

# Cultural Negotiation of Digital Technology Adoption Among the Baduy Community: Indigenous Communication in the Era of Digital Immigrants and Sustainable Development

*Sitti Amar Azizyah Puthé Taliu*<sup>1\*</sup>, and *Frizki Yulianti Nurnisya*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

**Abstract.** This study investigates how the Baduy community in Kanekes, Indonesia a culturally resilient indigenous group selectively adopts digital technology amidst increasing social transformation. Despite extensive discussions on digitalization in rural and urban settings, research on how high-context indigenous societies negotiate digital change as digital immigrants remains limited. Using a qualitative single case study approach, drawing on in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, this study examines how digital technology is filtered, negotiated, and culturally regulated within Baduy Dalam and Baduy Luar. Findings reveal that technology is adopted primarily for functional purposes such as communication and small-scale economic exchange, while practices considered disruptive to cultural integrity are restricted through customary mechanisms, including periodic device inspections, community sanctions, and routine cultural briefings. Generational differences further shape the adoption pattern: younger Baduy engage more actively in digital interaction, whereas elders maintain deliberate distance to preserve spiritual values and ecological harmony. Interpreted through Hall's high-context communication framework, the study shows that digital media often clashes with implicit cultural norms, leading to selective resistance rather than full rejection. These findings contribute to discussions on sustainable social transformation by demonstrating that indigenous communities develop their own culturally grounded pathways toward digital adaptation preserving identity while cautiously navigating technological change.

## 1 Introduction

The development of digital technology over the past two decades has significantly transformed social, economic, and communication practices worldwide. The expansion of the internet, mobile devices, and digital platforms has reshaped how individuals interact, conduct business, and access information [1]. Digital technology adoption has been widely recognized as an important driver of economic efficiency and business competitiveness. The use of digital payments and business automation, for instance, can simplify transactions,

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\* Corresponding author: [uthe.aziz123@gmail.com](mailto:uthe.aziz123@gmail.com)

improve operational efficiency, and expand market access for small enterprises [2]. However, such technological adoption does not occur uniformly across all social contexts, particularly within indigenous communities where cultural values and customary regulations shape the acceptance of modern technologies [3].

Indigenous communities often maintain strong communal traditions, customary governance systems, and culturally embedded communication practices. These characteristics influence how new technologies are interpreted, negotiated, and adopted within everyday social life [4]. Consequently, understanding digitalization in indigenous contexts requires analytical attention to cultural communication systems rather than solely technological indicators [5].

Within this context, indigenous communities can be understood as digital immigrants, encountering digital technologies after their cultural identities and communication systems have already been firmly established [6]. This situation often results in selective and gradual patterns of technology adoption that are strongly regulated by customary norms and traditional authority. However, existing studies on indigenous communities in Indonesia tend to focus mainly on cultural preservation, resistance to modernity, or tourism-related commodification. Such perspectives do not sufficiently explain how indigenous communities actively negotiate digital technologies as part of everyday communication and social adaptation.

The Baduy Indigenous Community in Kanekes Village, Banten, provides an important case for examining these dynamics. Known for their strong cultural resilience, the Baduy maintain strict customary rules governing interactions with modernity. The Inner Baduy prohibit the use of digital devices entirely, while the Outer Baduy show a more flexible approach, particularly in relation to economic activities such as handicraft production and tourism-based trade. Previous studies indicate that some members of the Outer Baduy community have begun using mobile phones, messaging applications, and social media to support communication and commercial activities.



**Fig. 1.** Integration of QRIS digital payment in Baduy handicraft transactions

One example of this gradual technological integration can be seen in the introduction of digital payment systems within local handicraft businesses. As shown in **Fig. 1**, QRIS-based digital payments have begun to facilitate transactions between Baduy artisans and visiting consumers, expanding market access while still operating within customary boundaries.

Despite these developments, digital engagement within the Baduy community remains tightly regulated by customary institutions. Technology adoption undergoes processes of cultural filtering, including device inspections, restrictions on acceptable uses, and routine

customary guidance regarding digital ethics. Therefore, digitalization in the Baduy context cannot be interpreted as unconditional acceptance of modern technology, but rather as a culturally mediated adaptation shaped by moral, social, and spiritual considerations.

The complexity of digital transformation becomes even more apparent when viewed through the lens of cultural representation. Although the Inner Baduy reject the use of digital technology, their identity and way of life are widely circulated through digital content produced by tourists, guides, and external social media users who operate outside customary authority [7]. This situation reflects broader concerns raised in mediatization studies regarding the limited control indigenous communities have over their cultural narratives once they enter digital media environments [8]. Consequently, both Inner and Outer Baduy communities are increasingly situated within a digital ecosystem that requires them to negotiate cultural authority and representation.

Generational dynamics further complicate this process. Younger members of the Outer Baduy community are generally more active in utilizing digital media for communication, commerce, and leisure, while older members maintain greater distance from digital technologies in order to preserve spiritual values, ecological balance, and adherence to customary norms [9,10]. From an intercultural communication perspective, this generational difference reflects a broader tension between the open and explicit communication logic of digital media and the implicit, symbolic, and collective communication system embedded in Baduy culture.

Understanding how indigenous communities navigate these tensions is increasingly relevant to global discussions on sustainable development, particularly in relation to inclusive digital transformation (SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and the preservation of cultural heritage within sustainable communities (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities). Indigenous approaches to digital adaptation illustrate that technological change can occur while maintaining cultural resilience and local governance systems.

To analyze this phenomenon, this study integrates the concepts of digital immigrants [6], high-context communication theory [4] and innovation diffusion theory. This theoretical framework allows for a deeper understanding of how digital technology is interpreted, negotiated, and regulated within culturally embedded systems. Within this perspective, technology is not merely a tool of modernization but also a site where cultural identity, authority, and values are continually negotiated [11].

Based on this context, this study addresses the following research question: How does the Baduy community negotiate digital technology adoption within a high-context cultural system? Using a qualitative case study approach, this research contributes to the study of digital communication and sustainable social transformation by demonstrating that indigenous communities are not passive recipients of technological change but active actors who construct culturally grounded pathways of digital adaptation [12].

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Research paradigm and design**

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm, which views social reality as socially constructed through shared meanings, cultural practices, and communicative interactions. This paradigm is particularly suitable for examining how indigenous communities understand and negotiate digital technology within culturally embedded systems of value and meaning. Given the study's focus on exploring how digital technology is interpreted, filtered, and regulated by the Baduy community, a qualitative research design was employed.

A qualitative single case study approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of culturally situated digital practices within their real-life context [13]. Single case studies are suitable for addressing “how” and “why” research questions when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not clearly delineated and when the researcher has limited control over events. This design allows for a holistic understanding of technology adoption as a socially and culturally negotiated process rather than a purely technical one.

## 2.2 Case selection and research context

The Baduy community of Kanekes Village, Banten, Indonesia, was purposively selected as the research case due to its strong adherence to customary law (*adat*), high-context communication culture, and differentiated internal responses to digital technology [14]. The case is analytically significant rather than statistically representative, as it offers a theoretically rich context for examining digital negotiation within indigenous societies.

The internal distinction between Inner Baduy (*Baduy Dalam*) and Outer Baduy (*Baduy Luar*) provides a natural contrast that enables the study to capture varying degrees of digital engagement under a shared cultural system. This configuration facilitates analysis of how cultural norms, authority structures, and generational dynamics shape selective patterns of technology adoption within a single indigenous community.

## 2.3 Data collection

Data were collected through methodological triangulation to enhance analytical depth and credibility. Three primary methods were employed:

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of digital technology adoption and restriction.
2. Limited non-participant observation was carried out to document everyday practices related to economic activities, social interaction, and technology use, particularly within Baduy Luar.
3. Document analysis involved the examination of customary regulations, village governance records, and locally relevant documents related to technology use and cultural norms.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their roles, experiences, and relevance to the research objectives. Five key informants participated in the study:

1. **BD1** – Darni’s father (representative of the Inner Baduy)
2. **BL1** – Sania (young generation of the Outer Baduy)
3. **BL2** – Marsha (young generation of the Outer Baduy)
4. **JS1** – Jaro Elder Sami (traditional authority)
5. **DS1** – Secretary of Kanekes Village (administrative authority)

## 2.4 Researcher positionality and ethical considerations

The researchers positioned themselves as outsiders to the Baduy community. To address potential power imbalances and ethical concerns, data collection was conducted in accordance with customary protocols and with the assistance of village authorities. Access to research sites and participants was negotiated through culturally appropriate channels, and respect for spatial, social, and communicative boundaries was strictly maintained.

Informed consent was obtained verbally from all participants, and anonymity was preserved through the use of pseudonyms. This reflexive positioning is essential in qualitative research, as it acknowledges how researcher identity and presence may influence data generation and interpretation

## **2.5 Data analysis**

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach adapted from Miles and Huberman (2014), involving three iterative stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to technology adoption, cultural regulation, and communicative practices.

Analytical interpretation was guided by the study's theoretical framework. The concept of digital immigrants informed analysis of adoption tempo and technological caution; high-context communication theory guided interpretation of symbolic meanings and implicit norms; and diffusion of innovation theory provided insight into mechanisms of social control and selective adoption. This theoretically informed analysis enabled the study to move beyond descriptive accounts toward conceptual interpretation.

## **2.6 Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed. Credibility was enhanced through data triangulation and member checking whereby preliminary interpretations were discussed with selected participants [15]. Transferability was supported through thick description of cultural context and practices. Dependability and confirmability were addressed by maintaining an audit trail of research decisions and analytical procedures.

# **3 Results and discussion**

## **3.1 Results**

This study reveals that the process of digital technology adoption by the Baduy community is gradual, selective, and controlled by traditional values. Interviews with five informants show that digital technology has influenced economic aspects, communication, cultural representation, and intergenerational relationships. This process can be mapped into five main themes: (1) socio-economic change, (2) technology adoption patterns by digital immigrants, (3) traditional control and digital ethics, (4) cultural representation and resistance to misinformation, and (5) hopes and anxieties about the future of cultural identity.

### ***3.1.1 Changes in social and economic life***

Digital technology has gradually transformed the socio-economic life of the Baduy community, particularly among the Outer Baduy. Informants consistently contrasted present conditions with the past, especially regarding market access and mobility [2]. Darni's father (BD1) explained that earlier trade activities were constrained by infrastructure and distance, whereas improved roads and mediated communication now facilitate commercial exchange, although economic practices remain bound by customary regulations.

Among the Outer Baduy, the impact of digitalization is more visible. Sania (BL1) and Marsha (BL2) reported that digital payment systems such as QRIS, bank transfers, and mobile communication have enabled them to reach consumers beyond the Baduy area. Digital circulation of handicrafts expands market reach and strengthens household income. Nevertheless, these economic benefits coincide with social change. Marsha (BL2) observed that children increasingly spend time with mobile phones rather than engaging in collective outdoor play, a practice historically central to Baduy socialization shown in **Fig. 2**.



**Fig. 2.** Socialization of QRIS usage for prospective MSME merchants in the Baduy tourist area

From the Inner Baduy perspective, economic convenience is subordinated to moral and ecological considerations. Darni's father (BD1) expressed concern that technological progress could “deceive nature” and disturb the balance between humans and the environment. This view reflects an ethical framework in which economic gain is secondary to spiritual harmony. Consequently, socio-economic transformation among the Baduy does not follow a linear modernization trajectory but unfolds as a negotiated process balancing economic opportunity with cultural and ecological responsibility.

### 3.1.2 Digital technology adoption patterns by digital immigrants

Technology adoption differs markedly between the Inner and Outer Baduy. The Inner Baduy maintain a near-total rejection of digital devices show in **Fig. 3**. BD1 stated that mobile phones are strictly prohibited within Inner Baduy territory, and long-distance communication must rely on intermediaries from the Outer Baduy.



**Fig. 3.** Digital marketing through social media

In contrast, the Outer Baduy display conditional acceptance. Sania (BL1) and Marsha (BL2) noted that mobile phones and platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram have been used since approximately 2015, initially for communication and later for commercial purposes. However, digital practices remain instrumental rather than expressive or lifestyle-oriented.

Mr. Medi (DS1) clarified that, in principle, digital technology is still viewed as a customary violation, yet small and functional devices are tolerated due to their economic and communicative utility. This tolerance represents pragmatic accommodation rather than normative approval.

Generational differences greatly influence these patterns. Younger members of the Outer Baduy are more digitally literate and active, while older members often lack technical skills and rely on intermediaries. Overall, Baduy adoption patterns correspond with the

characteristics of digital immigrants: cautious, selective, and culturally embedded rather than driven by technological enthusiasm [6].

### 3.1.3 Social control and indigenous digital ethics

Customary institutions actively regulate digital use. Jaro Elder Sami (JS1) described routine inspections of mobile phones in border areas between Inner and Outer Baduy to ensure compliance with permitted uses. Violations are addressed through customary guidance and, in some cases, confinement in traditional houses. JS1 states, “Technology is allowed, as long as it does not violate customs” This pattern shows that technology is integrated through a collectively controlled process.

In addition to inspections, cultural briefings are conducted every three months to reinforce traditional values and remind community members about acceptable digital behavior. Sania (BL1) and Marsha (BL2) explained that mobile phones may only be used for trade and important communications, not for activities considered morally or culturally inappropriate. Sanctions play an important role in maintaining compliance. Violations can result in confinement in the traditional house for moral guidance, while more serious violations such as entering restricted areas with digital devices are discussed openly and sanctioned by traditional authorities in the **Fig. 4**.



**Fig. 4.** Information board regarding customary rules and restrictions on digital documentation for visitors entering customary areas

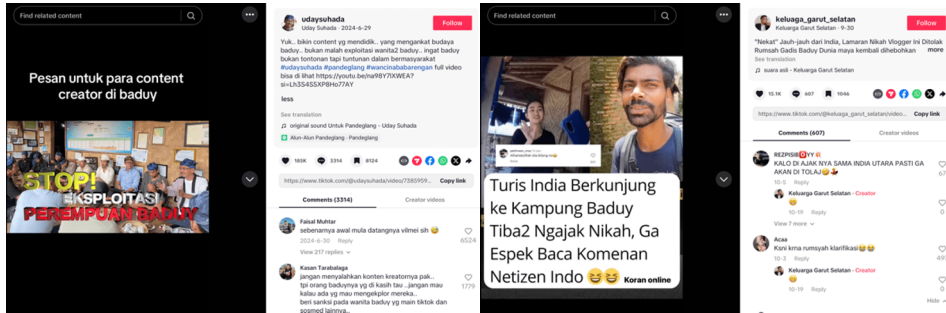
Mr. Medi (DS1) emphasized that monitoring and sanctions are not punitive in nature, but rather serve as preventive measures. The goal is to ensure that technology enters the “mind” without controlling it, maintaining autonomy over cultural values rather than succumbing to technological domination. These practices collectively form what can be called indigenous digital ethics, a local moral framework that regulates digital engagement outside the formal legal system.

### 3.1.4 Cultural representation and resistance to misinformation

Informants from the Outer Baduy expressed dissatisfaction with external content creators who portrayed Baduy life in an exaggerated or inappropriate manner. Marsha (BL2) criticized content that highlighted sensational elements or focused too much on young women rather than everyday cultural practices. BL2 explained, “*Many come just to create content, sometimes what is shown is exaggerated or highlights inappropriate things*”.

Jaro Elder Sami (JS1) echoed this concern, arguing that such representations reduce Baduy culture to a spectacle rather than conveying its philosophical depth. For the Baduy community, misrepresentation is not only a misinformation but also a violation of cultural respect.

Mr. Medi (DS1) provided concrete examples of institutional resistance. He recounted instances in which external media producers were formally confronted, including a case involving a national television station that was required to issue a public apology and perform a traditional cleansing ritual after filming without permission in the Baduy Dalam area in the Fig. 5.



**Fig. 5.** The effect of social media content publication on the popularity and interaction of tourists in Baduy Traditional Village.

Although direct participation in digital production is limited, Baduy authorities actively regulate external narratives [8]. Content creation is only permitted if it does not mislead the public, exploit cultural symbols, or violate spatial boundaries. Although the Inner Baduy community does not adopt digital technology, their cultural identity remains digitally exposed, requiring defensive strategies to protect narrative sovereignty [11].

### 3.1.5 Hopes and concerns for the future of culture

All informants expressed concern about the long-term impact of digital technology on the sustainability of Baduy culture. Darni's father (BD1) emphasized that any future changes must remain in line with traditional principles, even in the next 10 to 20 years. BD1 hoped that “changes would remain within the rules of custom” Sania (BL1) and Marsha (BL2) articulated a nuanced position. While acknowledging the benefits of social media and digital commerce, they emphasized the importance of prioritizing tradition. For them, digital participation should not replace customary obligations.



**Fig. 6.** The inner Baduy (wearing white) and outer Baduy (wearing black) communities live side by side in preserving their traditions

Jaro Elder Sami (JS1) worried that uncontrolled external influence could weaken cultural cohesion but expressed confidence in collective adherence to adat show in Fig. 6. Mr. Medi (DS1) highlighted intergenerational tension, noting that younger members increasingly trust online sources over elders' narratives, potentially challenging traditional authority [8].

Cultural continuity thus appears uncertain but negotiable, contingent on customary governance of technological change.

## **3.2 Discussion**

The findings indicate that digital technology adoption within the Baduy community occurs through a culturally mediated process rather than through linear technological acceptance. Consistent with the concept of digital immigrants [5,6], the Baduy do not fully reject digital technology but evaluate its functions, risks, and compatibility with customary values before adopting it. This selective adoption reflects a broader cultural negotiation in which technological practices are continuously assessed within existing social and moral frameworks.

### *3.2.1 Technology adoption as a process of cultural negotiation*

Technology adoption in the Baduy community cannot be understood as a purely technological process. Instead, it represents a form of cultural negotiation in which digital practices are filtered through traditional norms, communal obligations, and spiritual values. Within this negotiation, the Outer Baduy function as an intermediary space where certain technologies such as WhatsApp, QRIS, and social media are selectively integrated into economic and communication activities.

However, technology is primarily viewed as a functional tool rather than a symbol of modern lifestyle. In contrast, the Inner Baduy maintain a position of deliberate non-adoption, reinforcing symbolic boundaries between tradition and modernity. This pattern aligns with Diffusion of Innovation theory, which emphasizes that technology adoption is influenced not only by perceived benefits but also by cultural compatibility and social authority structures. In the Baduy context, cultural legitimacy plays a more decisive role than technological efficiency. Consequently, digital engagement emerges as a negotiated balance between economic adaptation and the preservation of cultural integrity.

### *3.2.2 High-context communication and digital ethics*

The Baduy community reflects characteristics of a high-context culture, in which communication relies on shared meanings, rituals, and implicit social norms. Digital media, however, operates largely through low-context communication logic that emphasizes explicit expression, visibility, and rapid information exchange. This difference creates tension between digital communication practices and the traditional communication system embedded within Baduy culture [12].

To manage this tension, the Baduy community has developed what can be conceptualized as indigenous digital ethics. Through mechanisms such as periodic device inspections, customary guidance, and restrictions on technology use, the community collectively regulates acceptable digital behavior. These practices function not as punitive surveillance but as a form of communal responsibility aimed at ensuring that technology remains subordinate to cultural values.

This finding supports arguments in digital anthropology that technology governance can emerge from culturally embedded ethical systems rather than relying solely on formal legal institutions. In the Baduy case, customary regulation allows digital technology to be incorporated in ways that maintain social cohesion and moral accountability.

### **3.2.3 Cultural identity and representation**

Another significant issue revealed in this study concerns the representation of Baduy culture in digital media. Although the Inner Baduy do not directly participate in digital platforms, their cultural identity continues to circulate widely through content produced by tourists, vloggers, and other external actors [11]. This condition illustrates an important paradox: communities may become digitally visible even without actively adopting digital technology.

External representations often simplify or sensationalize indigenous culture, transforming complex traditions into visual spectacle. From the perspective of mediatization theory, such dynamics reflect unequal power relations in the production and circulation of cultural narratives. Groups with greater access to media technologies tend to shape how other communities are represented in public discourse.

Nevertheless, the Baduy community demonstrates cultural agency in responding to this situation. Through customary restrictions on documentation, selective permission for media production, and reaffirmation of traditional norms, the community attempts to maintain control over the representation of its cultural identity [11]. These practices indicate that digital exposure does not necessarily eliminate indigenous autonomy, but instead creates new arenas of negotiation regarding visibility and cultural protection.

### **3.2.4 Resistance as cultural resilience**

Rather than representing technological backwardness, the selective resistance to digital technology observed among the Baduy community can be interpreted as a form of cultural resilience. By regulating the speed and direction of technological adoption, the community seeks to ensure that social change does not undermine core cultural values.

Within the framework of digital immigrants, technology is approached cautiously and integrated only when it supports practical needs such as communication or economic exchange. Technologies perceived as potentially disruptive to social harmony, spiritual practices, or ecological balance are deliberately restricted.

Generational differences further shape this negotiation process. Younger members of the Outer Baduy tend to engage more actively with digital media, while elders emphasize the importance of maintaining traditional values. However, these differences do not necessarily lead to cultural fragmentation. Instead, they stimulate ongoing dialogue that reinforces *adat* as a living and adaptive cultural system.

Ultimately, the Baduy case illustrates that resistance to technology can function as a strategy of cultural self-determination. By selectively engaging with digital tools while preserving their communication traditions and governance systems, the community maintains control over how technological change is incorporated into everyday life.

## **4 Conclusion**

This study examines how the Baduy community negotiates digital technology adoption within a high-context cultural system. The findings show that digital technology adoption among the Baduy occurs through a selective and culturally regulated process rather than through linear technological acceptance. As digital immigrants, the community approaches technology cautiously, using it mainly for communication and limited economic activities while restricting practices perceived as threatening cultural values and social harmony. Customary governance mechanisms, including social control and ethical guidance, play a central role in filtering technological practices and maintaining the balance between adaptation and cultural preservation. These findings demonstrate that digital engagement in indigenous societies is shaped by local communication systems, authority structures, and

collective values. In this context, technological resistance should not be interpreted as technological backwardness but as a form of cultural resilience that allows communities to regulate the pace and direction of social change while maintaining their cultural integrity. This perspective also highlights the importance of culturally grounded approaches to inclusive digital transformation within broader sustainable development efforts.

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