

Exploring the Management of Community Radio in the Digital Era: a Case Study of Radio Bamba

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ABSTRACT

Amid the pressure of digitalization and a lack of structural support, community radio in Indonesia is struggling to survive as a voice space for citizens. This study examines the sustainability strategy of community radio that remains active and adaptive amidst the challenges of the times, namely Radio Bamba (Balaraja). Radio Bamba represents an alternative form of community-based media that relies on the values of participation, solidarity, and local culture. Through a qualitative approach with in-depth interview techniques involving managers, broadcasters, active listeners, and representatives of the Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI), this study found that adaptation to social media was conducted in a contextual and gradual manner. Radio Bamba, with its network of young managers and a digital entertainment approach, leverages channels such as YouTube and WhatsApp to expand participation. Regulatory pressures and limited resources have led to the emergence of defensive strategies that are informal but still ethical according to community standards. These findings show that the resilience of community radio lies not only in its technological capacity but also in its social power and long-term commitment that grows from affective relationships with citizens. By positioning social media as a bridge, not a destination, community radio still occupies a meaningful living space amid an increasingly automated media landscape.

Keywords: Community Radio, Alternative Media, Social Media, Digital Adaptation, Survival Strategies, Citizen Participation

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INTRODUCTION

Community radio in Indonesia has faced challenges since its inception, ranging from the lack of government regulatory support and problems in the implementation of broadcasting rules to internal obstacles such as management and funding (Yuliasari, 2017). Technological developments have also increased pressure, especially related to limited human resources, broadcast programming, and changes in audience patterns (Herawati & Anggraini, 2024). Formally, community radio gained recognition through the Broadcasting Law No. 32 of 2002, which established community broadcasting institutions as independent, non-commercial legal entities with limited reach. However, the implementation of regulations in the field still presents problems (Hilmi, Alfandi, & Prisdyananti, 2022). Local governments often view community radio as a threat, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as agrarian or human rights matters (Fadilah, Yudhapramesti, & Aristi, 2017). This has contributed to the stigma of "dark radio" or "underground radio." Additionally, technical and financial constraints continue to be obstacles, as noted in previous research (Eddyono & Hanathasia, 2012).

In the post-New Order period, community radio received strong social support because it was considered part of the struggle for democracy and freedom of information (Kementerian Pertahanan Indonesia, 2022). Community members are actively involved in management as a form of political and social participation, and even discourse on revising the Broadcasting Law has emerged (Aminah, 2018). However, internal management issues remain a serious

challenge. Many community radio stations are managed voluntarily without a clear structure, making it difficult to maintain operational sustainability.

In a social context, community radio is seen as a medium "from, by, and for the community." Tabing emphasized that community radio highlights local content, citizen participation, and diversity of information. It is expected to be an alternative media capable of voicing marginal issues, although government regulations often hinder it (Eddyono & Hanathasia, 2015). The challenge intensifies with new regulations such as Law No. 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation, which tightens broadcasting licenses. According to Bowo Usodo from JRKI, this has the potential to weaken the democratization of broadcasting and suppress the existence of community radio (Mediana, 2021).

The development of digital technology also has significant implications. Radio remains relevant as a communication medium but must adapt to avoid being displaced by new platforms (Bahar et al., 2023; Hilmi et al., 2022). The survival of radio now depends on innovation, communication strategies, and the use of digital media to expand reach and interaction with audiences (Sitompul, 2023). This transformation encourages community radio to migrate to digital platforms such as Spotify, SoundCloud, and Joox, while utilizing social media as spaces for interaction and promotion (Cordeiro, 2012; Rohanudin, 2014; Sinabariba, 2023). However, limited resources hinder a uniform adaptation process.

In this study's context, the term "digital age" primarily refers to the use of social media—such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube—for interaction and content distribution. Social media enables audiences not only to be passive recipients but also active participants in producing and disseminating information (Nasution, 2017; Hidayat, 2016). Tabing (1998) identifies five characteristics of community radio: local scale, participatory, self-reliant, non-commercial, and oriented to common interests. These characteristics emphasize the role of community radio in supporting the democratization of broadcasting, although it remains constrained by frequency access and lack of state support (Hirschmeier & Beule, 2021).

Radio Bamba (RBamba) was chosen as the research subject because it is one of the community radios still active today. Located in Sangreng Village, Talagasari Village, Balaraja District, Tangerang Regency, RBamba was established in 1996 on the initiative of Maman, a local community activist. This radio is notable for its consistency in presenting local content, especially dangdut music popular among the working community, as well as its involvement in supporting government programs. RBamba has survived through voluntary listener dues and community support despite legal broadcasting constraints and competition with illegal radio stations. The 2017 KPID Award as the Best Community Radio in Banten Province attests to recognition of its work.

Considering its resilience and adaptability, RBamba is a relevant case study to understand how community radio adapts amid digital disruption (Jankowski, 2013). This research focuses on management dynamics, adaptation strategies, and structural challenges faced by RBamba, aiming to enrich literature on alternative media and support the strengthening of community media literacy (Ibrahim, 2020).

Despite extensive literature on media digitalization and community radio challenges, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how community radio specifically adapts to the digital era while maintaining its community-based identity (Marianto & Vera, 2024). The fundamental research questions addressed include: How do community radios like

Radio Bamba navigate the tension between technological advancement and community values? What specific strategies do they employ to survive regulatory pressures while embracing digital platforms? To what extent can community radio maintain its participatory principles in an increasingly algorithm-driven media landscape?

This research addresses an urgent need to document and understand the survival strategies of community radio in Indonesia's rapidly changing media environment. With many community radios ceasing operations due to digitalization pressures and regulatory challenges, examining successful adaptation models is critical (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The urgency is heightened by the potential loss of local voices and community-based media spaces, which play crucial roles in democratic discourse and cultural preservation.

Previous studies on community radio in Indonesia have primarily focused on regulatory challenges and general sustainability issues (Yuliasari, 2017). However, there is limited research specifically examining how community radios adapt to digital platforms while maintaining their community-centered principles. Most existing studies treat digitalization as either a threat or an opportunity but lack comprehensive analysis of the complex negotiation between technological adaptation and community values.

This study contributes novel insights by examining the specific case of Radio Bamba's digital adaptation through new ethnography, revealing how community radio negotiates between technological advancement and community identity. The research provides unique empirical evidence of how grassroots media organizations develop contextual strategies for digital survival while maintaining their alternative media characteristics. This approach offers a fresh perspective on community media resilience in the digital age.

This research aims to (1) analyze the specific adaptation strategies employed by Radio Bamba in the digital era; (2) understand the motivations and pressures driving digital transformation in community radio; and (3) examine how community radio maintains its participatory principles while embracing digital platforms. The benefits include (1) providing empirical evidence for community media theory development; (2) offering practical insights for other community radios facing similar challenges; (3) informing policy discussions about community media support; and (4) contributing to broader understanding of alternative media survival in digital contexts.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach with a new ethnographic method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to understand social phenomena in depth through descriptive data, emphasizing processes, meanings, and interpretations in their natural context (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Researchers acted as the main instruments in data collection and analysis to explore the internal dynamics of community radio comprehensively (Sugiyono, 2015). The new ethnographic method was relevant because it focused not only on observing group culture or practices but also addressed the dimensions of politics, power, and representation surrounding the community. This approach involved the researcher's reflective awareness of biases and positions, while presenting diverse participant voices. Thus, new ethnography was appropriate to examine the adaptation strategies of community radio amid technological and regulatory changes in the digital era (Moleong, 2017).

The research object was Radio Bamba (RBamba), a community radio selected for its consistent survival despite limited resources. The study focused on adaptation strategies, motivations behind efforts to maintain existence, and innovative approaches RBamba used to stay relevant in the digital media landscape. Research subjects included three main groups: first, RBamba's managers and broadcasters involved directly in managing broadcasts and programs and understanding the community's history and internal dynamics; second, the management of the Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI), an important actor in national coordination and advocacy of community radio; and third, RBamba listeners who actively participated in broadcasts and interacted with programs, providing audience perspectives on the radio's relevance (Nasution, 2017).

Data collected consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data came from in-depth interviews with managers, broadcasters, JRKI administrators, and listeners. These interviews explored experiences related to regulatory challenges, technological limitations, audience participation, and views on community radio's future. Secondary data included non-participant observation of RBamba's broadcast activities and document tracing, such as archives, regulations, policies, JRKI and Kominfo reports, and prior articles and research. This documentation provided historical context and supported the analysis of field findings. Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) model, involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. During reduction, data were selected and grouped by main themes like regulations, internal dynamics, technology use, and audience engagement. The filtered data were presented through descriptive narratives enriched with direct quotes and discussed in relation to Fraser and Estrada's community radio theories and Chris Atton's alternative media concepts. Conclusions were drawn inductively and verified through cross-checking informants, interpretive reflection, and data triangulation.

To maintain validity, the study applied alternative validities as suggested by Saukko. Dialogical validity was ensured by fairly representing participants' voices (truthfulness), maintaining the researcher's critical awareness of personal biases (self-reflexivity), and presenting diverse perspectives (polyvocality). Contextual validity was maintained by understanding the socio-political dynamics affecting community radio (sensitivity to social context) and acknowledging the long history of this media in Indonesian communication (awareness of historicity). Through this combination, the research aimed to produce a valid, contextual understanding of RBamba's adaptation strategies and demonstrate how community radio survives as an alternative medium in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

History

Radio Bamba (RBamba), an abbreviation for Radio Bahana Anak Muda Balaraja, was established in 1996 in Sangreng Village, Talagasari Village, Balaraja District, Tangerang Regency. Born from the collective initiative of local youth who were initially active in the automotive community, RBamba became a space for citizens' expression as well as an alternative means of communication that was free from the dominance of the mainstream media (Saputro, 2020). From the beginning, the principle of "from, by, and for the community" has been the basis of its management. The first broadcast was carried out on the 94.5 MHz frequency with simple devices: assembled transmitters, makeshift studios, and antennas made

from mutual cooperation. In the early days, broadcasting activities were still experimental and lacked technical knowledge. However, these limitations have actually given birth to a culture of shared learning, where technical expertise develops through collective practice and community solidarity. As one of the managers explained:

"The RBamba started from a youth association... The Balaraja youth forum at that time started with nine youth organizations. We got together and had the initiative to establish a local radio station called it in 1996. At that time, there were no regulations related to the community radio law." (Interview with The Associated Press, April 16, 2025)

Because at that time there were no special regulations, RBamba operated as a "local radio" without clear legal status (Sinabariba, 2023). Although it is not legally recognized, RBamba has gained social legitimacy from the community. The studio is an informal public space that is open for anyone to get involved, whether as broadcasters, technicians, or visitors. Citizen participation can be seen in the form of material contributions and direct involvement in broadcasting. The presence of women as broadcasters shows that RBamba is also a space for empowering citizens across ages and genders.

The role of community leaders further strengthens RBamba's position. The village head, for example, had advocated for the need for transmitters to be accommodated in the Development Planning Conference (Musrenbang). Support like this shows that RBamba is seen as a shared social asset (Sitompul, 2023; Sugiyono, 2015; Suskarwati, 2021; Vivian, 2012). The year 2002 became an important momentum when Law No. 32 on Broadcasting recognized the existence of community broadcasting institutions. However, the transition process from illegal radio to legal community radio did not go smoothly. RBamba only started taking care of official permits in 2007 with the help of the Indonesian Community Radio Network (JRKI) and the Banten Regional Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPID). The legalization process was slow due to limited administrative understanding and licensing fees. The Chairman of JRKI, Adi Rumansyah, emphasized:

"... If you mention the permit, if all of them have done the permit process, they have done it before. It's just that they used to be foolish when it came to paying for radio broadcasting permits (ISR)... What is JRKI's move? We have been advocating for this licensing to be free, and now IPP is indeed free, even though ISR is still expensive." (Interview with Adi Rumansyah, April 15, 2025)

Despite facing bureaucratic obstacles and financial limitations, the spirit of self-help is key. RBamba is slowly reorganizing its institutional structure, separating the broadcasting function and supporting community, but still maintaining participatory principles. With social capital and internal flexibility, RBamba has been able to survive for almost three decades. While many local radio stations go out of business, RBamba continues to exist as an alternative space that broadcasts local information, strengthens social cohesion, and is a mirror of citizens' creativity in managing community-based media.

Regulatory Obstacles and the Legalization Process

The journey of legalization of Radio Bamba (RBamba) shows a long dynamic full of administrative, technical, and structural obstacles. Although Law No. 32 of 2002 formally recognizes the existence of community broadcasting institutions, the implementation of regulations in the field does not necessarily facilitate the legalization process. Since its inception in 1996, RBamba has not had a clear legal umbrella. This condition makes its

operations often considered illegal and misunderstood as private radio, even though the orientation and practices are different. Kang Maman, one of the founders of RBamba, recalled how in 1997 the Monitoring Center (Balmon) called them to be coached because the use of frequencies was considered illegal.

"Because the regulation does not have a community radio, it is still fraudulent. And at that time, private radio friends viewed us as private, but we haven't. In 1997, Balmon finally analyzed all frequency users. Finally, we were called and coached at that time." (Interview, April 16, 2025)

Since then, RBamba has participated in regular coaching every six months. Although structurally it does not have an official permit, this step shows good faith to comply with the rules. The choice not to take the private licensing route is based on two things: the high cost and the requirements of a legal entity, PT, which is not in accordance with the non-profit and community-based character. The biggest obstacle arose when the formal licensing process began in 2007. Many administrative requirements such as notary deeds, location permits, and IMBs are enforced equally between community radio and commercial broadcasting institutions. The cost of notifying the deed reached millions of rupiah, while the RBamba simple studio was refused to get an IMB. Technical obstacles also arise because the location of the transmitter is considered too close to the navigation path of Soekarno-Hatta Airport. Balmon even requested that the transmitter coordinate points be moved as far as two kilometers, adding to the cost and labor burden for the manager.

The long process of legalization also requires RBamba to participate in up to 15 Joint Evaluation Forums (FRB). In practice, managers must bring their own printing devices to correct documents directly, as administrative corrections are frequent. The requirement for social support in the form of 250 photocopies of residents' ID cards also triggered public doubts regarding the potential for data misuse. However, thanks to long-established social legitimacy, these barriers can be overcome through a personal approach. In addition, regulations require community radio to be in the frequency range of 107.7–107.9 MHz. RBamba, which initially broadcast on 94.5 MHz, must move to 107.7 MHz and share channels with Radio Kulni in Cikande through a time-sharing system. Under the agreement, Radio Kulni broadcasts programs from morning to noon, while RBamba gets a day-to-night broadcast slot. This compromise, although born of limitations, actually allows both to remain on the air without significant conflicts.

Another obstacle arises when the government requires every broadcasting institution to have an NPWP and Business Identification Number (NIB). For RBamba, which does not have a fixed cash flow, this requirement raises a pseudo-tax problem. The delinquent status was eventually rescinded after clarification with JRKI, but it left a note that the regulations did not yet fully understand the nonprofit nature of community radio. The change in the licensing system to a digital model (OSS) does not necessarily help. The procedures of uploading documents, login, and online verification can prove difficult for managers, especially the elderly. The call center services provided are also less responsive. In this condition, JRKI Banten Region plays an important role in providing administrative assistance as well as advocacy. The support of local communities, including village heads who allocate transmitter budgets through Musrenbang, further shows that RBamba's strength lies in grassroots solidarity.

This entire process lasted more than a decade, until RBamba finally obtained an official license in 2017. Despite its tortuous journey, the journey emphasized that the broadcasting regulatory system is still oriented to commercial logic and has not fully sided with the sustainability of community media. The legalization of RBamba is clear evidence that the sustainability of community radio in Indonesia is determined more by social resilience and network support, than by the ease of state regulation.

Management and Survival Strategy

In the face of various structural and technical challenges, Radio Bamba's management developed a survival strategy that relied on community solidarity, participatory work systems, and institutional flexibility. Unlike commercial broadcasters that have a hierarchical structure and fixed funding sources, RBamba operates through a fluid yet functional model of decentralization of roles and collective self-sufficiency. RBamba's management is divided into two main parts: internal management which deals with legal, technical, and broadcast aspects; as well as external management handled by a community of active fans and listeners. This division is not intended to create distance, but to ensure work efficiency and fair engagement. Broadcasters have autonomy in managing programs, while the listening community has room to convey aspirations and participate in maintaining operational sustainability. This relationship is dialogical and non-centralized, thus fostering a high sense of ownership from all parties involved.

One of RBamba's main strategies in surviving financially is a community-based funding system. No commercial advertising is run, in accordance with the principle of community radio which prohibits commercialization activities. Instead, RBamba relies on voluntary contributions from community members, whether through direct donations, membership programs, to off-air activities such as art performances and cultural events. The following are the results of the interview with Kang Maman, the manager of RBamba Radio:

Yes, 1 month 2 times. Inserted 10 thousand per person for radio. For example, 1 person is 100 thousand, so 110. 10 thousand for radio. This is very, very effective. So they don't feel that way, right? Every month, pay 100 for social gatherings, 10 for radio. (Interview with Kang Maman, manager of RBamba radio, April 16, 2025)

For example, in a wayang golek show managed by one of the founders, part of the show's honorarium is allocated for radio operational needs. This approach builds an internal economic circulation that relies on collective consciousness, not on market transactions. In addition, RBamba developed a membership system with monthly dues. Each active member pays a small nominal amount, which is partly allocated for daily operational costs and partly to pay the annual radio station permit (ISR) dues. Listeners who are members get the benefit of priority in interactive broadcasts, are called by the broadcaster, and are also involved in community activities. This strategy not only eases the financial burden of institutions, but also strengthens the social closeness between radio and audiences.

"If the members have been from the beginning, yes. There is such a thing as participation in lieu of attention. In the 90s, you used to pay attention. Sir, request a song with a width of 5 thousand. Now that we have WA, social media is also sophisticated. You don't have to use a member contribution card now. So the concept is that every time he pays members per month, it means that after the opening, he will definitely be nudged by the broadcaster. Whoever the broadcaster is or at any time during the broadcast will definitely be nudged. And

it can be interactive for free because it is already recorded in active members." (Interview with Kang Maman, Manager of RBamba Radio).

Kang Mamang explained that today RBamba has 187 active members. The member is a listener who is committed to helping fund operational costs. Each member is charged a contribution of 35 thousand/month. The cost is used for operational funds of 25 thousand and 10 thousand is used for ISR (Broadcasting Station Permit) savings. The procurement of broadcast equipment and infrastructure is also carried out collectively. Some important devices such as transmitters and broadcast computers were obtained through the submission of needs in the Musrenbang forum at the village or sub-district level. In one case, the village head provided budget support for the purchase of transmitters, without a direct grant mechanism, but through an empowerment program. This kind of support reflects social recognition of RBamba's role as a connector of citizens' voices. In everyday life, no publisher is paid a fixed salary. However, the distribution of incentives is carried out based on contributions in broadcast activities and relations with the community. For example, when there is a request for a special broadcast from residents, such as the playing of dangdut songs for a celebration or a certain community program, the broadcaster who handles the program receives an honorarium from the residents' contribution. This participation-based incentive model fosters work motivation that relies on social relations, not professional contracts.

Defensive strategies are also seen in adaptive technical work patterns. When the broadcast equipment was damaged by a lightning strike, the community moved quickly to raise funds for repairs. Volunteer technicians from active listeners help with device repairs and antenna reconnections. There are no professional contractors or technicians involved, as the entire process is carried out by community members who have basic expertise and a willingness to learn together. Even for complex technical issues such as the configuration of the frequency spectrum and the manufacture of transmitting antennas, RBamba managers rely more on local knowledge resulting from field experience and discussions with fellow radio communities. The main key in RBamba management is flexibility and social sustainability. Without large financial resources, RBamba was able to stay afloat because it was supported by the collective awareness that this radio was a common property. The manager also explained that not only technicians, broadcasters in RBamba must also be technicians, for example when there is lightning. The following are the results of the interview with the manager, Kang Maman:

Because the basics are that I am also an editor first. IT, software, hardware. To be a user. Servicemen too, users too. Finally, I really understood. It is transmitted to them. Even the friends at Rbamba are unique. So, all broadcasters must be able to install and uninstall devices. Because we are prone to lightning. We can't go 24 hours without any control. This radio continues to run no matter what the weather is. We can't. We broadcast depending on the weather. If there is lightning, all broadcasters must be able to turn off. Pulling out the large antenna should be possible. Girls should be able to do it too. When he wanted to broadcast, he just came. Plug in the device. Plug in the cable. Plug in the audio cable. Turn on the electricity. Self-electrical connector. (Interview with Kang Maman, Radio Manager, April 16, 2025).

The studio space is kept clean alternately by listeners, logistics are provided through mutual cooperation, and strategic decisions are made through deliberation, not instructions. This practice not only ensures the technical continuity of operations, but also creates an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable work environment. In order to attract attention, RBamba

also conducts broadcasts related to the education needed by residents. Kang Maman explained that there are public service advertisements broadcast by RBamba in collaboration with related agencies. Here are the results of the interview:

For example, there is a talk show with, we do it once a month with the Police. There is socialization related to the use of facilities on the highway. Once a month. The Police came here for the Public Relations section, asking for a duration of 30 minutes to talk about the Police's policies, especially now that they are tax-free, for example, free of arrears in West Java. He went up asking for a duration. So that's what we decided. We broke up on social media because they also have their own social media. If he asks for terrestrial, it's terrestrial. Because of its nature, it is not paid. In BKK, with paid BKKBN. In the past, it was once, asking for a duration of one hour. (Interview with Kang Maman, Radio Manager, April 16, 2025)

Socialization is used for two things, namely meeting the information needs of the public or listeners. Second, such programs are used by RBamba as a form of RBamba's commitment to meet the educational needs needed in the community.

- Digital Adaptation and Social Media

The presence of digital platforms and social media has radically changed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. The impact is felt directly for community media ecosystems such as Radio Bamba (RBamba) which previously relied on FM broadcasts with limited local coverage. The significant decline in conventional radio listeners since 2015—along with the expansion of smart device ownership and internet access—has prompted RBamba to pursue a convergence strategy between terrestrial broadcasting and digital platforms. The initial step was taken through the Listening To My Radio cloud streaming service so that broadcasts can be accessed beyond the frequency radius. Furthermore, RBamba's institutional presence is built on Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok. As revealed by the manager: "Finally... there are those on YouTube, on Facebook, on TikTok. Why don't you just make the radio, don't personalize... YouTube RBamba Channel, Facebook, and then TikTok were created." (Interview with The Associated Press, April 16, 2025). The choice of platform is strategic: TikTok is leveraged for organic reach and quick interactions, while YouTube is positioned as a more stable archive of long-form broadcasts.

This transformation not only moved the medium but also changed the culture of broadcasting. Broadcasters who previously relied on sound now perform visually; Studios are set up to be representative, cameras are installed for live, and broadcasters build awareness of expression, appearance, and spatial arrangement. The most obvious challenge arises for senior broadcasters who are not yet familiar with digital devices. For this reason, RBamba held an intensive internal training for three months covering social media literacy, online broadcast operations, and the basics of algorithms. "There are some broadcasters who don't understand... I don't even know his personal account. Finally, all from the beginning... created their personal accounts... Because when broadcasting, you have to understand the operation." (Interview with The Associated Press, April 16, 2025). The impact of this literacy also resonates with listeners: "With RBamba... You can find out how to use social media... Not only is it fun to listen to songs, but also to increase your knowledge... We ask each other questions and give each other their knowledge." (Interview with Lia Firda, April 16, 2025).

Technically, RBamba adopts a resource-efficient multi-platform broadcast system: three mobile-based cameras broadcast simultaneous programs on TikTok, YouTube, and

Facebook Live; a 10 Mbps internet connection is fulfilled through community joint ventures and Wi-Fi sharing with neighbors; Stream monitoring and commentary are carried out via mobile phones with informal coordination. This approach shows that digital adaptation can take place through contextual technological engineering without large investments. Migration to digital platforms also forms new relationships with audiences. The listening community is now cross-regional and generational; groups such as Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan have emerged who actively participate in broadcasts, interact with broadcasters, and even give regular contributions as participation. RBamba isn't just an audio repost; Content is produced according to the character of each platform—a snapshot of interactions and local culture for TikTok, while YouTube hosts long-form broadcasts and documentation. This algorithm-sensitive distribution confirms RBamba's presence not only technically, but also strategically.

On the other hand, the platform brings new limitations. TikTok's community policies and algorithmic censorship—such as the appearance of cigarette smoke or crowds—once stopped broadcasts automatically. RBamba responded with studio supervision and the discipline of online broadcasting ethics. Organizationally, digitalization encourages documentation-based standardization and transparency: online interactions are recorded as part of broadcast reports, and proof of engagement (screenshots of comments/support) become indicators of program performance. This is shaping a new accountability that is relevant in the digital ecosystem.

Ultimately, the convergence between FM and social media for RBamba is an existential strategy: not replacing but expanding the scope and building a more inclusive space of interaction. RBamba is no longer waiting to be searched on frequency; They actively reach the public across platforms. With a strategy that is community-based, resource-efficient, and adaptive to technology, RBamba performs as a laboratory for community media adaptation: survive, experiment, and stay meaningful amidst a fast-paced and algorithmic social media landscape. Digital adaptation, in this case, is not just about avoiding extinction, but formulating a future of alternative media that is more democratic, participatory, and connected.

Hope and Sustainability

After going through a long journey full of challenges of legality, technological adaptation, and community dynamics, Radio Bamba (RBamba) looks to the future with a spirit of survival rooted in collective and participatory values. However, the challenges ahead are increasingly complex. One of the crucial issues is the sustainability of human resources. Many broadcasters come from the early generation who are now entering the elderly, while the involvement of the younger generation has not been optimal even though efforts have been made through community music spaces, digital broadcast forums, and online cultural activities. Without structural support from local governments, regeneration is slow and depends on the personal initiative of the manager. In terms of regulations, the manager hopes that there will be a simplification of bureaucracy and recognition of the unique characteristics of community radio. "The government should look at community radio... obligations are the same as private companies, pay yes, report yes, report, but the rights are limited. Hopefully... provide programs, for example, public appeals, not donations," explained Kang Maman (Interview, April 16, 2025). This expectation reflects a desire that community radio should not be equated with commercial institutions in terms of administrative obligations such as taxes, NIB, or NPWP, which are burdensome in the absence of affirmative support. Criticism has also been directed

at the imbalance of treatment, when illegal radio remains involved in government programs, creating social jealousy and weakening the motivation of legal radio like RBamba.

From the institutional side, RBamba emphasizes the importance of strengthening long-term capacity instead of instant fund assistance. Support in the form of training, digital literacy, broadcast infrastructure access, and content production partnerships are considered more strategic. Collaboration with the government in disseminating public messages—for example, election campaigns, family planning, or local culture—will strengthen RBamba's position as part of a community-based public service ecosystem. Internally, RBamba has set up a sustainability strategy through clear division of tasks, broadcast documentation and evaluation, and transparent financial statements. All are managed collectively to create community trust. This transparency is a differentiator from other community radios that tend to be exclusive.

Going forward, social media is positioned as the main channel for expanding reach, while FM broadcasting is maintained to strengthen local identity. This new paradigm emphasizes proactivity: radio is no longer waiting for an audience, but actively reaching out to the public through various digital platforms. With this strategy, RBamba emphasized that it is not just surviving, but transforming into a concrete example of how community media can be relevant in the digital era. A simple but strong hope is still carried: that the state does not see community radio as a regulatory burden, but rather as a strategic partner in creating a fair, inclusive, and community-based public communication space.

Discussion

During a wave of media change that is accelerating and massive, community radio is facing increasingly complex challenges. In the Indonesian context, many community radios that were once active have now regressed, stopped broadcasting, or even disappeared from the public sphere altogether. The pressure of legality, the lack of human resources, and the disruption of digital technology to the presence of social media make the resilience of community media often tested to the most fragile point. Therefore, the existence of Radio Bamba as a community radio that is still active and consistently broadcasting is an important exception that deserves to be studied. After describing descriptively how this radio survives in social, political, and technological dynamics, this section aims to interpret the findings through a theoretical approach. The formulation of the problem of how and why community radio adapts in the digital age, especially the social media era, will be further analyzed, placing the concept of community radio from Fraser and Estrada as the main frame of thought. In view of Fraser and Estrada, community radio is not just an alternative broadcast channel, but a cultural and social space that allows citizens to be directly involved in production, management, and distribution of information. As the field findings show, realities at the community level are not always as ideal as theoretical definitions. The digital adaptation carried out by the two radios shows forms of compromise, survival strategies, and even shifts in values, especially when regulatory pressures and media disruption are present at the same time. Thus, this discussion not only answers questions about the form of adaptation and the reasons behind it but also tries to uncover the extent to which community radio is still able to maintain its identity amid of increasingly complex technological and bureaucratic logic.

In addition, the discussion in this section not only describes how Radio Bamba survives in the digital era but is also critically directed to dismantle the power structure that surrounds it. This criticism is directed at three main domains. First, the state, through broadcasting

regulations that are often more burdensome than supportive, so that community radio is forced to follow market logic that is not in accordance with their self-help nature. Second, community radio itself, because the ideals of participation and access—as formulated by Fraser and Estrada—are often narrowed to the work of a few individuals, rather than a full collectivity. Third, global digital platforms, which, while opening new spaces, also present a reliance on YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook algorithms, which are not designed for the benefit of local communities. With this frame, the following discussion will place the findings of the field in dialogue with the theories of Fraser & Estrada and Atton, while also pointing out the contradictions and dilemmas facing community radio in the digital age.

Keeping the Waves, Getting Around the Times: The Dynamics of Community Radio Management in the Digital Era

During the media world that is now dictated by algorithms, click rates, and the power of capital, community radio still retains the romanticism of the era when media was a space to gather and share stories. For Radio Bamba (RBamba), broadcasting is not just a product, but a conversation that connects the voices of citizens with their daily lives. This radio survived not because it rejected modernity, but because it believed that the media could remain relevant without having to give up its community roots. RBamba's management cannot be understood by the logic of mainstream media management. There is no HRD, marketing division, or content manager. What exists is a collective work system based on voluntary involvement, where one person can concurrently multitask—tool technician, broadcaster, social media admin, and community liaison. This management was born not because there was a salary or a formal contract, but because there was an ethos of moral responsibility: "this radio must stay alive." This principle is in line with Fraser and Estrada's idea of holistic community involvement, namely that true community radio must be managed, owned, and run directly by the community.

However, conditions on the ground also show an important shift: participation that would normally be collective often narrows to personal work. Some key individuals survived because of emotional bonding, although the participation of local residents decreased. In other words, the sustainability of RBamba is often supported by the dedication of a few people who do not have the heart to let their radio die. This paradox raises a critical question: to what extent is RBamba still fully managed "by the community", or does it rely on strong personal commitments? Nevertheless, this personal dedication still serves to maintain the principle of "access and participation," so that broadcasting is still present as a space for citizens. In facing the digital era, RBamba chose a contextual adaptation path. They built a YouTube channel, managed Instagram, and leveraged TikTok to expand interactions. FM broadcasts are redistributed online, even repackaged to be relevant to digital audiences. Studios are transformed into more aesthetically pleasing, cameras are installed for visual broadcasting, and broadcasters are provided with in-house training on digital literacy and understanding of social media algorithms. All of this was done without the support of government programs or major sponsorships—only community self-help and internal solidarity. This is a typical form of alternative media adaptation, as described by Atton: simple innovations based on community needs, which do not have to be uniform with the logic of the mainstream industry, but are appropriate according to their social and cultural context.

Despite successfully penetrating the digital space, RBamba still grapples with regulatory pressure. After obtaining a Broadcasting License (IPP) and a Radio Station Permit (ISR), they entered the "legal but burdensome media" phase. Regulations require annual reports, device certification, and operational costs that are not proportional to the community's capacity. In this situation, strategy becomes part of the defensive strategy. RBamba, for example, mentions the name of stalls or workshops that support broadcasts in the program, not in the framework of corporate advertising, but as a form of citizen participation. Formally this may be against the rules, but socially it is a solidarity-based microeconomic mechanism. This practice reflects what Atton calls the transformative logic of alternative media: negotiating the formal rules of the state with the participatory value of the community, creating a media space that favors local needs. Furthermore, the management of RBamba is not only about maintaining the broadcast schedule or maintaining the device but also maintaining the emotional relationship between the broadcaster and the listener. Many listeners respond to the broadcast with a form of symbolic support: voluntary contributions, consumption for the broadcaster, or simply accompanying them in the studio. This relationship shows that radio is not just a medium, but a "neighbor" who greets every day. When listeners refer to broadcasters as family, or send greetings across digital platforms, they are affirming social relationships that go much deeper than just media interactions.

Thus, RBamba's management dynamics show that surviving in today's media landscape does not necessarily mean efficient, viral, or profitable. Precisely in its limitations and modesty, RBamba shows that media can remain relevant if managed with a participatory ethos, social flexibility, and community solidarity. In the lens of Fraser and Estrada, the existence of RBamba is proof that community radio is an alternative communication space that provides real access and participation for citizens. While in Atton's perspective, RBamba's practice is a form of cultural resistance to the hegemony of the mainstream media—asserting that citizens' voices should not be dimmed even if they must compete with market logic and digital algorithms.

Adaptation as an Inevitable Choice: Reasons, Pressures, and the Power of Digital Vitality

Adaptation for Radio Bamba (RBamba) is not a free choice, but an inevitability born from social and technological changes. The shift in citizens' media consumption patterns—from song request cards that used to be accompanied by donations, to short greetings via WhatsApp—urges RBamba to change. If in the past listeners left greetings with handwriting, now it is enough with instant messages. This change reflects what Atton calls the need for alternative media to continue to redefine itself: not just a counterpart to the mainstream media, but a social space that is sensitive to the transformation of people's habits. However, this adaptation brings a new dilemma. Social media expands reach, but at the same time changes the intensity of closeness. Announcers who used to recognize the voice of the listener now only read text without intonation; Greetings that used to feel personal now resemble an "anonymous mention." For RBamba's managers, social media is positioned not as a substitute for broadcast houses, but as an additional window—a way for community voices to penetrate the village boundaries without losing their roots. But critical questions remain: is brief interaction on social media enough to maintain the horizontal relationships that characterize community radio, or instead shift it to shallow, algorithm-based relationships?

The pressure to adapt comes not only from social change, but also from regulations. Administrative obligations through online systems such as OSS and SIMP3, device certifications, and annual reports, demand capacity that is often beyond the reach of the community. Many managers are unfamiliar with the digital bureaucracy but are still forced to follow the logic of the state. In this context, adaptation becomes a micropolitical practice: how RBamba negotiates between formal compliance and survival strategies. For example, by naming a support stall on the air—which is formally considered an advertisement but socially understood as a form of community support. This practice illustrates what Atton calls transformative ethics: shifting the logic of the market into social solidarity, without losing local relevance.

Adaptation also means value negotiation. RBamba cannot only reject modernity but also cannot give in to market logic. The use of YouTube for rebroadcasts, the use of TikTok for visual interaction, or even experiments with new technologies such as digital jingle creation, show that adaptation is not just technical, but also ideological. The question that arises is always ethical: is this still a community? Is it still in accordance with the principle of, by, and for citizens? Fraser and Estrada emphasize that community radio should remain horizontal and participatory. In RBamba's practice, that principle is constantly being tested, as sustainability demands value flexibility.

RBamba's vitality ultimately does not lie in its technological sophistication, but in the courage to continue to say hello even though it is limited. Their digital adaptation does not mean chasing virality or profit, but ensuring that citizen greetings, local music, and village news remain on the air. Social media becomes a bridge, not a destination; Technology is just an aid, not a ruler. In an increasingly automated digital world, RBamba's choice to maintain local nuances and emotional relationships with citizens is a subtle, but loud form of resistance: the community's voice must not be lost, even if it has to grapple with algorithms and bureaucracy.

Between Hope and Sustainability: Interpreting Community Radio Resilience

RBamba's long journey—from the struggle for legality, to solidarity-based economic strategy, to digital adaptation with limited resources—shows that the sustainability of media does not always rely on large funds or advanced technology. It rests on something more fundamental: commitment to community. Behind the consistency of broadcasting, there is unheard-of fatigue, unrecorded pressure, and a burden often borne by a handful of people who believe that community radio is a space worth fighting for. This kind of resilience echoes the principle of holistic community involvement: sustainability is born from community involvement—not just as a listener, but as part of the system that nurtures and brings it to life. Broadcasting that "stays on" is not just a technical routine, but a long-term social work.

The critical point: resilience that relies on individual dedication without regeneration risks embodying "personal dependence." Participation that is ideally spread often narrows down to the survival work of a handful of key figures. Here there is a gap between the participatory ideal and the operational reality. Therefore, strengthening the regeneration mechanism, more equitable division of roles, and intergenerational learning are requirements so that resilience is not fragile. RBamba's hope is actually simple: the state not only rules, but also recognizes; regulation not only tests compliance, but understands the context; Technology does not keep people away, but brings closer together citizens who are scattered in the digital

frenzy. They are not demanding huge subsidies; They are asking for fair frequency, proportionate procedures, and support schemes that are aligned with the nonprofit's character. Ironically, during the promise of connectivity in the digital era, the listening space of citizens' media is actually threatened to narrow by the flow of corporate information and algorithmic logic. In this situation, "defending" itself is already a form of resistance.

The strength of RBamba is not measured by followers or views, but by attachment: by mothers who leave greetings for migrant children, fathers who offer prayers on evening broadcasts, young people who learn to greet microphones for the first time. This is what Atton understands as the core of alternative media: the social relations produced by communication practices. RBamba converts broadcast into presence: not the monetization of attention, but the nurturing of trust—built slowly, on a day-to-day basis from real relationships. Because it is based on relationships, the challenges have also changed. As interactions shift to a fast-paced, instant digital space, community values must take on new forms. Not all young people are interested; not all parents are comfortable; Yet there are always those who survive—they become the backbone of new possibilities that are built slowly. Here, the value of freedom of expression and two-way interaction finds its actualization: independence that remains open to strategic collaboration, participation accompanied by transparency and accountability.

Inward criticism remains important: the romanticism of "citizen voices" needs to be balanced with long-term strategies—systematic regeneration, digital literacy, and cross-community networking. Without it, the burden of resilience will continue to be borne by the older generation and make sustainability vulnerable. But at the same time, RBamba has proven that the little ones can last if anyone believes. The measure of success is not virality, but continuity, not a momentary impression, but a long-term attachment. In the end, the question is not "how long" RBamba can last, but "why" he chose to stay. The answer goes back to the community: because there are still residents who feel that their voices are represented; Because broadcasts are not just entertainment, but a reminder that they are not alone. If there is still one listener who tunes the frequency, one broadcaster who is willing to read the greetings without being paid, and one manager who is willing to patch up the electricity cost from personal pockets, RBamba will stay alive. And if one day the waves are completely silent, hopefully not because they lost, but because their mission has been fully delivered: that the voice of the community—no matter how small—deserves to continue to be heard.

CONCLUSION

This research examined how and why community radios Radio Bamba and Radio Suara Waditra adapt and survive amidst rapid media digitalization, particularly in the social media era. The findings reveal that their adaptation processes are contextually grounded and reflect their communities' capacities and characteristics: Radio Bamba adopted progressive digital practices such as audio-visual content production and live streaming, while Radio Suara Waditra maintained analog broadcasting with limited social media use. Their adaptations were driven not by trends but by survival needs responding to changes in citizen interaction, regulatory demands, and sustainability challenges amid unequal access and limited state support. This confirms community radio as an alternative media form rooted in participation, access, and self-management, aligned with Fraser and Estrada's and Chris Atton's theories on media collectivity and opposition to dominant market logics. The radios demonstrate that

resilience relies more on social and cultural relevance than technological sophistication, sustaining a vital, though quieter, space for marginalized voices in a digital landscape dominated by industrial and algorithmic forces. Future research could explore how these adaptive strategies impact community engagement and the long-term viability of community radios in diverse socio-political contexts.

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