

Navigating the Digital Tide: The Identity Resilience of the Ammatoa Indigenous Community amidst Communication Technology Shifts

Zelfia¹, Hafied Cangara¹, Dwia Aries Tina Pulubuhu², Andi Alimuddin Unde¹

¹Department of Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

²Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of self-identity among the indigenous Ammatoa community in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, in the context of changing communication technologies. The Ammatoa people, residing both within and outside their ancestral territories, face challenges and opportunities brought about by modernization and globalization. They maintain a *kamase-masea* lifestyle, which signifies living simply and modestly, as an expression of sacred values and oral cultural heritage. While open to modern education and technology, they strive to preserve their traditions and local wisdom. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with an interpretivist paradigm, analyzing the interaction between tradition and modernity, the impact of communication technologies on social and cultural practices, and the strategies of identity adaptation and negotiation in both virtual and physical spaces. The findings reveal that the Ammatoa community endeavors to integrate aspects of modernity and tradition to maintain their cultural identity, navigate external pressures, and leverage social media to uphold and promote local wisdom while advocating for their rights.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Communication Technology, Social Adaptation, Modernization and Tradition

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Introduction

Modernization has significant impacts on the dynamics of social change for both the general and traditional societies (Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Singh, 2012; Huntington, 2017; Suda, 2019; Inglehart, 2020). For traditional communities, modernization can lead to more complex and profound changes (Newson & Richerson, 2009; Reher, 2021; Thi, 2021; Lei, 2021; Zhou et al., 2021; Datzberger, 2022; Grinin, 2022; Gauthier, 2022). These include shifts from traditional economic activities to more modern or industrial ones, changes in social structures and family organizations, as well as adaptations to new values and norms. Often, traditional societies face challenges in maintaining their cultural identity and heritage amid pressures to adapt to a more modern lifestyle (Fogel-Chance, 1993; Rozman 2014; Rohmadi et al., 2023; Inman, 2024).

The advancement of communication technology has significantly reduced geographical barriers, facilitated global interaction, cross-national collaboration, and broad access to information, reshaping the way we communicate, conduct business, and learn. Technologies such as the internet, email, and social media enable instant cross-border communication, while digital platforms support international cooperation and economic transactions, expanding markets and educational opportunities (Watson et al., 2018; Teece, 2018; Loonam & O'Regan 2022; Shukla et al., 2023). Access to information from around the world enriches knowledge

and cultural understanding but also brings challenges such as cybersecurity issues, the spread of misinformation, and increasing digital divides (Haider et al., 2021; Antwi-Boateng & Al Mazrouei, 2021; Ahmad et al., 2023). These impacts necessitate actions that ensure technology supports inclusive and sustainable social progress.

The integration of traditional societies into the global mainstream has brought significant changes to their way of life (Berry, 2008; Kasongo, 2010; Qizi, 2021; Andrew, 2023). Connected with the outside world through trade, popular culture, and global economic trends, these communities face alterations in their traditional values. Globalization offers new opportunities, such as access to broader markets for local products, increased awareness of global issues, and enriching cultural exchanges (Srinivas, 1995; Azarya, 2004; Rosenmann, et al., 2016; Beribe, 2023). However, challenges also arise, including the loss of cultural identity, dominance of foreign cultures, and risks of economic exploitation. These impacts necessitate adaptive strategies that minimize negative risks while maximizing the benefits of globalization, ensuring that traditional societies can thrive in a balance between preserving traditions and embracing change.

Several studies have illustrated the interaction between communication technology and local wisdom in Indonesia. For instance, research by Christiany Juditha (2019) explored the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and its impact on social change in Suka Datang Village, Curup Utara, Rejang Lebong, Bengkulu, demonstrating widespread adoption of mobile phones by villagers that affected how they communicate, access, and disseminate information, and facilitated daily activities, though not yet engaged in e-commerce activities. Furthermore, Fuad Muchlis (2017) focused on communication practices in empowering the Rimba community in Bukit Dua Belas National Park, Jambi Province, critiquing the history of marginalization and exploring empowerment practices and the role of alternative media in helping the Rimba community overcome power dominance and fight for their communal rights. Abdullah & Cangara (2014) conducted research on the traditional Ammatoa community in Kajang, focusing on their adaptation to communication and information transformation. This study revealed the life of the Kajang community, highlighting their internal and external communication processes, and the Ammatoa's efforts in responding to changes in information and communication. This research emphasizes how the local wisdom of Ammatoa and the Kajang community serves as a defense against the influence of advancements in communication and information technology.

Related to this, there is the indigenous Ammatoa community in South Sulawesi, located in the forest area of Bulukumba District, about 200 kilometers south of Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi Province. The Kajang community, both geographically and demographically, is divided into two main groups: Kajang Dalam (ilalang embayya), which strictly maintains customs and traditions, and Kajang Luar (ipantarang embayya), which is outside the customary area and more open to technological influences, including electricity, communication, agricultural innovations, and education.

The majority of the Ammatoa indigenous community lives in the forest alongside their traditional leader, the Ammatoa. For them, the forest is not just a place to live but also a crucial space for life and intergenerational interaction. Through the forest, the Ammatoa meet the needs of the current generation while nurturing a profound connection with nature. They uphold the principle of kamase-masea, which emphasizes simplicity, as a way to maintain a spiritual relationship and collective happiness with their ancestors.

The principle of kamase-masea, reflecting simplicity from the pasang belief, has become an integral part of the daily life of the Ammatoa community, leading to their stringent limitation

on the use of technology in the Ilalang embayya traditional area (Disnawati, 2013; Ansaar, 2017; Awalia & Kaswanto, 2017; Dewi, et al., 2022). For nighttime illumination, they rely on natural sources such as candlenut or rubber sap, combined with cotton and palm fronds. Vehicles are left at the entrance of the area, and the inhabitants walk barefoot inside. The dominance of black in their attire reflects the value of kamase-masea, a symbol of the simplicity they embrace.

As the Ammatoa increasingly interact with the external world, venturing out for commerce and education, they encounter challenges and opportunities that affect their engagement with various communication technologies, thereby influencing their cultural participation and evolving perceptions of identity. Unlike prior research that primarily addressed technological adaptation superficially or focused on its economic and social impacts, this investigation delves deeper into how communication technology, particularly social media, becomes integrated into the Ammatoa's values, practices, and identity perceptions. This analysis aims to uncover how the Ammatoa community balances the preservation of their traditional culture with the adaptation to technological advancements, thereby shaping the Identity Profile of both the broader Kajang Community on social media and the indigenous Ammatoa amidst technological evolution.

Methods

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative method with an interpretivist paradigm, which posits that human actions have interpretive meanings and social phenomena are complex. Descriptive content analysis is used to dissect the gathered data. Primary data are collected through field observation, unstructured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD) to directly understand the phenomena and behaviors of the subjects. These observations also support the clarification and verification of the information obtained, while secondary data are sourced from literature and previous research. The research was conducted in the Ammatoa region, covering ilalang embayya and the outer embayya area in Kajang District, Bulukumba Regency, which includes Tana Toa Village, Tambangan Village, Malleleng Village, and Pattiroang Village, to explore the influence of Ammatoa culture. The study also involved observing the interactions of the Kajang community on various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and virtual communities.

Secondary data collection techniques in this study involved gathering documents, primarily posts from the Instagram account @Kajang_tambalaya during the period from August to November 2022. The collected data were then reduced and analyzed to be presented as descriptions and narratives, aiding in drawing conclusions about the research problem. In data collection, the researcher was assisted by two assistants from UMI students, who supported the field research process. A guide from the village head's office also helped the researcher in navigating and communicating with informants on-site. To legally enter the Kajang customary area, the researcher obtained official permission from the local government.

Data on the Kajang people's participation in virtual spaces were analyzed alongside theories related to their emancipation. This analysis process was qualitative and conducted parallel to data collection, following three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Saldana, 2014).

Results and Discussion

In the rapidly evolving modern era, the indigenous Ammatoa community steadfastly adheres to the principle of kamase-masea, which in the Bugis-Makassar language means "pity," but holds a broader meaning for them. In the Konjo language, kamase-masea is interpreted as a

lifestyle of simplicity and modesty. It is regarded as a sacred value system, reflecting the divine relationship between humans and God, manifested in the daily life practices of the Ammatoa people.

In the context of communication technology development, the Ammatoa community continues to uphold their traditional rationality in daily life. The absence of children from school is often not due to a lack of desire to learn but to adhere to their customary practices and rituals. During rituals, children, especially those in school uniforms, are required to refrain from roaming around, and sometimes they choose not to attend school at all. This situation has led to a dialogue between schools and the Ammatoa community, where the Ammatoa have requested changes to the school uniforms to black and white, reflecting their ability to negotiate and maintain their cultural identity. This shows the Ammatoa community's effort to ensure that their traditions are respected and accommodated, even within the formal education system that is physically encroaching on their territory.

In the village of Tanah Towa, there are educational facilities including one kindergarten, three elementary schools, one junior high school, and one senior high school, all located near the Ammatoa customary area. The availability of these educational institutions offers opportunities for Ammatoa children to pursue higher education levels after completing high school. From an education and communication technology perspective, this is seen positively as it contributes to improving their quality of life. However, from a cultural standpoint, this could pose challenges to cultural preservation, as traditional values are pressured by broader cultural influences. Although the Ammatoa indigenous community is open to modern education, it does not necessarily fundamentally alter their customary structure and traditions.

The Ammatoa community is an indigenous group with a rich oral cultural heritage passed down from their ancestors, making oral culture predominant in their daily lives. Although they no longer strictly follow primary orality, they continue to maintain an oral mindset. Classifying Ammatoa as illiterate necessitates an approach that involves expanding access to education and information, a strategy more aligned with literate societies. However, amidst the advancements in communication technology, the Ammatoa recognize their position within a literate society, reflecting their awareness of the social and technological changes affecting their way of life.

The Ammatoa community takes various measures to ensure that they do not lose their identity amidst the changing times. They have become more selective in accepting innovations and changes around them, as seen in their approach to formal education. Ammatoa children are educated in formal institutions oriented towards written culture and technology, but with the aim of preserving traditional customs. This community strives to maintain their cultural heritage amid the dominance of technology, which permeates not only the educational system but also the public sphere in general, without diminishing the value of either.

Individuals acquire specific meanings in the various roles they play, whether as students, workers, partners, parents, members of fraternal groups, parties, or as unique individuals outside these groups. Individuals have multiple identities reflecting their dual roles in society, shaping personal characteristics that are distinctive yet shared within a broader social context. Identity theory explores how these various identities interrelate and influence behavior, thoughts, emotions, and how they integrate individuals with society as a whole. This includes understanding how the people of Kajang navigate their identities both within and outside their customary areas, reflecting the complex interaction between personal uniqueness and collective values.

The response of the Amatoa community to the developments in communication technology can be seen from their position within society and examines the relationship between the Kajang people and society and how the roles they perform are based on the social structural position they occupy. Benwell and Stokoe in identity theory state that identity depends on the local conditions of the society. The social structure is formed from individual actions that, over time and across different people, become patterned and systematic. Repeated interactions and behaviors among individuals and large groups create patterns accepted as norms and the basis of the social structure in society.

Considering the identity of the Kajang people involves two approaches. The individual identity of the Kajang people can be viewed from two perspectives: internal and external. Internally, we examine how various identities interact and integrate within the individual, and how the process of identity verification occurs personally. Externally, we explore how these identities are connected and influenced by the complexities of the social structure in which they exist, encompassing both the Kajang customary area and beyond.

Individuals in Kajang possess layered identities, where it is not always possible to authenticate all these identities simultaneously. Identity is an intersubjective phenomenon, not merely subjective. This means that a person's identity is formed in reaction to the actions of others and evolves through social interaction. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of the Kajang indigenous community, where an individual's identity is shaped and verified through ongoing social relationships and dynamics.

The findings from this study align with Stella Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory (2015), as it sheds light on how the Ammatoa navigate the intricacies of identity formation and negotiation in the face of modernization and technological advancements. The theory posits that individuals feel secure in their identities within familiar cultural settings but may experience vulnerability when encountering new or foreign environments. This dynamic is evident in the Ammatoa's transition from their traditional, insular setting to more open and technologically integrated environments.

The Kajang people value meaningful interpersonal connections, especially in supportive contexts like customary ceremonies, where they experience autonomy of identity in discrete interactions. Their identity stability is reinforced within familiar and predictable cultural contexts, while identity change or challenge arises in unexpected cultural situations. Their meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of identity issues are influenced by cultural, personal, and situational diversity they encounter.

Intercultural communication awareness among the Kajang people underscores the need to integrate cultural knowledge, motivation, and skills to achieve satisfactory, accurate, and efficient communication. Within the Ammatoa community, there are individuals who possess strong confidence in their identity, while others show flexibility towards the influence of new identities they encounter.

Ting Toomey (2005) defines functional biculturalism as the ability of an individual to consciously and fluidly navigate between cultural contexts, becoming a cultural transformer. To achieve this state, the key is cross-cultural competence. The indigenous Ammatoa community demonstrates this ability through three main components: cultural knowledge, which includes a deep understanding of the norms, values, beliefs, and cultural practices of various groups; self-confidence; and engagement and connections that provide stability in diverse cultural or ethnic group contexts. The Ammatoa have a broad cultural awareness and knowledge, enabling them to understand and interact effectively within cultural diversity.

This involves knowledge of history, language, customs, and key concepts that shape their customs, encapsulated in their belief in "pasang ri kajang," a unified function of their cultural knowledge. Secondly, Cultural Sensitivity includes the ability to read, understand, and appropriately respond to the cultural expressions of others, including understanding non-verbal cues, communication norms, and intercultural interaction styles (Le Roux, 2002; Ayonrinde, 2003; Aririguzoh, 2022). Cultural sensitivity also entails developing empathy for the experiences and perspectives of others. Cultural Skills involve the ability to communicate and interact effectively with people from diverse cultures (Rosen et al., 2004; Rathje, 2007; Barrett, 2013; Mor et al., 2013; Dollwet & Reichard, 2014; Arvanitis, 2018). The Ammatoa's interaction with the general population outside their region, including skills in speaking, listening, and considering the cultural context, facilitates this. Additionally, acting skills include the ability to collaborate, negotiate, and cooperate across cultures.

The social media identity of indigenous people reflects the dynamics between modernity and tradition. As community members participate in digital platforms, their profiles often include elements like traditional photos and images, using visuals that reflect their traditional aspects, including portraits in customary attire, celebrations of customary ceremonies, or landscapes unique to the Ammatoa region. Their profile descriptions often incorporate cultural identity elements, such as affiliation with a specific tribe or ethnic group, languages spoken, and preserved cultural activities. They also use social media to share stories and historical records, including narratives about ancestors, ancient traditions, or tales ingrained in their culture.

Participation in customary activities is often shared by the Ammatoa community through photos and updates on social media. This includes celebrations of rituals, festivals, or religious ceremonies that are integral to the indigenous identity. The use of traditional language also forms part of their self-identity, with some community members opting to use their Konjo language in posts or online communications. This not only reflects their cultural identity but also plays a role in preserving and promoting the local language.

The self-identity of the Kajang indigenous community has undergone an interesting transformation amid the evolution of communication technology. While they endeavor to preserve local wisdom and traditional values, modern communication technologies also serve as a means to extend their influence and maintain relevance in an ever-changing society.

The Kajang indigenous community utilizes social media as a vital platform to strengthen their cultural identity, sharing images, videos, and stories that reflect their daily life, traditions, and arts and crafts. This platform also facilitates intercultural networking, allowing Kajang to connect with other indigenous communities, researchers, and environmental activists, creating opportunities for idea exchange and collaboration. Furthermore, social media and communication technologies play a role in education and raising awareness about the sustainability of the environment and Kajang culture. Through online learning approaches, they not only support intergenerational knowledge transfer but also provide a means to archive and share traditional knowledge, integrating their heritage with modern technology.

Communication technology enables the Kajang indigenous community to advocate for their land rights (Syarif, 2022; Arumningtyas, et al., 2023; Elfira et al., 2023; Nisa et al., 2023). They can upload evidence of violations or design online campaigns to support their rights, using social media as a tool to promote the use and preservation of the Kajang traditional language. Videos, writings, and images are utilized to teach and maintain their language. The Kajang community can use technology to record and digitize their cultural heritage, including audio, video, and photographic documentation of their traditional life. They use social media to raise awareness about environmental issues and the protection of customary forests. They can create

online petitions and garner global support to combat deforestation and climate change. By leveraging communication technology, the Kajang indigenous community can preserve their cultural identity while playing an active role in the evolving world, an effort to maintain their local wisdom while adapting to the times.

Conclusion

The Ammatoa indigenous community strives to maintain a simple way of life, or *kamase-masea*, which means living modestly, as part of their sacred values. Despite facing advancements in technology and modern education, they adhere to their traditions, as evidenced in the negotiation over school uniforms. The presence of schools in the customary area and the acceptance of higher education indicate an openness to modernity, yet there are concerns about cultural preservation. The Ammatoa, with their dominant oral culture, face challenges in integrating written culture and technology. Efforts to preserve identity through selectivity towards innovation and formal education are undertaken to maintain traditions. The self-identity of the indigenous people is articulated through social interactions and experiences, highlighting the importance of identity negotiation and cross-cultural competence. The Kajang indigenous community utilizes social media to promote their cultural identity, foster intercultural relationships, and support advocacy for customary land rights and the preservation of language and traditions. This demonstrates their adaptation to technological developments while still preserving local wisdom. Through these actions, the Ammatoa community showcases a dynamic balance between embracing changes brought by modernization and technology and conserving the core aspects of their cultural heritage and traditional values.

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