



Communication Challenges of Outer Baduy Youth in the Digital Era: A SWOT Analysis

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Abstract. This study analyzes the communication challenges faced by Outer Baduy youth amid the increasingly pervasive penetration of digital technology. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research combines in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, youth representatives, cultural experts, and academics, along with a review of recent literature. SWOT analysis is employed as a framework to map the community's internal strengths, such as strong social cohesion and cultural adaptability; internal weaknesses, such as limited technology access and indigenous media literacy; external opportunities, including supportive policies, digital economy trends, and growing appreciation of local culture; and external threats, related to cultural erosion, media exploitation, and pressures of globalization. These conditions reflect a form of digital marginalization that challenges the community's ability to access and critically engage with digital content. The results indicate that Outer Baduy youth can serve as strategic bridges between tradition and modernity. The study proposes SWOT-based communication strategies that are adaptive, culturally informed, and community-empowering. In this way, communication becomes not only a means of preserving cultural identity but also a strategic tool to strengthen cultural sustainability and enhance the competitiveness of indigenous communities in the digital era.

Keywords: Outer Baduy Youth, Indigenous Media Literacy, Digital Marginalization, SWOT-Based Communication, Cultural Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The Baduy tribe, especially the Outer Baduy community, is an indigenous Sundanese group in the interior of Banten, Indonesia, known for strictly adhering to the Sunda Wiwitan belief and traditional customs. Their life is characterized by simplicity, harmony with nature, and self-sufficiency passed down through generations. Today's Outer Baduy youth face unique communication challenges: on one hand, they must communicate internally in accordance with customary values when dealing with elders, parents, peers, and younger members; on the other hand, they are increasingly required to interact externally with a digitalizing outside world.

The entry of modern communication technology into the Outer Baduy community has triggered inevitable social changes. Although the Baduy people have historically had minimal engagement with modern technology, digital tools are slowly making their way into daily life. Outer Baduy youth have begun to encounter mobile phones, social media, and the internet, whether to communicate with tourists or to market their handicrafts online. This phenomenon brings economic benefits and broader horizons, but simultaneously raises concerns about the erosion of customary values and changes in the community's internal communication patterns. For example, the Baduy traditional council went so far as to petition for their region to be free from internet signals in order to protect their traditions.

To understand this complex situation, this study examines the communication challenges of Outer Baduy youth in the digital era using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) approach. This analysis highlights internal factors (the community's strengths and weaknesses, including values, norms, and customary rules) as well as external factors (opportunities and threats in the macro context, analyzed through PESTEL: Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental, and Legal factors). By applying a strategic management perspective, the analysis aims to formulate appropriate communication strategies that bridge the needs of cultural preservation with the benefits of technology adoption.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on the Outer Baduy community. A qualitative method was chosen to deeply explore the phenomena of communication and the socio-cultural dynamics underlying them, aligning with a constructivist paradigm that views social reality as shaped by actors' subjective meanings. The primary data collection technique was in-depth, semi-structured interviews, supplemented by documentary research. A total of nine key informants were selected purposively for interviews, comprising: (1) two Baduy elders who provided perspectives on local wisdom and customary policies; (2) two Baduy youth leaders who act as young champions or bridges between tradition and the millennial generation; (3) two Outer Baduy young people active on social media (youth who use digital platforms for various purposes); (4) one Baduy culture observer who understands the broader cultural context; (5) one social communication expert (academic) who provided theoretical insight on community communication; and (6) one local government official involved in policymaking related to the Baduy. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian. The questions focused on the informants' experiences and views regarding internal communication patterns in the Baduy community, changes noticed since the arrival of digital technology, attitudes toward social media, challenges faced by youth in communication, and strategic efforts or suggestions to address these dilemmas. Field notes were also taken to record non-verbal context and situational observations during research in Kanekes Village.

Literature study was conducted in parallel with the interviews, covering books, scholarly journals, reports, and credible news articles related to the research topic. Sources reviewed include prior studies on the Baduy community and technology (e.g., [1]–[4]), literature on digital communication and indigenous communities, foundational theories of strategic communication [5], as well as recent news about the Baduy.

Data analysis was carried out thematically and comparatively. First, the interview recordings were transcribed and read repeatedly to identify key themes. Next, each theme was categorized within the SWOT framework: findings related to internal strengths, internal weaknesses, external opportunities, and external threats. This categorization followed qualitative coding and content analysis techniques, guided by concepts from the literature review. For instance, a respondent's statement about young people's obedience to customary leaders was coded as "Strength: social cohesion & adherence to custom," whereas an informant's complaint about misuse of mobile phones was coded as "Threat: negative impact of technology." Each SWOT category was then examined through a PESTEL lens to ensure all external aspects (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal) were considered. The analysis results are presented in a descriptive-narrative form in the Results and Discussion section, enriched with anonymous interview quotes and relevant literature references to support the arguments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the in-depth interviews and literature study, a variety of findings were obtained and mapped into the SWOT analysis. The following discusses the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) affecting the communication of Outer Baduy youth in the digital era.

1. INTERNAL FACTORS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Strengths. The community exhibits several internal strengths that serve as assets in facing the digital era:

- **Adherence to customary values and norms:** Outer Baduy youth continue to strongly uphold traditional values and decisions of the customary council. One young interviewee (male, 25) explained, "The internet is important for us in Outer Baduy for communication, but if custom forbids it, we can't say much. We respect whatever the adat (customary) decision is." This illustrates the high loyalty and obedience of the younger generation to customary leadership and rules. Such respect for tradition provides a sturdy cultural foundation to filter outside influences.
- **Strong social cohesion and solidarity:** The Baduy community maintains robust group cohesion through mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) and consensus in daily life. Issues tend to be addressed collectively. For example, when negative content about the Baduy spread on social media, Inner and

Outer Baduy leaders swiftly held a joint meeting on 29 June 2024 and issued a united ultimatum demanding that the exploitative content involving Baduy women be taken down. This prompt and united action demonstrates effective traditional leadership and solid community support [6]. Such social solidarity is a strength that enables a coordinated response to external communication challenges.

- **Linguistic and cultural adaptability:** Despite a lack of formal education, the Baduy have shown a notable ability to adapt in communication. Over 70% of Baduy people can speak Indonesian sufficiently well to interact with tourists, and many young Baduy are able to confidently explain their cultural philosophy to outsiders [7]. This multilingual capability and cross-cultural understanding is a communication strength that helps Baduy youth negotiate with the modern world on their own terms.
- **Creative use of technology within tradition's limits:** Outer Baduy youth have demonstrated local ingenuity (local genius) in using technology in limited but effective ways that align with their customs. Rustiraning [1] documents how a young Baduy man, Narman, manages an Instagram account @BaduyCraft to sell handicrafts in a unique way. He creates content offline in the village (which has no electricity or signal) and uploads it when he travels outside the village, all while curating the content to comply with customary norms. This example shows that the younger generation can innovatively harness digital media for community benefit without completely violating adat restrictions.

Weaknesses. On the other hand, the analysis revealed several internal weaknesses that could hinder the community's response to the digital era:

- **Limited infrastructure and technical skills:** The Baduy heartland has no electricity or telecommunication signals at all (Inner Baduy area), and even Outer Baduy territory only has a few spots at the fringes with weak signal. When Baduy youths want to access the internet or charge a phone, they must walk out of the village to areas with electricity and network coverage. While this limitation is deliberately maintained to honor tradition, practically it is a weakness because access to modern information and communication is highly restricted. In addition, the technical ability of the youth to use digital devices is still minimal and self-taught; knowledge of digital literacy, cybersecurity, and content filtering is acquired informally, if at all.
- **Generation gap in adopting new communication:** Interviews with customary elders revealed concerns that some young people pay less attention to adat because they are preoccupied with their "world of mobile phones." One elder noted that "young people now often have their eyes on their phones, forgetting to greet others," indicating that — even if not widespread — there are signs of weakening traditional social interaction and discipline among certain youth. This generational tension is a weakness that could undermine internal cohesion if digital habits override customary etiquette.
- **Lack of formal education and modern knowledge:** The absence of formal schooling in the Baduy community means youth have limited knowledge in certain domains important in the digital era, such as media literacy, information management, and foreign languages. This educational gap makes it harder for them to fully understand and navigate the broader information society, posing a weakness when dealing with complex external communication or opportunities that require those skills.
- **Rigid customary rules slowing adaptation:** Extremely strict adat rules can become a weakness when quick responses to change are needed. For example, custom forbids modern objects like phones, cameras, or metal tools inside Inner Baduy territory; this rule is absolute. In urgent situations or crises, relying on digital solutions is often delayed or avoided due to the need to uphold the rules. One young man, Ako Sarka, recounted that he reluctantly bought a mobile phone and opened a bank account during the COVID-19 pandemic (when no tourists came) to sell products online, even though it technically violated adat and created a personal dilemma for him. He concluded that this step was for the good of the tribe, but this example highlights how the rigidity of certain customary norms can make the community slow to respond to crises or modern needs, since any adaptation must be carefully negotiated with tradition.

2. EXTERNAL FACTORS: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Opportunities. Various external conditions in the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal domains present opportunities for the Outer Baduy community in the digital era:

- **Policy support and indigenous rights recognition:** In recent times, the Indonesian government has shown greater support for indigenous communities' rights. Politically, a draft law on Indigenous Peoples is under discussion, aimed at protecting customary land rights and cultures of communities like the Baduy. The provincial and local governments in Banten have also been responsive to Baduy aspirations. For instance, when the Baduy council submitted a petition to cut off internet access in Kanekes, the Lebak Regency government promptly held an official meeting on 16 June 2023 with Baduy representatives and agreed to respect whatever decision the community made, pledging support for their choice. This kind of government responsiveness and the prospect of stronger legal protections provide an opportunity for the community to assert control over how technology impacts them [8].
- **Digital economic opportunities:** The digital era offers creative economic prospects for Outer Baduy youth. Through marketing on social media and e-commerce, traditional Baduy products — such as woven fabrics, handicrafts, forest honey, and durian — can reach much wider markets beyond on-site tourist visits. The success story of Ako Sarka is a concrete example: after he began selling Baduy products on online platforms, his revenue reached about IDR 8 million per month, nearly three times what he earned relying solely on the conventional tourist market. He even helped sell his relatives' products online. Another resident, Jamal, noted that now they can announce the durian harvest via WhatsApp to buyers outside, so their produce no longer goes to waste waiting for tourists. These examples show how digital tools can boost the local economy and empower youth entrepreneurship.
- **Social and cultural trends favoring local wisdom:** Socially, there is a growing public appreciation for local culture and indigenous wisdom in the digital age. Social media is replete with content highlighting unique cultures and local wisdom, including content about the Baduy, which often goes viral and garners public sympathy. Outer Baduy youth can leverage this trend for personal and community branding. Indeed, some have become nano-influencers with thousands of followers on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, sharing their daily village life, traditional weaving tutorials, or treks through nature. These authentic glimpses of Baduy life attract modern audiences hungry for traditional values. Thus, there is an opportunity for youth empowerment as cultural ambassadors through digital platforms, allowing them to correct misinformation about the Baduy and present narratives from their own perspective.
- **Technological advancements suitable for adaptation:** Although Baduy customs inherently limit technology usage, the evolution of technology offers solutions that can be aligned with their needs. Communication technology is becoming more user-friendly, affordable, and flexible, which creates opportunities for selective adoption of appropriate technologies. For example, mobile phones now have long-lasting batteries and offline modes, enabling Baduy youth to create digital content without frequent recharging. Since villages lack electricity, they commonly use solar-powered battery packs, which are increasingly available. Portable satellite or signal booster devices can be set up only at designated spots outside the inner village, so as not to disturb adat rules. Such technological innovations provide the community a chance to reap some benefits of connectivity and digital content creation in a controlled manner.
- **Environmental reputation and eco-partnerships:** The Baduy are renowned for their commitment to environmental conservation, as they fiercely protect their ancestral forests. In an era of climate crisis, this ecological wisdom becomes a comparative advantage that can be highlighted in external communication. Outer Baduy youth could serve as spokespersons on environmental issues — sharing their practices of sustainable living without electricity, without motorized vehicles, organic farming, and so on. This positive narrative can attract global support for their community in the form of environmental programs, sustainable eco-tourism initiatives, or conservation funding partnerships, all of which are opportunities to strengthen their community while preserving their environment.
- **Leverage of legal frameworks for advocacy:** Beyond domestic politics, international legal instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provide a basis for advocacy. The Baduy can invoke the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) regarding any development or technology policies in their area. This represents an opportunity for their voices to be heard in formal forums, and their communication strategies can be bolstered through legal channels if needed. In short, global indigenous rights frameworks offer the Baduy community additional leverage to ensure that external interventions respect their autonomy.

Threats. The digital era also brings a range of external threats across various domains that the Baduy community must be mindful of:

- **Political and legal threats:** Even with current supportive policies, future shifts could pose risks. There is a possibility of policy changes or development pressures that conflict with Baduy interests. For example, if central authorities one day decide that the Baduy region must be “opened up” for infrastructure or mass tourism development, it could lead to a clash of interests. External intervention in the form of top-down policies without community consent would threaten the Baduy way of life and control over their communications environment.
- **Economic threats:** The digital economy comes with its own risks. The entry of online intermediaries could weaken the bargaining position of Baduy producers if they lack control over the supply chain. There is a risk of exploitation by outside parties — for instance, entrepreneurs who use Baduy cultural motifs for commercial gain without fair profit-sharing. Online marketing also means competition with mass-produced goods; Baduy crafts might be outcompeted by factory-made imitations or other cultural products flooding the online market. Such competitive and exploitative pressures threaten the community’s economic sustainability if not managed properly.
- **Social and cultural threats:** The erosion of cultural values and norms is a primary threat. Intense interaction with the outside world via digital media can inculcate consumerism, individualism, or modern lifestyle habits in the youth that conflict with the Baduy principles of simplicity and communal life. A study [3] observed a shifting interpretation of pikukuh karuhun (ancestral rules) among Baduy millennials due to frequent contact with tourists and digital devices. If left unchecked, younger generations may experience cultural disorientation. Another threat is the exploitation and stereotyping of Baduy culture by external media or content creators. For instance, some social media influencers have sensationalized the Baduy as a “primitive tribe” or portrayed them as “anti-modern” without understanding that the Outer Baduy are actually dynamic. Uncontrolled tourism spurred by viral social media fame has also brought negative consequences: many visitors disrespect adat (entering forbidden Inner Baduy areas or violating no-photo rules), forcing locals to perform exhausting ritual atonements for these breaches. Over-tourism has environmental impacts too, such as litter, trail erosion, and social pressure toward commercialization of culture (e.g., youths tempted to abandon farming to become tour guides for quick money). Such social and cultural disruptions pose serious threats to the community’s integrity [6].
- **Technological threats:** From the technology perspective, threats include a widening digital divide and exposure to harmful content. If surrounding areas continue to get better internet infrastructure while the Baduy region remains a blank spot, important information (e.g., disaster warnings, market information) might not reach them in time. Also, Baduy youth could fall behind in digital skills compared to other youths, reducing their competitiveness if they ever need to work outside the community. Another threat is the influx of unfiltered negative information: the internet carries content like pornography, violence, scams, and hoaxes, which could infiltrate if devices are used without guidance. Without proper digital literacy or filters, these harmful contents pose moral and social risks to the community’s youth.
- **Environmental threats:** The Baduy natural environment is relatively well-preserved, but the introduction of technology can bring environmental hazards. Electronic waste, such as discarded batteries and broken phones, could pollute the soil they protect if not managed properly. Additionally, opening up the region (through new signals or roads) could invite exploitation of natural resources by outsiders, such as illegal mining or logging in their forests. Thus, technological connectivity, if not carefully controlled, may indirectly lead to environmental degradation, undermining the very ecosystem the Baduy strive to maintain.

CONCLUSIONS

Outer Baduy youth stand at an important crossroads in the history of their community’s communication. On one hand, they have inherited a rich Sunda Wiwitan cultural heritage and strong communal norms that uphold identity and social order. On the other hand, they live in a digital era that presents new communication challenges and opportunities, both internally and externally. The SWOT analysis conducted from a strategic management perspective indicates that (1) internal strengths such as adherence to custom,

social cohesion, linguistic adaptability, and local creativity provide a solid foundation to filter outside influences; (2) internal weaknesses like limited access and technology literacy, generational gaps, minimal formal education, and the rigidity of some customary rules must be acknowledged and addressed so they do not hinder the community's response to changing times; (3) external opportunities include government support, digital economic potential, trends of local culture appreciation, appropriate technology assistance, momentum from environmental campaigns, as well as legal protections for indigenous rights; and (4) external threats — such as cultural erosion, media exploitation, over-commercialization, misinformation, and various modern socio-economic risks — are real and already being felt, and could intensify if not managed wisely.

Recommendations: Based on the above findings, several strategic recommendations are proposed for managing community communication of the Outer Baduy in facing the digital era:

- **Formulate Updated Customary Rules on Technology:** The Baduy customary institution should proactively formulate updated *adat* regulations regarding the limits and guidelines of technology use for Outer Baduy residents. This could take the form of a written customary guideline that clearly specifies what is permitted and forbidden concerning mobile phones, social media, photography, and interactions with the digital world.
- **Digital Literacy Programs and Assistance:** Strategic communication management for the community needs to include initiatives to improve media and digital literacy among the youth. Local government, academics, and NGOs can be invited to collaborate in providing practical training in the Outer Baduy vicinity on topics such as wise smartphone use, leveraging social media for productive purposes, recognizing online dangers (hoaxes, pornography, fraud), and strategies to mitigate those risks. Culturally tailored digital literacy workshops would empower Baduy youth to navigate the online world more safely and effectively.
- **Integrated External Communication Strategy:** To counter threats like misinformation and exploitation by outsiders, the community should implement a more coordinated external communication strategy. First, appoint an official spokesperson or customary community public relations representative who can speak on behalf of the Baduy in the media. Second, the community can establish an official digital presence (such as an authorized website or social media page) to disseminate accurate information and represent their narrative to the public. By centralizing and managing outgoing messages, the Baduy can better protect their image and correct misconceptions in the digital sphere.
- **Collective Digital Economy Initiatives:** To harness economic opportunities without creating internal inequality, it is recommended to form a community-based digital enterprise. For example, the Outer Baduy could establish a cooperative e-commerce platform managed by the youth under elder supervision to market Baduy products (textiles, crafts, agricultural produce) online with fair profit-sharing for artisans and farmers. A collective approach ensures that the benefits of online business are distributed equitably and align with communal values, preventing individual ventures from undermining social harmony.
- **Technology-Enabled Cultural Preservation and Education:** Rather than weakening Baduy culture, technology can be used to strengthen it. For instance, create digital archives (photos, videos, audio recordings, and written documents) of Baduy oral history, genealogy, rituals, and crafts — done with the permission of customary leaders — to safeguard this knowledge for future generations. Such digital preservation efforts, possibly supported by outside researchers or heritage organizations, would ensure that Baduy cultural assets are documented on the community's own terms. Additionally, these archives and other educational content (e.g., learning materials about Baduy traditions) could be used in culturally appropriate educational programs for Baduy children and youth, blending technology with tradition to reinforce identity.

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