

The Digital Kampung: The Role of Mediated Communication in Indonesia's Online Community Dynamics

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Abstract

Emergence of new communities in digital age, the advent of digitized era in Indonesia and the further development of personal computing are substituting some links between people that they used to be face-to-face before. Thus, developing community implies more than ever before a virtual space which could never create without technology. This paper analyses these “digital kampung” spaces through the lens of Mediatization Theory and Cultural Proximity Theory. The analysis takes places through the lens of qualitative content analysis, focusing on patterns in communicative practices across selected community-based Facebook groups, WhatsApp networks, and local marketplace platforms. Against this backdrop, the paper explains how mediated communication transforms *gotong royong* (mutual aid) into hybrids that integrate online coordination with offline enactment. Cultural affinity remains an influence, since common language, symbols and stories that have to do with the place help members feel as if they belong even when they are scattered all over. But the findings also capture tensions: for example, between misinformation and lack of access to digital tools and shifts in what is considered trust. The digital kampung is both the continuation and also an adaptation of age old communal traditions in Indonesia, it illustrates how technological platforms can facilitate social coherence whilst responding to some of the complex cultural contexts between urban–rural divides.

Keywords: *digital kampung, mediated communication, mediatization theory, cultural proximity, online community, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital communication technologies has altered the production, maintenance, and transformation of communities. This transition is particularly notable in Indonesia where collectivist values and community-based practices are still significant in social life. The acceleration of more than 78% of the population gaining internet connectivity by 2024 has resulted in the development of online platforms which resemble and even disrupt social and cultural processes akin to those found within the traditional *kampung*. These “digital *kampung*” settings range from community Facebook groups and WhatsApp neighborhood networks to hyperlocal marketplace platforms that function like physical communal spaces transplanted into the digital world.

Mediatization Theory provides the proper theoretical framework to analyze how the digital media logic transmigrates interaction patterns, and how communicative practices are being

inscribed in technology of platforms. At the same time, Cultural Proximity Theory accounts for why people are attracted to online spaces where recognizable linguistic, cultural, and symbolic forms are reflected [1]. These perspectives together provide a framework to analyze the transformation of Indonesian communities in adapting *gotong royong* (mutual aid) practices, given mediated communication opportunities, and constraints.

There is evidence that digital *kampung* spaces can strengthen community relations, ease collective solutions, and overcome distance (ibid); but they also become hosts to new challenges. The rise of falsehood, disparities in digital literacy between cities and countrysides, and shifting norms around trust also provide greater challenges for them to support social cohesion [2]. Understanding these dynamics is critical to the analysis of Indonesia's sweeping digital transformation, which draws on global technological trends as well as conservative cultural logics.

The paper is a study of communicative practices in the context of selected digital *kampung* communities in Indonesia, posing three interrelated questions: (1) How does mediated communication influence traditional modes of community interaction? (2) How have cultural proximity affected people's involvement and sense of belonging in the online communities? (3) What possibilities and tensions arise as such communities position digital affordances in relation to local traditions? The research responds to these questions within the theoretical and empirical debate on technology, culture, and community in the digital age.

METHOD

This study was qualitative in nature and examined digital *kampung* communities through communicative practices within Indonesia. The complex process of adaptation and conversion of the traditional social norms in digital platforms was facilitated by using a qualitative approach. The study was framed by Mediatization Theory and Cultural Proximity Theory, which provided a theoretical lens to explore the interplay between technological affordances and culturally embedded communication practices.

Sample selection An ample and purposive sampling was used to recruit online communities that are either originated from or explicitly represent a particular urban or rural *kampung* in Indonesia, engaged actively, such as having made at least 50 posts or interactions monthly within the past six months, and were using platforms known for significant community engagement in Indonesia Facebook Groups, WhatsApp group chats, or local e-commerce marketplace forums (e.g., Tokopedia's community features).

Five communities were selected for study: two from rural areas (Central Java and West Nusa Tenggara), two urban areas (Jakarta, Surabaya), and an interstitial group that linked *kampung* migrants to their home village.

Methods from February to April 2025 were applied for data collection:

- a. #Archival retrieval #Facebook group Save/download posts and comments from public FB groups.
- b. Participant observation: Gaining permission from the admin to enroll as an observer in communities and see how people communicate on WhatsApp and hybrid online–offline events.
- c. Document Capture: Keeping of visual and written artifacts such as memes, fliers, and announcements delivered in the communities.

We obtained ethical approval prior to data collection and ensured that all participant names were anonymized. In the published results, to preserve privacy, no identifiable images or personal information were included.

We conducted thematic coding of the data using NVivo 14. The coding scheme was developed following the theoretical approach, and the first index points stemmed from: Dimensions of mediatization (e.g., platform logic, temporal structuring, spatial expansion). Likenesses in culture (the use of the local language, references to certain cultures and symbolic elements).

Coding was iterative, so that new themes could appear on their own. For example, “digital *gotong royong*” emerged as a sub-theme of mediatization and cultural proximity, illustrating the hybrid nature of online–offline collaboration. Triangulation was then done by comparing findings across the different platforms and sectors.

Security and credibility of data were ensured by longterm engagement with the informants, peer-debriefing with two Indonesian communication scholars as well as member-check on the message list filters from leaders. Detailed description of the context within each community eased transferability. The study only focuses on digitally active communities and overlooked *kampung* communities that are less techno savvy, hence the limitations of this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

‘Looking’ for digital *kampung* an analysis of the five selected digital *kampung* communities revealed three interlocking themes: Digital *Gotong Royong*; showing concern towards one another and collaborating to overcome issues in digitized environments. Local languages, cultural symbols as unifying forces: supporting identity and a sense of belonging through communications grounded in the culture. Managing trust in mediated spaces it is a fine line between being sharing and checking things through on online conversations. These themes suggest the transition and evolution of *kampung*’s old social to become mediated and showing indeed platform logics and cultural continuation go hand in hand.

Gotong royong, an all-important part of Indonesian social life, was being digitally practiced in every community. In city-based Facebook groups, members pooled their resources to organize charity drives for disaster relief. In rural WhatsApp groups, people collaborated on agricultural labor exchanges and village festivities. Mediatization was the process that made these things happen faster and on a bigger scale [3]. Specific crowdfunding links, for example, could be shared in a matter of minutes, speeding up the collection of resources.

The findings suggest that the rules about giving and getting have evolved as well. In the offline context, involvement in *gotong royong* tends to be obligatory whereas in online settings, members engage more volitionally. This goes in line with Hjarvard’s [4] notion that mediatization breeds new periods and participation structures, which allow for selecting without losing the collective floor.

Cultural Proximity Theory elucidates why these virtual communities remained vibrant despite their geographical dispersion. All five groups used local dialects (such as Javanese and Sasak) in addition to Bahasa Indonesia. They also employed locally unique idioms and humor. Pictorial artifacts, of people in native dress or local landmarks, served to reinforce a united identity.

Such reliance on contextual communication also supported the “at-home” experience of digital conversation and corroborates Straubhaar, [5] who argues cultural comfort breeds loyalty. However, these very mechanisms could inadvertently exclude new members outside of the cultural group, leading to a loss of diversity and opportunity for cross-cultural interactions.

The digital *kampung* replicated a trust-based dynamic found in real-life village communities, but mediated communication made it less secure. Misinformation much of it, when it came to news about events in the area, unverified was a persistent issue. In three of the groups, administrators-imposed verification protocols, like requiring people to provide photo or video evidence before spreading urgent community alerts [6].

This adaptation proves how open digital platforms can be and how culturally cohesive groups need to support trust. Mediatization wise, this is a practice of recalibrating community norms to make them consistent with the operational logics of platforms and protect core values of societies.

The study shows that mediatization and cultural proximity are not parallel processes but intersect in shaping the dynamics of digital *kampung*. The speedy activation of culturally patterned behaviors is supported by affordances (instant messaging, multimedia sharing) afforded to people by the platform [7], with the familiarity grounded in shared culture assuring that digital events are personally significant for participants. But the intersection can also deepen insularity, forming what Couldry and Hepp [8] describe as “communicative enclaves,” where people are highly engaged — though only with those like themselves.

Urban cities widely used digital platforms to organize, network and advocate with those beyond the local community. They did this, for instance, by speaking with local government agencies through approved WhatsApp channels. In rural communities, digital means were primarily used to plan events and coordinate activities in their own localities, such as setting the days for farming and planning ceremonial events [9]. This variance illustrates how digital infrastructures are changed according to local requirements, and so how mediatization depends on situation [10].

With the theme of OSC 2025 “Collaborative Digital Transformation”, digital *kampung* is not without its pros and cons. It shows how mediated communication can help people stay together when they are physically distant, and it also shows the critical importance of digital literacy, trust management and involving everyone in the conversation. By reinforcing these areas, we can help ensure that when digital changes are introduced, they do not simply turn online into all the other spaces where things are wrong.

CONCLUSION

This current study has focused on how traditional socialization practices in Indonesian digital *kampung* communities have adopted the affordance of digital ICTs and

applied Mediatization Theory or Cultural Proximity Theory as a medium of analysis. The results indicate that mediated community unification is not a mere reflection of offline *kampung* interaction, but changes the dynamics of participation, trust formation, and cultural expression. These communities prove that they can rapidly pool resources, coordinate activities online and offline, and maintain a sense of belonging across physical divides through activities such as digital *gotong royong*.

Cultures of proximity played a crucial factor in restoring engagement, where the engagements using local languages, regional humor and culturally relevant images helped the participants support their sense of identity. At the same time, these mechanisms for bringing people together could create digital enclaves that are exclusive to cultures and make it more difficult for individuals from diverse cultures to communicate with one another. The mediatization of processes as norms of community were brought into line with logics of the platform rather than vice versa (for example in introducing verification protocols to combat misinformation) and moved from mandatory to voluntary.

The digital *kampung* is a blend of Indonesia's communal past and how people engage on platforms. As it connects urban and rural areas and continues to keep cultural ties strong, it is an exemplar of how it might be used to aid digital inclusion. But this promise can be brought to bear only if challenges around digital literacy, trust and cultural exclusion are confronted.

These results signal to policy makers that community-led digital selection require accompanying resources for moderation, verification, and inclusive distribution. For academics, the digital *kampung* stands for a major site of enquiry for studying how mediatization and cultural proximity intersect with each other in shaping aspects of digital community ethnodynamics across the diversified societies. In future a longitudinal approach can be employed to track the development of these communities over time, particularly as technology becomes more advanced and socio-political factors evolve.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI (if any)

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT to assist in structuring the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

This declaration does not apply to the use of basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, references etc. If there is nothing to disclose, there is no need to add a statement.

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