | 3,299 |
| 2 | Total interactions | 128 |
| 3 | Non-follower viewers | 61.3 % |
| 4 | Dominant content type | Posts (99.3%) |

Table 2 presents the initial performance of the newly created “Mekar Budaya Lembang” Instagram account within one month after the training. The total of 3,299 views and 128 interactions indicates a positive early response, especially considering that the account was previously inactive. 61.3% of viewers were non-followers, suggesting that the content successfully reached audiences beyond the immediate community through algorithmic visibility and organic sharing. The

dominance of posts (99.3%) as the most engaging format also highlights the effectiveness of static images and short videos in capturing audience attention for cultural content. These insights confirm that community-produced digital narratives can expand the cultural presence of Perang Tomat and strengthen local identity through broader online exposure.

This project also shows how participatory digital education can change the way people think about media and help them become more critical consumers of it. Participants were encouraged not only to post content but also to analyze audience reception, reflect on digital ethics, and contextualize Perang Tomat within broader cultural narratives. This analytical approach strengthened critical thinking skills and enabled participants to navigate the complexities of cultural representation in digital spaces. By embedding reflection into technical training, the program ensured that digital literacy evolved into a practice of cultural stewardship rather than mere content production.

In essence, this initiative exemplifies how digital literacy can evolve into cultural literacy, where technology is not only a tool for dissemination but also a reflective space for self-definition. By learning digital storytelling, the Cikareumbi community turns social media into a vibrant record of their identity, making sure that Perang Tomat remains a lively and evolving cultural conversation instead of just a fixed tradition.

3. From Cultural Broker to Cultural Collective: Redefining Leadership and Authorship

Traditionally, the Tomato War's sustainability depended on the charisma of Abah Nanu, a cultural broker mediating between sacred ritual and public spectacle. The program's success in nurturing eight digital cultural cadres signifies a paradigmatic shift from charismatic to distributed cultural leadership. Here, knowledge is no longer owned by one person; instead, it is made by people of all ages working together.



Figure 3 Digital content training and documentation by Cikareumbi youth, alongside an interview with Abah Nanu Munajar Dahlan—the creator of the “Tomato War” tradition.

(Source : Sheila Kurnia Putri, 2025)

This reconfiguration challenges the myth of the solitary artist or leader as cultural guardian. Instead, culture is kept alive by a networked authorship model in which older people give it symbolic legitimacy and younger people bring technological fluency. The interplay between the two generates what Latour calls a network of actants, a living ecology of human and non-human agents (rituals, devices, platforms) that co-produce cultural meaning (Andrade &

Ekundayo, 2011), (Banoet, 2022), (Plesner, 2009), (Budiman et al., 2025).

The revitalization process also aligns with Latour's Actor-Network Theory, which emphasizes that cultural practices are produced through networks of human and non-human actors. In this study, elders, youth, facilitators, smartphones, routers, and digital platforms all function as interconnected actants that co-produce the meaning and sustainability of Perang Tomat. The emergence of eight digital cultural cadres exemplifies how leadership becomes distributed rather than centralized, demonstrating that cultural continuity results from collaborative interactions within this socio-technical network.

Thus, the digital cadre becomes more than a group of content creators; they are mediators of continuity, transforming the idea of stewardship from preservation to participation. This shift also illustrates the value of mentorship as a horizontal, rather than hierarchical, process. Knowledge flows multidirectionally, combining experiential wisdom with technical innovation and creating a resilient model of cultural leadership that can adapt to technological, social, and generational changes.

Moreover, this collective approach strengthens community identity by democratizing the authority of cultural interpretation. The distributed model ensures that the tradition is not dependent on a single charismatic figure, which makes it more

resilient to social disruption. It also fosters a sense of ownership and pride among youth, positioning them as co-authors of a living heritage, thereby addressing challenges of cultural attrition in a rapidly modernizing society.

4. Glocal Heritage and the Dialectics of Visibility

Through digital mediation, Perang Tomat traverses geographical and cultural boundaries, transforming into a glocal heritage, a tradition both local in origin and global in reach. This process, however, is double-edged. Digital exposure invites recognition but also risks commodification. As Appadurai notes, global cultural flows generate mediascapes that can either democratize culture or dilute its meaning (Appadurai, 1996).

In this sense, the digital visibility of Perang Tomat is a political act: a form of cultural decolonization where representation is reclaimed from external curatorship. The *Mekar Budaya Lembang* platforms function not merely as tools but as symbolic infrastructures enabling communities to control their cultural narrative. They transform spectatorship into participation and data into dialogic exchange.

Appadurai's concept of mediascapes helps explain how Perang Tomat gains new visibility within global cultural flows. With 61.3% of Instagram viewers being non-followers, the tradition transcends local boundaries and enters glocal circulation, where local identity interacts with global audiences. This digital mobility, supported

by community-produced content, validates Appadurai's argument that media have an important influence on the contemporary cultural imagination. However, the community's conscious effort to embed cultural context in its posts ensures that global visibility does not dilute local meaning.

The challenges of glocalization also emphasize the ethical responsibilities of digital representation. Expanding reach is desirable, but it is crucial to present cultural content with contextual integrity. The community actively negotiates these tensions by including explanations, stories, and historical context with visual content. This keeps the tradition's depth and meaning alive. This approach models a conscious balance between global engagement and local authenticity, demonstrating that visibility does not necessarily entail dilution when mediated thoughtfully.

However, sustainability depends on whether visibility can remain relational, anchored in shared values rather than metrics of reach. The challenge is not to make tradition go viral, but to make it vital: meaningful, lived, and contextually grounded.

5. Toward a Model of Community-Based Digital Empowerment

From a broader perspective, the Cikareumbi experience proposes a replicable model of community-based digital empowerment that unites PAR with critical cultural pedagogy. Its success lies not in producing content, but in producing consciousness: that technology, when

appropriated collectively, becomes a site of cultural negotiation rather than domination.

This model integrates three pillars:

1. Cultural Consciousness – preserving authenticity through reflective digital storytelling.
2. Collaborative Agency – promoting intergenerational participation in cultural authorship.
3. Critical Sustainability – ensuring that digital presence translates into local empowerment.



Figure 4 Group photo of researchers, facilitators, and the Cikareumbi community at the conclusion of the digital literacy program.

(Source : Sheila Kurnia Putri, 2025)

Additionally, the model emphasizes the role of iterative learning, where continuous reflection, feedback, and adaptive strategies reinforce both digital and cultural competencies. The training sessions were structured to allow participants to experiment, make mistakes, and learn collectively, highlighting that empowerment is an ongoing, dialogical process rather than a one-off intervention. By integrating iterative cycles of action and reflection, the program nurtured resilience, adaptability, and innovation, positioning the community

to navigate future disruptions while sustaining cultural vitality.

In this framework, revitalization transcends recovery; it becomes an act of reimagination. The Tomato War is no longer merely a spectacle of the past; it is a living discourse on how tradition and technology can co-evolve, creating not just a festival but a philosophy of resilience for communities navigating post-pandemic futures.

6. Intergenerational Learning and Cultural Continuity

An important dimension highlighted by this study is the role of intergenerational learning in sustaining cultural practices. The digital literacy program facilitated structured interactions between elders who carry ritual knowledge and youth who possess technological fluency. These interactions created a feedback loop where traditional wisdom informs digital storytelling, and digital experimentation reinvigorates interest in heritage. Such a mechanism ensures continuity not only of ritual forms but also of the underlying values of cooperation, respect, and communal identity. By embedding learning within the social fabric of the village, Perang Tomat becomes a lived tradition that actively involves multiple generations, reducing the risk of cultural attrition over time. Moreover, this process fosters mentorship and mutual recognition, strengthening social bonds and reinforcing the communal sense of ownership over cultural narratives.

In addition, intergenerational learning fosters adaptive cultural resilience by

enabling the community to respond creatively to external pressures such as modernization and globalization. By combining the elders' experiential knowledge with the youth's technological skills, the community develops hybrid practices that retain traditional meaning while appealing to contemporary audiences. For instance, ritual explanations, storytelling techniques, and symbolic gestures are translated into digital formats such as short videos or infographics, making them accessible to younger generations and even global viewers. This process preserves cultural knowledge and encourages innovation in ritual presentation, ensuring that Perang Tomat remains relevant and engaging. Furthermore, the collaborative environment strengthens social cohesion, as shared learning experiences create trust, empathy, and a sense of collective responsibility toward heritage preservation.

7. Digital Storytelling as a Catalyst for Local Creativity and Economy

Beyond cultural preservation, digital storytelling has emerged as a catalyst for local creativity and economic opportunity. Participants began experimenting with photography, video editing, graphic design, and narrative framing, developing skills that extend beyond the Perang Tomat context. These competencies enhance cultural representation and create avenues for micro-entrepreneurship, such as selling digital content, merchandise, or offering guided cultural experiences. The program demonstrates that empowering communities

with digital skills can simultaneously nurture creative industries while maintaining cultural authenticity. This dual impact exemplifies the potential of participatory digital initiatives to serve as a bridge between heritage, innovation, and local economic development, highlighting that culture and creativity are mutually reinforcing components of sustainable community development.

Moreover, the digital storytelling process stimulates entrepreneurial mindsets among participants by encouraging them to explore the cultural economy in a structured and creative way. For example, participants experiment with monetizing digital content, such as creating thematic photo collections, short documentaries, or cultural guides, which can be marketed to local tourists or sold online. These activities demonstrate that cultural preservation and economic development are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be mutually reinforcing when guided by strategic digital literacy. In addition, the initiative strengthens local branding by linking cultural authenticity to marketable products and experiences, increasing both community pride and economic sustainability. Over time, these practices may contribute to the emergence of a small-scale creative industry ecosystem in Cikareumbi, where cultural knowledge, innovation, and digital skills coalesce to support sustainable livelihoods while maintaining the integrity of local traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital literacy can function not only as a technical

competence but also as a transformative cultural strategy for revitalizing local traditions in the post-pandemic era. As initially anticipated in the introduction, the participatory digital literacy program in Cikareumbi Village successfully bridged the gap between cultural preservation and technological adaptation. Through the empowerment framework of Participatory Action Research, the community transitioned from passive cultural subjects to active digital narrators, reclaiming the authority to represent their own traditions in the public sphere.

The findings reaffirm that community-based digital engagement fosters both cultural resilience and creative sustainability. The revitalization of the Perang Tomat tradition through locally produced digital content and the establishment of Mekar Budaya Lembang's social media platforms illustrates how technology can serve as a medium of decolonized cultural expression. The integration of visual storytelling, collective participation, and digital branding has proven effective in extending the visibility of local heritage to global audiences while maintaining authenticity and communal values.

Furthermore, this study highlights the broader implications for cultural policy and education. By demonstrating how digital literacy can be aligned with cultural preservation, it provides a model for educational institutions, local governments, and cultural organizations to collaborate in supporting intangible heritage. Training programs that combine technological skills

with cultural reflection can cultivate a generation of digitally literate cultural stewards capable of sustaining heritage in increasingly mediated environments.

This model has the potential to be replicated in other cultural communities that want to protect Research may investigate interdisciplinary frameworks that integrate ethnography, digital humanities, and creative media practice to enhance the theoretical comprehension of cultural sustainability in the digital era and promote intangible heritage through participatory digital transformation. Future studies may explore interdisciplinary frameworks that combine ethnography, digital humanities, and creative media practice to deepen the theoretical understanding of cultural sustainability in the digital age. Moreover, cooperation among academic institutions, municipal authorities, and creative sectors will be essential in expanding this empowerment model to foster inclusive cultural economies and ensure the enduring resilience of local identities in a globalized context.

Lastly, the Cikareumbi case underscores that technology alone is insufficient without community-centered approaches. Digital tools, when contextualized within local values and practices, become instruments of empowerment, fostering both agency and identity. The lessons learned suggest that preserving cultural heritage in the 21st century requires an integrative approach that merges tradition, creativity, technology, and participatory engagement into a sustainable ecosystem of cultural vitality.

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