NAVIGATING COMMUNICATION: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN INDONESIA

Ngurah Ayu Dian Anggraeni[1✉], Eko Sasono[2], Sopi[3], Fuad Mas'Ud[4]

[1]Management, Economic, STIE Dharma Putra Semarang, Indonesia
[2,3]Management, STIE Semarang, Indonesia
[4]Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Diponegoro, Indonesia

Abstract

This research aims to explain the dynamics of community leadership in improving the quality of communication among indigenous communities in Indonesia. A quantitative research approach was used, and data were collected through questionnaires distributed to members of various Indigenous communities, resulting in a sample size of 212 respondents. This study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) and AMOS software, to analyze how community leadership mediates the interaction between traditional values and modern communication practices. The findings of this study reveal that community leadership positively and significantly affects communication quality, but the direct impact of traditional community values on community leadership and communication quality has not been observed. This shows that the role of leadership in bridging traditional cultural practices with the demands of quality communication has not yet been realized. The results of this study highlight the importance of integrating technological and educational support to empower the role of leaders in promoting community engagement and ensuring inclusive communication strategies. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of community leadership and offers practical insights for policymakers and community leaders to develop adaptive strategies for sustainable and effective communication in the context of customs.

✉correspondence Address:
Jl. Pamularsih Raya No.16, Bongsari, Kec. Semarang Barat, Kota Semarang, Jawa Tengah 50148
E-mail: ngurahayudian@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Community leadership has become a primary focus in social studies, especially as a mediator influencing the quality of communication within Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities often have unique leadership structures deeply rooted in traditional values and local culture. Some literature has been conducted to study culture in various contexts (Baety & Rojuaniah, 2022; Mursidah et al., 2023). However, in a broader and more complex modern context, Indigenous communities face challenges maintaining their traditional identity while adapting to a wider communication process involving many external stakeholders.

This research uncovers the dynamics in bridging the gap between local traditions and the increasingly complex demands of modern communication within indigenous communities in Indonesia through community leadership. It emphasizes the importance of community leadership in integrating traditional values into a broader communication system without erasing the unique cultural essence of Indigenous communities, which can be eroded by rapid changes in times.

The research's main challenge is maintaining the authenticity of Indigenous culture amidst globalization, where cultural differences often isolate Indigenous communities' voices. The focus of the research explains the

role of community leadership as a bridge in ensuring more effective and inclusive communication while preserving cultural identity and ensuring that the voices of Indigenous communities are heard and considered by stakeholders.

This research is based on a leadership theory that emphasizes the importance of the leader's role in strengthening social capital in Indigenous communities to enhance communication within the community. Although community leadership research is still relatively new, this study has covered various important aspects of other types of leadership (Aisyah & Pusparini, 2023; Baety & Rojuaniah, 2022; Buchori et al., 2023; Chen, 2022; Wang, 2021).

Community leadership is vital in building relationships between indigenous communities and external parties, such as government and non-governmental organizations. In other leadership styles, leaders who focus on community interests before personal interests tend to be more effective in gaining the trust of stakeholders, including Indigenous communities, thus providing space for them to voice their views (Khalifa, 2019; Savila et al., 2023).

Community leaders are figures who can adapt to customary needs, and if they can adapt (flexibly) to other leadership styles, they are seen as more effective in creating quality communication (Lukito-Budi, 2021). The leader's control mechanism can be described when he mediates the influence of customary communities that often have specific needs and concerns in creating space for open dialogue and clear communication related to internal decision-making, strengthening collaboration, and actively involving customary communities in development. Good quality communication between leaders and community members is important to create understanding and active involvement.

Previous research also shows that effective leadership impacts Indigenous communities. Riley highlights positive feedback that indicates leadership is valued and effective (Riley et al., 2024). Niesche offers a practical model for culturally responsive leadership that can be applied elsewhere to improve relationships with educational institutions (Niesche, 2024).

This research uses a quantitative approach, SEM analysis, and Amos software. Data was collected through surveys from Indigenous communities to develop leadership strategies for mediating traditional values and modern communication, enhancing community bonds, and promoting decision-making inclusivity.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The research shows that culturally sensitive communication is important to support the transition of Indigenous communities and improve the quality of communication. The low level of language proficiency negatively impacts the perception of communication quality (Bailey, 2024; Hamwi, 2023).

Smith's research shows that Indigenous communities in Canada have successfully built an inclusive communication system (Smith, 2021). Purbasari dan Suharno's research also highlights that successful intercultural communication in local government institutions can enhance local community participation in decision-making (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019). Meanwhile, Indigenous communities such as Bayan and Kasepuhan Cicarucub continue to maintain traditional communication patterns through cultural values, symbols, local languages, and rituals despite being in the digital era (Destiana et al., 2023; Khusnia et al., 2022).

Promoting local culture and Indigenous communities is important for enhancing intercultural communication, while integrating customs in formal education helps develop character and improve communication (Hermino, 2020; Setyono, 2019). This research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₁: Indigenous communities have a positive influence on the quality of communication

The leadership of Indigenous communities plays an important role in ensuring the fulfillment of community interests. However, limited access and the relevance of leaders can reduce their influence on policies (Rahi et al., 2021). Various constraints also affect the leadership of Indigenous communities (Piggott-McKellar et al., 2019).

The lack of technological infrastructure, limited technological knowledge, and traditional culture hinder indigenous communities' decision-making. Their influence on leadership is diminishing due to low technology adaptation and differences in social values.

Indigenous communities play an important role in preserving traditional knowledge and leading adaptation to environmental challenges (Schlingmann et al., 2021). Participatory action research enables community leaders to lead social change through local values, strengthen independence and engagement, and enhance adaptation effectiveness (Cornish, 2023). this research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Indigenous communities have a positive influence on community leadership

Riley explained that traditional leaders' active participation can improve the quality of communication between educational institution communities and strengthen long-term relationships (Riley et al., 2024). Jamillo–Restrepo added that community-based leadership can take a collaborative approach, create inclusive dialogue, and enhance the exchange of information and understanding among community members (Jaramillo-Restrepo, 2024).

Effective communication involves clarity and consistency. Leaders use transparent channels to share decisions openly (Longmuir, 2023). Community-based leadership strengthens communication between local communities and policymakers so that the community's voice is heard and considered in decision-making (Kipp, 2019). This research proposes the following hypothesis:

H₃: Community leadership has a positive influence on the quality of communication

This research highlights the importance of community leaders coordinating dialogue for the successful implementation of policies (Smith, 2021). In the traditional Ngaseuk ceremony, oral communication is passed down from generation to generation, with the traditional leader's role as the main bearer of information being emphasized (Destiana et al., 2023).

Indigenous leaders implement traditional communication to preserve the culture of Kampung Bali (Sri Wahyuni, 2023). The focus is on communication methods directly involving indigenous communities and their challenges. This study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₄: Community leadership can mediate the influence of indigenous communities on the quality of communication

METHOD

The design used is quantitative research with the SEM analysis method. The population refers to all indigenous communities in Indonesia that have a leadership structure. The sample used was during the distribution of the questionnaire (July - September 2024). The amount is still in accordance with the literature guidelines (Hair, 2009). The sampling technique is stratified random sampling. First, the selected respondents are members of the indigenous community. Second, only community respondents or active members interact with the community leader.

The questionnaire is compiled based on indicators relevant to the research variables. Indigenous communities (independent variable) are people who rely on local practices daily. The indicators of the Indigenous community used are upholding customs (X1), recognizing history and cultural heritage (X2), and preserving local culture (X3) (Simatupang & Siringo-Ringo, 2024).

Community leadership (mediating variable) is when individuals lead a community to bring about positive change and achieve common goals. Community leadership indicators are measured using indicators that create mutual understanding among different stakeholders (Facilitating Collaboration/Y11), ensuring that voices are heard and considered in the community decision-making process (Promoting Inclusivity/Y12), and being a voice for the community at the local, regional, or national level (Advocating For Community Needs/Y13) (Kim et al., 2021; Nomm, 2020; Vinerean et al., 2021).

The quality of communication (dependent variable) is the extent to which connection, effective communication, interaction, collaboration, and engagement, as well as relationship management, are carried out to ensure a clear understanding of the information conveyed. The indicators of communication quality are measured using indicators of strong connection (Y21), effective communication (Y22), established interaction (Y23), collaboration and engagement in communication (Y24), and relationship management (Y25) (Nurrachmah, 2024).

The research instrument uses a closed questionnaire structured using a 1-10 Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents via Google Forms.

The research conducted a CFA test with a loading factor value above 0,5 (Ghozali, 2017; Hair, 2009; Kline, 2023). SEM analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the role of community leadership in mediating the relationship between indigenous communities and communication quality. Finally, the interpretation of the research results and conclusions were made.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method using a questionnaire. The sample consisted of 232 respondents, 10 of whom we excluded because they were not indigenous community members. Furthermore, we also removed 11 respondents because their assessment of their community leader was deemed unreasonable. Two hundred twelve respondents are remaining. The selected respondents are active members of the indigenous community who interact with the traditional leaders. The sample size exceeded previously recommended minimum

requirements (Ghozali, 2017; Hair, 2009; Kline, 2023). Data was collected over three months with a focus on the diversity of customs and communication challenges in various regions of Indonesia.

This research provides a novelty integration of diverse theories such as charismatic leadership, servant leadership, and participative leadership to understand community dynamics. Previous studies exploring community leadership have also used the indicators in this integration. The research test results obtained that the research model using Amos software are as follows:
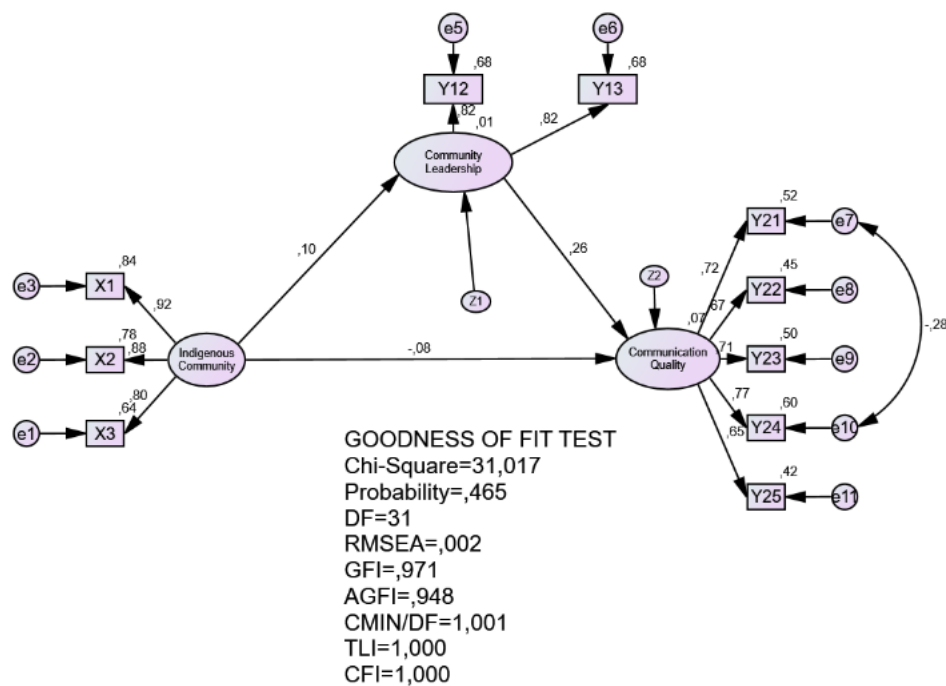

Figure 1. Research Model

The research model is deemed feasible with a calculated chi-square result < table (31.017 < 44.985). Probability (0.465) > 0.05. RMSEA 0.002 (< 0.020). GFI 0.971 (> 0.90). AGFI 0.948 (> 0.90). CMIN/DF 1,001 (< 2.00). TLI 1.000 (> 0.95). CFI 1.000 (> 0.95).

This study shows that the CFA values of all indicators are valid (se > 0.5), except for Y11 in community leadership, which was removed because the estimated value was < 0.5. Data is displayed as follows:

Table 1. Standardized Regression Weights

			Estimate
X3	←	Indigenous_Community	.802
X2	←	Indigenous_Community	.883
X1	←	Indigenous_Community	.916
Y12	←	Community_Leadership	.823
Y13	←	Community_Leadership	.822
Y21	←	Communication_Quality	.724
Y22	←	Communication_Quality	.668
Y23	←	Communication_Quality	.706
Y24	←	Communication_Quality	.775
Y25	←	Communication_Quality	.649

CFA values indicate that the largest factor characterizing Indigenous communities is cultural preservation; community leadership ensures the community's voice is considered in decision-making; and communication quality is collaboration and engagement. The invalidity of the community's role in creating understanding can be caused by a lack of leader representation, unclear goals, or a lack of trust among stakeholders.

Initially, this study showed non-normal multivariate results, but after linking e10 with e7 based on the AMOS output, the results indicated normal multivariate data (cr<2,58). However, in a univariate context, there are still indicators with a cr value > 2,58. Data is displayed as follows:

Table 2. Covariances

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
e7	↔	e10	-.793	.318	-2.498	.013	par_11

Table 3. Assessment of normality

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	c.r.	Kurtosis	c.r.
Y25	1,000	10,000	-.710	-4.219	-1.026	-3.049
Y24	1,000	10,000	-.798	-4.741	-.597	-1.773
Y23	1,000	10,000	-.942	-5.597	-.287	-.854
Y22	1,000	10,000	-1.112	-6.611	.167	.497
Y21	1,000	10,000	-.759	-4.513	-.189	-.563
Y13	1,000	10,000	-1.007	-5.986	-.091	-.270
Y12	2,000	10,000	-.533	-3.170	-.782	-2.325
X1	4,000	10,000	-.852	-5.062	.039	.114
X2	3,000	10,000	-.897	-5.334	.142	.422
X3	1,000	10,000	-.860	-5.114	-.656	-1.951
Multivariate					3.284	1.543

The correlation (Table 2) between strong connections (Y21) and collaboration and engagement (Y24) is that Indigenous communities feel that strong connections and collaboration and engagement are very closely related. If Indigenous communities have strong connections, they will collaborate and engage, and vice versa.

The communication quality indicator (Y25) that is declared univariate non-normal may be caused by the presence of Indigenous community respondents who have very strong and collaborative relationships, while some others experience unique relationship dynamics, such as deep conflicts, but still provide good assessments of communication quality.

This research shows that the influence of indigenous communities on community leadership and communication quality is not significant. However, community leadership has a positive and significant impact on the quality of communication. Data is shown as follows:

Table 4. Regression Weights

			S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Community_Leadership	←	Indigenous_Community	.102	1.272	.203	par_2
Communication_Quality	←	Community_Leadership	.255	2.897	.004	par_1
Communication_Quality	←	Indigenous_Community	-.083	-1.079	.280	par_3

Table 4 provides information to answer the following various hypotheses:

H_1: The indigenous community has a positive and significant impact on the quality of communication

This research rejects previous findings (Purbasari & Suharno, 2019; Smith, 2021) dan menunjukkan bahwa komunitas adat lebih mempertahankan komunikasi tradisional mereka (Destiana et al., 2023; Khusnia et al., 2022) sehingga kurang fokus pada kualitas komunikasi secara global.

This research also rejects previous findings (Sri Wahyuni, 2023). When communities still maintain their traditional communication, they will face challenges due to misalignment, hindering communication quality. Moreover, modern marketing techniques must align with their cultural values and be more effective due to a lack of understanding or interest.

H_2: The indigenous communities have a positive and significant influence on community leadership

This research rejects previous findings (Cornish, 2023; Piggott-McKellar et al., 2019; Schlingmann et al., 2021), and it is more aligned with the rationality of other studies (Rahi et al., 2021). Due to established social structures and leadership, participatory approaches and climate change adaptation may not be relevant for the entire Indigenous community. The limitations of resources and access to technology can diminish the significance of the Indigenous community's influence on community leadership.

H_3: Community leadership has a positive and significant impact on the quality of communication.

This research aligns with previous findings (Jaramillo-Restrepo, 2024; Riley et al., 2024). Community-based leadership can enhance the quality of communication by encouraging participatory engagement and valuing local perspectives, such as creating open and inclusive dialogues. This approach enriches understanding among community members.

Table 5. Standardized Direct Effects

	Indigenous Community	Community Leadership	Communication Quality
Community Leadership	.102	.000	.000
Communication Quality	-.083	.255	.000

Table 6. Standardized Indirect Effects

	Indigenous Community	Community Leadership	Communication Quality
Community Leadership	.000	.000	.000
Communication Quality	.026	.000	.000

Table 7. Standardized Indirect Effects - Two-Tailed Significance (BC)

	Indigenous Community	Community Leadership	Communication Quality
Community Leadership	...	...	...
Communication Quality	.174	...	...

Table 5 and Table 6 show the direct and indirect effects of the research model. The results provide information to answer hypothesis 4 as follows:

H_4: Community leadership can mediate the influence of Indigenous communities on the quality of communication

In Tables 5 and 6, this study explains that the direct influence of the Indigenous community on communication quality (0.102) is greater than the indirect influence (0.026), which contradicts previous research (Destiana et al., 2023; Smith, 2021). In Table 7, it is also emphasized that the role of community leadership in mediating indigenous communities and communication

quality is insignificant, with a probability value in the bootstrap table of 0.174, which is greater than 0.5. Community leadership did not succeed in mediating that influence because the Indigenous community has a strong ability to maintain the community's form. Constraints in adopting new technologies, such as limited infrastructure, low digital skills, and incompatibility with traditional communication, lead to communication quality issues. In addition, modern marketing techniques are also incompatible with their cultural values and are less successful due to a lack of understanding or interest.

Additional theoretical discussion of this research indicates that community leadership implementing modern strategies positively influences communication quality by creating engagement and open dialogue among members. However, in the context of indigenous communities, the influence is not significant because they still rely on traditional values and communication methods.

In contingency leadership theory, community leaders who ensure all voices are heard in decision-making tend to use a modern approach. Utilizan principios de inclusividad, transparencia y participación activa en un entorno más complejo. A structured communication method effectively conveys the community's interests at various levels of government or institutions.

If the Indigenous community maintains traditional communication while the community leaders use a modern approach, this can lead to a mismatch. As a result, there is a gap in understanding, a lack of trust, or even rejection from community members because modern methods are considered incompatible with cultural values, ultimately lowering communication quality.

The participative leadership theory emphasizes the importance of community members' involvement in decision-making. Leaders who create extensive engagement and open dialogue among community members can significantly improve the quality of communication, foster a sense of belonging, and strengthen trust, ultimately enhancing communication effectiveness within the community.

Meanwhile, in practical terms, this research indicates that improving communication quality within Indigenous communities is independent of the community leadership structure due to its limited influence. A holistic approach that involves all community members, combining traditional and modern communication methods and providing appropriate technological and educational support, is needed to become more inclusive and adapt to the needs of the times.

The development of adaptive community leadership that can integrate modern approaches can strengthen effective and inclusive communication, tighten relationships among community members, and enhance engagement in decision-making. By combining traditional and modern values, leaders can build more transparent communication channels, encourage collaboration, and align shared goals locally and nationally.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research presents in-depth insights into community leadership, emphasizing the importance of adaptive and inclusive approaches in building communication quality. The findings indicate that community leadership integrating charismatic leadership theory, servant leadership, and participatory leadership still needs to improve the quality of communication in Indigenous communities. The success of community communication still heavily relies on the leader's ability to adapt to the unique needs of the community being led and to create an open dialogue between the leader and the members.

The new findings from this research include recognising the relationship between community leadership and other forms of leadership. Leadership that uses contingency leadership theories, such as charismatic leadership and servant leadership, is considered modern and, therefore, difficult to apply in traditional Indigenous communities. Participatory theory is important to include in order to improve community communication effectiveness.

Future research can explore community leadership practices by incorporating technology and engagement and developing existing comprehensive community leadership policies. By exploring these areas, the research can contribute to the development of theories or practices that can support community communication and collaboration.

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