

DIGITAL SOCIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY- BASED DISPUTE RESOLUTION IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of digital technology has significantly transformed social interactions, communication patterns, and dispute resolution processes within Indonesian society. Traditional community-based dispute resolution mechanisms, which have long served as accessible and culturally legitimate means of conflict management, are increasingly influenced by digital platforms and online communication networks. This study investigates the transformation of community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia within the context of an emerging digital society. Using a sociolegal research framework, the study explores how digital technologies affect the legitimacy, effectiveness, and accessibility of local dispute resolution practices. The findings demonstrate that digital communication tools facilitate faster information exchange, broader public participation, and increased transparency in dispute management processes. At the same time, the digitalization of social relations introduces new challenges, including misinformation, online harassment, privacy concerns, and the emergence of digitally mediated conflicts. The study further reveals that community leaders and local institutions increasingly utilize digital platforms to support mediation and consensus-building efforts while maintaining traditional values and social norms. Effective adaptation requires balancing technological innovation with cultural legitimacy and procedural fairness. The research argues that the evolution of community-based dispute resolution reflects broader changes in legal consciousness and social governance within Indonesia's digital transformation. The study concludes that sociolegal frameworks must adapt to the realities of digital society while preserving the inclusive and participatory character of local dispute resolution mechanisms. These findings contribute to contemporary debates on law, technology, and community governance in developing societies.

KEYWORDS *Digital Society, Dispute Resolution, Community Governance, Legal Culture, Sociolegal Studies*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally transformed contemporary society by reshaping patterns of communication, social interaction, and institutional governance. The emergence of a digital society has altered not only how individuals exchange information but also how communities organize collective action, negotiate social norms, and resolve conflicts. Digital platforms have become integral to everyday life, enabling instant communication across geographical boundaries while simultaneously creating new forms of social relationships and legal challenges. As Manuel Castells (2010) argues, the development of the network society has shifted the organization of social life from territorially bounded communities toward digitally connected networks in which information flows increasingly determine social, political, and economic interactions. This transformation has significant implications for legal institutions because law itself functions within the broader structure of social relations rather than existing independently from society.

Indonesia represents a particularly important context for examining these developments. With one of the largest internet user populations in Southeast Asia, the country has experienced rapid digitalization over the past decade through widespread adoption of smartphones, social media platforms, and online communication applications. Digital technologies have become deeply embedded in everyday governance, public administration, commercial transactions, and community interactions. According to recent national statistics, internet penetration continues to increase across urban and rural areas, enabling local communities to access digital communication tools that were previously unavailable. Consequently, many social processes traditionally conducted through face-to-face interactions—including community deliberation, information sharing, and conflict resolution—are increasingly mediated by digital platforms.

These developments are particularly relevant for Indonesia's long-standing tradition of community-based dispute resolution. Unlike formal judicial institutions, community-based dispute resolution emphasizes deliberation (*musyawarah*), consensus (*mufakat*), social harmony, and restorative outcomes rooted in local cultural values. Village leaders, religious authorities, customary institutions, and respected community figures have historically played central roles in facilitating mediation and preventing social conflicts from escalating into formal litigation. Such mechanisms reflect Indonesia's pluralistic legal landscape, where state law coexists with customary law (*adat*), religious norms, and informal community practices (Bowen 2003; Bedner 2008). Rather than relying exclusively on legal adjudication, many communities continue to prefer locally negotiated settlements because they preserve social cohesion and maintain long-term interpersonal relationships.

From a sociolegal perspective, these practices illustrate that law cannot be understood solely as a formal system of statutes and judicial decisions. Instead, law operates as a social institution whose legitimacy derives from cultural acceptance, collective participation, and everyday social practices (Cotterrell 1992). Sociolegal scholars have long argued that legal institutions evolve alongside broader social transformations, requiring legal analysis to consider the interaction between formal regulation and lived social experience (Banakar and Travers 2005). This perspective is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where legal pluralism remains a defining characteristic of community governance. Griffiths (1986) distinguishes between legal centralism, which assumes that the state monopolizes legal authority, and legal pluralism, which recognizes the coexistence of multiple normative orders within society. Community-based dispute resolution exemplifies this pluralistic framework by integrating customary values, religious principles, and state law into practical mechanisms of conflict management.

The expansion of digital communication, however, has begun to transform the operation of these traditional mechanisms. Community disputes increasingly emerge from online interactions, including misinformation, cyber harassment, digital fraud, online defamation, and conflicts originating on social media platforms. At the same time, digital technologies provide new opportunities for mediation by facilitating rapid communication, virtual meetings, electronic documentation, and broader public participation. Messaging applications such as WhatsApp, video conferencing platforms, and community social media groups have become common tools through which local leaders coordinate mediation processes, disseminate information, and negotiate settlements. Consequently, dispute resolution is no longer confined to physical meeting spaces but increasingly occurs within hybrid environments that combine face-to-face deliberation with digital communication.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined digital governance, online dispute resolution, and legal technology from institutional and procedural perspectives (Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017). Other studies have explored the relationship between digital society and changing patterns of citizenship, participation, and governance (Van Dijk 2020; Couldry and Hepp 2017). Meanwhile, sociolegal research has consistently emphasized the importance of legal consciousness, community legitimacy, and legal pluralism in understanding informal justice systems (Merry 1988; Ewick and Silbey 1998). Despite these

important contributions, relatively little research has investigated how the emergence of digital society reshapes community-based dispute resolution within Indonesia's pluralistic legal environment. Existing studies often focus either on formal online dispute resolution mechanisms or on traditional community mediation as separate phenomena, leaving insufficient attention to the interaction between digital transformation and informal justice institutions.

This gap is significant because technological innovation does not simply replace existing legal practices. Rather, digitalization restructures the social conditions under which community institutions operate, influencing patterns of participation, authority, trust, legitimacy, and procedural fairness. Community leaders increasingly perform dual roles as traditional mediators and digital facilitators, while community members negotiate disputes through both physical and virtual spaces. These changes raise important sociolegal questions concerning the preservation of cultural legitimacy, the emergence of new forms of legal consciousness, and the capacity of local governance institutions to adapt to rapidly evolving technological environments.

Accordingly, this study examines how digital society transforms community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia using a sociolegal analytical framework. Specifically, the study addresses three interrelated questions: (1) how digital society influences the operation of community-based dispute resolution; (2) what opportunities and challenges digital technologies create for informal justice mechanisms; and (3) how sociolegal theory explains the changing relationship between digital communication, legal legitimacy, and community governance. Rather than viewing digitalization merely as technological modernization, this study argues that the transformation of community-based dispute resolution reflects broader changes in legal culture, social organization, and governance structures within Indonesian society.

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative sociolegal approach combining normative legal analysis with empirical examination of policy documents, scholarly literature, institutional reports, and relevant case studies concerning digital governance and community dispute resolution in Indonesia. Data are analyzed through qualitative content analysis and thematic interpretation to identify patterns of institutional adaptation, changing legal practices, and emerging sociolegal implications. By integrating perspectives from digital society theory, legal pluralism, and sociolegal studies, this article seeks to contribute to contemporary debates on law and technology while offering a contextual understanding of how community-based justice evolves within developing digital societies.

II. DIGITAL SOCIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY INTERACTION

The emergence of digital society has fundamentally reconfigured the ways individuals and communities communicate, organize collective activities, and negotiate social relationships. Rather than functioning merely as technological tools, digital platforms have become embedded within the social structure itself, shaping everyday interactions, institutional practices, and governance mechanisms. This transformation is particularly significant in Indonesia, where rapid digital

adoption has intersected with long-established traditions of communal life and informal dispute resolution. Consequently, community governance increasingly operates through a hybrid environment in which face-to-face deliberation coexists with digitally mediated communication.

Digital society is commonly understood as a social order in which digital technologies become central to economic activities, political participation, cultural production, and interpersonal relationships. Castells (2010) conceptualizes this transformation through the notion of the *network society*, arguing that contemporary social organization is increasingly structured by interconnected information networks rather than solely by geographic proximity or hierarchical institutions. Within these networks, communication occurs continuously through digital infrastructures that enable information to circulate almost instantaneously across multiple social spaces. As a result, authority, participation, and collective decision-making are increasingly influenced by the ability of actors to access, interpret, and distribute digital information.

Indonesia illustrates this transformation particularly well. During the past decade, internet penetration, smartphone ownership, and social media usage have expanded rapidly across urban and rural communities alike. Digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and TikTok have become essential instruments for maintaining social relationships, organizing community activities, and exchanging public information. Community meetings, announcements, neighborhood security coordination, religious activities, and village development discussions are now frequently coordinated through digital messaging groups before being implemented through conventional face-to-face interactions. Digital communication therefore complements rather than entirely replaces traditional forms of community engagement.

The growing integration of digital communication into everyday community life has also transformed patterns of social participation. Traditional community interaction generally relied upon physical proximity, scheduled meetings, and direct interpersonal communication. In contrast, digital platforms enable participation that is more immediate, flexible, and geographically unrestricted. Residents who work outside their villages, migrate to urban centers, or temporarily reside elsewhere may continue participating in local discussions through online communication channels. This expanded accessibility potentially strengthens social inclusion by allowing broader community involvement in collective decision-making processes. At the same time, participation increasingly depends upon digital literacy, internet connectivity, and technological access, creating new inequalities that may reinforce existing socioeconomic disparities (Van Dijk 2020).

The transformation of communication technologies has also altered the production and circulation of social information. Previously, community information typically passed through recognized local authorities such as village heads, neighborhood associations, religious leaders, or customary institutions. Digital platforms have significantly decentralized these information flows by enabling virtually every community member to generate, disseminate, and comment upon public information. While this democratization of communication encourages transparency and broader participation, it simultaneously reduces institutional control over information accuracy. Rumors, misinformation, manipulated digital content, and emotionally charged narratives can spread rapidly

through online networks before community leaders have opportunities to verify or clarify disputed information. Consequently, digital communication has become both an instrument of social cohesion and a potential catalyst for community conflict.

This changing communication environment directly influences the formation of legal disputes. Increasingly, conflicts originate not from physical interactions but from digital communication itself. Online defamation, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy violations, hate speech, fraudulent transactions, and misunderstandings arising from social media exchanges represent new categories of disputes confronting Indonesian communities. Unlike conventional interpersonal conflicts, digitally mediated disputes often spread rapidly across extensive social networks, attracting broader public attention and complicating efforts to achieve consensual resolution. A disagreement initially confined to two individuals may quickly evolve into a collective controversy involving family members, neighborhood organizations, community groups, and online audiences.

These developments demonstrate that digital technologies reshape not only communication channels but also the social construction of conflict itself. Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue that digital media increasingly constitute the environment within which social reality is produced and interpreted. Community members therefore experience disputes not merely through direct personal encounters but also through digital narratives, online discussions, visual documentation, and algorithmically mediated information flows. Legal consciousness—the manner in which individuals perceive law, rights, obligations, and justice—is consequently influenced by continuous exposure to digital communication. Individuals increasingly evaluate community conflicts by comparing multiple online sources, public opinions, and legal information available through internet platforms, thereby altering traditional patterns of legal authority and community trust.

From a sociolegal perspective, these developments illustrate that legal institutions evolve together with broader social transformations rather than independently from them. Cotterrell (1992) emphasizes that law derives its effectiveness from social relationships and collective legitimacy rather than solely from formal legal rules. Accordingly, community-based dispute resolution cannot remain unaffected by changes in communication technologies because its operation fundamentally depends upon interaction, trust, participation, and social acceptance. When patterns of communication change, the institutional processes through which communities negotiate conflicts inevitably change as well.

Nevertheless, digitalization should not be interpreted as replacing traditional community institutions. Instead, Indonesian communities increasingly demonstrate institutional adaptation by integrating digital technologies into existing social practices. Village governments routinely establish official WhatsApp groups to disseminate public information, neighborhood associations coordinate community activities through online messaging applications, and religious organizations increasingly employ digital communication to facilitate consultations among members. These developments illustrate what may be described as hybrid community governance, where conventional deliberative institutions continue to function while incorporating digital communication into their operational practices. Rather than eroding local governance, digital technologies may reinforce

institutional responsiveness when employed in ways that remain consistent with local cultural norms and collective expectations.

The hybridization of community interaction also affects the legitimacy of local leadership. Traditionally, authority within Indonesian communities depended largely upon age, customary position, religious status, or social reputation. Digital society introduces additional dimensions of legitimacy related to information management, communication skills, and technological competence. Community leaders are increasingly expected not only to facilitate face-to-face deliberation but also to verify online information, manage digital communication channels, respond promptly to public concerns, and mediate conflicts emerging from virtual interactions. Their authority therefore extends beyond conventional leadership functions into the management of digital public space. This evolving role reflects broader changes in community governance, where effective leadership requires balancing traditional legitimacy with digital adaptability.

Ultimately, the transformation of community interaction provides the social context within which community-based dispute resolution is being reconfigured. As communication shifts toward digitally connected networks, informal justice mechanisms are required to respond to new forms of conflict, changing patterns of participation, and evolving expectations of transparency and accountability. Understanding these changes is therefore essential before examining how traditional mechanisms of mediation, deliberation, and consensus-building are themselves transformed within Indonesia's emerging digital society. The following section explores this institutional transformation by analyzing how community-based dispute resolution adapts to the opportunities and constraints generated by digital communication technologies.

III. TRANSFORMATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Community-based dispute resolution has long constituted one of the most significant mechanisms for maintaining social order within Indonesian society. Unlike formal judicial institutions, which emphasize procedural legality and adjudication, community-based mechanisms prioritize dialogue, consensus, restoration of social relationships, and collective harmony. These mechanisms operate through locally recognized institutions, including village governments, customary councils, religious leaders, neighborhood associations, and respected community elders. Their legitimacy derives less from statutory authority than from collective trust, cultural acceptance, and shared social values, illustrating the pluralistic nature of Indonesia's legal system (Bowen 2003; Bedner 2008; Griffiths 1986).

From a sociolegal perspective, community-based dispute resolution represents an example of living law, in which legal norms emerge from everyday social practices rather than exclusively from state legislation. Ehrlich argued that the effectiveness of law depends largely on the social norms governing community life rather than on formal legal rules alone (Ehrlich 1936). This perspective has significantly influenced sociolegal scholarship by demonstrating that informal institutions frequently possess stronger practical legitimacy than formal legal institutions within local communities. In Indonesia, this dynamic is reflected in the

continued reliance on *musyawarah* (deliberation), *mufakat* (consensus), and restorative settlement despite the availability of formal judicial procedures (Bowen 2003; Lindsey and Butt 2018). Community members often perceive negotiated agreements as more sustainable because they preserve interpersonal relationships while reducing the social and economic costs associated with litigation.

Traditionally, the dispute resolution process depended heavily upon direct interpersonal communication conducted through face-to-face meetings. Community leaders facilitated discussions by bringing disputing parties together, encouraging mutual understanding, and negotiating solutions that reflected shared community interests rather than individual legal victories. Decisions were generally accepted because the mediation process emphasized participation, respect for local customs, and the restoration of social harmony. Such mechanisms illustrate what Braithwaite (2002) characterizes as restorative justice, where repairing damaged relationships takes precedence over determining legal liability or imposing punitive sanctions. Accordingly, procedural legitimacy within community mediation has historically depended upon trust, transparency, and cultural familiarity rather than strict procedural formalism.

The expansion of digital communication has not displaced these traditional principles but has significantly transformed the institutional environment in which they operate. Community mediation increasingly occurs through hybrid communication systems that combine conventional deliberation with digital interaction. Village officials, neighborhood associations, and religious organizations routinely employ WhatsApp groups, video conferencing platforms, and social media applications to coordinate meetings, disseminate information, clarify misunderstandings, and facilitate preliminary discussions before formal mediation sessions take place. Digital communication therefore extends rather than replaces existing mediation practices by enabling more efficient coordination among disputing parties and community leaders (Castells 2010; Couldry and Hepp 2017).

This institutional adaptation reflects broader changes in community governance resulting from digitalization. Communication technologies enable mediation to occur across geographical boundaries, allowing parties who are physically absent to participate in discussions through virtual platforms. This flexibility is particularly valuable in Indonesia, where labor migration, educational mobility, and urbanization frequently separate community members from their places of origin. Digital communication therefore reduces logistical barriers that previously constrained participation in community dispute resolution while simultaneously strengthening connections between dispersed members of local communities (Van Dijk 2020). Increased accessibility also enables mediators to maintain continuous communication with disputing parties throughout the mediation process rather than relying exclusively on scheduled face-to-face meetings.

Digital technologies have also transformed the management of information during dispute resolution. Traditional mediation depended largely upon oral testimony and collective memory, whereas contemporary mediation increasingly incorporates digital evidence such as screenshots, chat histories, electronic documents, photographs, video recordings, and social media content. These materials frequently become central sources of factual verification, particularly in

disputes originating from online communication. Digital documentation may enhance procedural transparency by providing objective records that assist mediators in reconstructing disputed events. At the same time, the increasing reliance on electronic evidence introduces new challenges regarding authenticity, privacy protection, contextual interpretation, and digital manipulation, requiring mediators to develop competencies extending beyond conventional interpersonal negotiation (Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

The transformation of dispute resolution is equally evident in the evolving role of community leaders. Traditionally, mediators exercised authority primarily through personal reputation, customary status, religious legitimacy, or institutional position within the community. In digitally connected environments, however, effective mediation increasingly requires competencies in information management, digital communication, and online conflict moderation. Community leaders must verify rapidly circulating information, address misinformation before it escalates into broader social conflict, facilitate constructive online dialogue, and maintain public trust within both physical and digital spaces. Their authority therefore becomes increasingly multidimensional, combining traditional social legitimacy with technological capability and communication effectiveness (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Van Dijk 2020).

These developments also influence patterns of public participation within community dispute resolution. Digital communication enables broader segments of the community to observe, comment upon, and occasionally participate in discussions surrounding local conflicts. While increased transparency may strengthen institutional accountability, excessive public exposure can simultaneously complicate mediation efforts by encouraging social polarization or external intervention. Disputes that previously remained private may rapidly attract widespread online attention, increasing social pressure upon mediators and disputing parties alike. Consequently, maintaining confidentiality and procedural fairness has become substantially more complex in digitally mediated environments than in conventional community meetings (Nissenbaum 2010; Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

From a sociolegal perspective, these institutional transformations demonstrate that digitalization does not replace informal justice but instead reshapes the mechanisms through which legal legitimacy is constructed. Legal legitimacy within community mediation continues to depend upon fairness, participation, cultural acceptance, and collective trust; however, these elements must now be negotiated within communication environments characterized by rapid information exchange, decentralized public participation, and continuous digital connectivity. Legal consciousness itself evolves as community members increasingly encounter legal information through online platforms, influencing expectations regarding transparency, accountability, procedural rights, and access to justice (Ewick and Silbey 1998). Consequently, community-based dispute resolution must simultaneously preserve its traditional normative foundations while adapting to emerging digital forms of social interaction.

The transformation of community-based dispute resolution illustrates a process of institutional adaptation rather than institutional replacement. Indonesian communities continue to rely upon deliberation, consensus, and restorative justice as fundamental normative principles, yet these principles are increasingly

implemented through digital communication infrastructures that redefine participation, authority, and conflict management. This hybrid model reflects the resilience of local legal institutions while demonstrating their capacity to respond to technological change without abandoning their underlying cultural legitimacy (Cotterrell 1992; Griffiths 1986; Bedner 2008). The following section examines how this transformation generates both significant opportunities and substantial challenges for the future development of community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF DIGITALIZED COMMUNITY-BASED DISPUTE RESOLUTION

A. Opportunities of Digitalized Community-Based Dispute Resolution

The integration of digital technology into community-based dispute resolution has created significant opportunities for improving the accessibility, efficiency, and inclusiveness of informal justice mechanisms. Rather than replacing traditional mediation, digital communication expands the institutional capacity of local communities to manage disputes across geographical, social, and temporal boundaries. This transformation is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where community mediation remains an important mechanism for resolving interpersonal, family, neighborhood, and village disputes outside formal judicial institutions. Digital platforms therefore function as institutional complements that strengthen existing mediation practices while responding to the increasing complexity of contemporary social interactions (Castells 2010; Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

One of the most significant advantages of digitalization is the improvement of accessibility to dispute resolution processes. Conventional mediation often requires disputing parties to be physically present at community meetings, creating practical obstacles for individuals who work outside their villages, migrate to urban centers, or experience mobility constraints. Digital communication platforms reduce these barriers by allowing preliminary consultations, coordination meetings, and follow-up discussions to be conducted remotely. Messaging applications and video conferencing technologies enable community leaders to maintain communication with disputing parties regardless of physical location, thereby increasing opportunities for broader participation without fundamentally altering the consensual nature of mediation (Van Dijk 2020). Increased accessibility is particularly important in geographically dispersed communities where transportation costs and distance frequently hinder participation in collective decision-making.

Digital technologies also improve procedural efficiency by accelerating the exchange of information throughout the mediation process. In traditional community dispute resolution, the organization of meetings, dissemination of invitations, and clarification of factual issues often required considerable time because communication depended primarily upon direct interpersonal contact.

Contemporary digital platforms enable mediators to distribute information immediately, coordinate schedules more effectively, and maintain continuous communication before, during, and after mediation sessions. Faster communication reduces procedural delays and allows community institutions to respond more rapidly to emerging conflicts before disagreements escalate into more serious social disputes (Castells 2010; Couldry and Hepp 2017). Consequently, digitalization strengthens the preventive function of community mediation by facilitating earlier intervention.

Another important opportunity concerns the enhancement of procedural transparency and accountability. Digital communication enables mediation activities to be documented more systematically through electronic records, written correspondence, meeting summaries, photographs, and digital evidence. Such documentation assists mediators in maintaining institutional consistency while providing parties with clearer records of negotiated agreements. Electronic documentation may also reduce misunderstandings regarding the content of mediation outcomes because agreements can be reviewed and verified after discussions have concluded. Greater transparency contributes to public confidence in community dispute resolution by demonstrating that mediation processes are conducted fairly and consistently, provided that confidentiality and data protection are adequately maintained (Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017; Nissenbaum 2010).

Digitalization further encourages broader community participation in local governance. Community members who previously experienced limited opportunities to contribute to deliberative processes may now engage through online communication platforms that facilitate discussion, consultation, and information sharing. Younger generations, in particular, tend to participate more actively through digital communication than through conventional community meetings, thereby expanding intergenerational engagement in local governance. This increased participation has the potential to strengthen democratic decision-making within community institutions by incorporating more diverse perspectives into mediation and consensus-building processes (Couldry and Hepp 2017). From a sociolegal perspective, broader participation contributes to institutional legitimacy because legal decisions become more closely connected to collective community expectations and shared social values (Cotterrell 1992).

Digital communication also enhances institutional coordination among multiple actors involved in dispute resolution. Village governments, neighborhood associations, customary institutions, religious organizations, women's groups, and youth organizations increasingly exchange information through integrated digital communication networks. Improved coordination facilitates collaborative responses to complex disputes involving multiple stakeholders while reducing duplication of institutional efforts. Such collaborative governance reflects broader developments in digital public administration, where technology supports horizontal cooperation among community institutions rather than reinforcing centralized authority alone (Meijer and Bolívar 2016). As a result, community mediation becomes more adaptive to increasingly complex patterns of social conflict.

Beyond procedural improvements, digitalization contributes to expanding public legal awareness. Community members now possess easier access to legal information, government regulations, judicial decisions, and educational resources

through digital platforms maintained by public institutions, universities, and civil society organizations. Greater availability of legal information may strengthen legal literacy by enabling individuals to better understand their rights, obligations, and available dispute resolution mechanisms. Increased legal awareness can improve the quality of community mediation because disputing parties enter negotiations with a clearer understanding of both legal principles and community expectations, thereby facilitating more informed and sustainable agreements (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Tyler 2006).

Collectively, these developments demonstrate that digital technologies possess considerable potential to strengthen community-based dispute resolution without undermining its cultural foundations. Accessibility, efficiency, transparency, participation, institutional coordination, and legal awareness all contribute to improving the effectiveness of informal justice mechanisms when digital tools are employed in ways that remain compatible with local social norms. Nevertheless, these opportunities are accompanied by significant risks that simultaneously reshape the institutional environment of community mediation. The same technologies that facilitate communication and participation also create new forms of conflict, inequality, and governance challenges requiring careful sociolegal consideration (Castells 2010; Van Dijk 2020).

B. Challenges of Digitalized Community-Based Dispute Resolution

Despite its considerable advantages, the digitalization of community-based dispute resolution also generates complex challenges that may undermine the legitimacy, fairness, and effectiveness of informal justice mechanisms. Digital communication accelerates the circulation of information and expands opportunities for participation, yet these same characteristics facilitate the rapid dissemination of misinformation, intensify public polarization, and create new forms of conflict that are often more difficult to mediate than conventional interpersonal disputes. Consequently, digital transformation should be understood not merely as technological progress but also as a source of institutional risks requiring continuous adaptation by community leaders and local governance institutions (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Nissenbaum 2010).

One of the most significant challenges is the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation through digital communication networks. Information shared through social media or messaging applications frequently circulates without adequate verification, allowing inaccurate narratives to shape public perceptions before community institutions have an opportunity to clarify disputed facts. In many instances, misunderstandings originating from edited images, incomplete conversations, or fabricated digital content escalate interpersonal disagreements into broader community conflicts. The speed with which information travels through digital networks significantly exceeds the capacity of traditional mediation institutions to respond, thereby increasing the difficulty of restoring trust once public opinion has become polarized (Wardle and Derakhshan 2017; Castells 2010).

A second challenge concerns the emergence of online harassment and digitally mediated social conflict. Community disputes increasingly arise from

cyberbullying, online defamation, hate speech, privacy violations, and hostile interactions occurring through social media platforms. Unlike conventional disputes confined to local social environments, online conflicts frequently involve anonymous actors, extensive audiences, and permanent digital records that continue circulating even after mediation has been completed. These characteristics complicate restorative approaches because reputational harm and psychological impacts often extend beyond the immediate community, reducing the effectiveness of traditional reconciliation mechanisms (Citron 2014; Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

The increasing reliance on digital communication also raises significant concerns regarding privacy and data protection during community mediation. Traditional mediation generally takes place in controlled settings where confidentiality can be maintained through direct interpersonal interaction and shared community norms. By contrast, digital mediation frequently involves the exchange of sensitive personal information through messaging applications, video conferencing platforms, or cloud-based document storage, all of which are vulnerable to unauthorized access, accidental disclosure, or deliberate redistribution. Screenshots of private conversations, audio recordings of mediation sessions, and digitally shared agreements may circulate beyond the intended participants, undermining trust in the mediation process. Since confidentiality constitutes one of the essential principles of effective mediation, inadequate protection of digital information may discourage parties from participating openly in dispute resolution and ultimately weaken institutional legitimacy (Nissenbaum 2010; Solove 2021).

Another major challenge concerns the persistence of the digital divide, which continues to shape unequal access to technology across Indonesian society. Although internet penetration has increased substantially, disparities remain between urban and rural regions, economically advantaged and disadvantaged communities, and younger and older generations. These inequalities affect not only physical access to digital infrastructure but also the ability to utilize digital technologies effectively. Van Dijk (2020) argues that the digital divide extends beyond access to include differences in digital skills, information literacy, and meaningful technological use. Within community-based dispute resolution, such disparities may inadvertently exclude vulnerable groups from participating fully in mediation processes conducted through digital platforms. Elderly community members, individuals with limited digital literacy, and residents of areas with inadequate internet connectivity may therefore encounter structural disadvantages that reduce their ability to engage in deliberative decision-making.

Closely related to the digital divide is the issue of unequal digital literacy among mediators and community leaders. The effectiveness of digital mediation depends not only on technological availability but also on the competence of those responsible for facilitating communication and managing conflict. Community leaders are increasingly expected to authenticate digital evidence, recognize misinformation, moderate online discussions, and understand the ethical implications of digital communication. However, many local institutions continue to rely on mediation practices developed for face-to-face interactions and may lack the technical expertise necessary to address conflicts originating within digital environments. Without adequate institutional capacity, digital platforms may

complicate rather than facilitate dispute resolution, reducing public confidence in community mediation and increasing dependence on formal legal institutions (UNESCO 2021; Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

Digitalization also creates important challenges for procedural fairness. Community mediation has traditionally emphasized equal participation, respectful dialogue, and consensual decision-making. Digital communication, however, may unintentionally alter these principles by privileging individuals who possess greater technological competence, stronger communication skills, or broader social influence within online networks. Participants who are more active on social media or more familiar with digital platforms may dominate discussions, shape public opinion, or influence the mediation process before formal deliberation begins. Algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged content further contributes to unequal visibility, allowing certain narratives to receive disproportionate public attention regardless of their factual accuracy. Consequently, maintaining procedural fairness requires mediators to manage not only interpersonal interactions but also the unequal dynamics created by digital communication itself (Tyler 2006; Gillespie 2018).

Another institutional challenge arises from the growing tension between public transparency and mediation confidentiality. Digital governance generally encourages openness, accountability, and public access to information as essential components of democratic governance (Meijer and Bolívar 2016). Community mediation, however, frequently depends upon confidential dialogue that allows disputing parties to negotiate sensitive issues without fear of public embarrassment or reputational harm. Excessive transparency may discourage honest participation, while excessive confidentiality may reduce public trust in mediation outcomes. Digital technologies intensify this tension because information shared during mediation can be reproduced, archived, and redistributed with minimal effort. Community institutions must therefore establish clear procedural boundaries regarding which information should remain confidential and which aspects of mediation should be documented for public accountability (Nissenbaum 2010; Solove 2021).

These challenges collectively demonstrate that digitalization transforms the institutional foundations of informal justice rather than merely introducing new communication tools. From a sociolegal perspective, the legitimacy of community-based dispute resolution depends upon balancing technological innovation with enduring principles of fairness, inclusiveness, trust, and cultural acceptance. Legal institutions derive their authority not solely from procedural efficiency but also from the confidence that communities place in the fairness of institutional processes (Cotterrell 1992; Tyler 2006). Accordingly, successful digital adaptation requires more than technological investment; it necessitates the development of governance frameworks capable of protecting privacy, reducing digital inequality, strengthening digital literacy, and preserving procedural justice within digitally mediated environments.

The opportunities and challenges discussed above reveal that digital transformation is inherently ambivalent. The same technologies that improve communication, participation, and institutional responsiveness simultaneously generate new forms of vulnerability that may weaken community trust if left unmanaged. Digital society therefore does not determine the future of community-

based dispute resolution in a deterministic manner. Rather, technological outcomes depend upon the capacity of legal institutions, community leaders, and governance structures to integrate innovation while preserving the normative values that have historically sustained informal justice in Indonesia (Castells 2010; Couldry and Hepp 2017; Banakar and Travers 2005).

V. SOCIOLEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

The transformation of community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia demonstrates that digitalization should not be understood merely as the adoption of communication technologies within existing legal institutions. Rather, it represents a broader process of institutional restructuring in which legal authority, social legitimacy, and community participation are continuously renegotiated within digitally mediated social environments. From a sociolegal perspective, technological innovation affects not only the procedural dimensions of dispute resolution but also the social conditions under which legal norms acquire legitimacy and become accepted by community members. Consequently, the relationship between law and society becomes increasingly dynamic as digital communication reshapes both the production of conflict and the mechanisms through which conflict is resolved (Cotterrell 1992; Banakar and Travers 2005).

One of the most significant implications concerns the changing nature of legal legitimacy. Classical legal theory frequently associates legitimacy with compliance derived from formal legal authority and institutional competence. Sociolegal scholarship, however, has consistently argued that legitimacy emerges through public trust, procedural fairness, and social acceptance rather than through legal coercion alone (Tyler 2006; Cotterrell 1992). Community-based dispute resolution has historically derived its legitimacy from these social foundations, particularly through collective deliberation, cultural familiarity, and the preservation of social harmony. Digital communication does not eliminate these normative foundations but alters the processes through which legitimacy is constructed. Community members increasingly evaluate dispute resolution not only by its substantive outcomes but also by the transparency of communication, the credibility of digital information, and the inclusiveness of participatory processes conducted through digital platforms.

This transformation illustrates a broader shift from institutional legitimacy toward what may be described as networked legitimacy. In conventional community governance, trust was primarily generated through direct interpersonal relationships, repeated social interaction, and the authority of recognized local leaders. Within digital society, legitimacy increasingly depends upon an institution's ability to maintain credibility across interconnected communication networks where information circulates continuously and public scrutiny extends beyond geographically bounded communities. Community leaders are therefore expected not only to resolve disputes fairly but also to communicate transparently, respond rapidly to misinformation, and demonstrate accountability within both offline and online public spheres. Institutional legitimacy consequently becomes inseparable from communicative legitimacy, reflecting the growing importance of

information management within contemporary governance (Castells 2010; Couldry and Hepp 2017).

The digitalization of community dispute resolution also reconfigures legal consciousness. Ewick and Silbey (1998) conceptualize legal consciousness as the ways ordinary people understand, experience, and engage with law in everyday life. Traditionally, legal consciousness within Indonesian communities developed primarily through direct interaction with customary institutions, religious leaders, village authorities, and interpersonal social relationships. Digital society substantially expands these sources of legal knowledge by providing immediate access to legislation, judicial decisions, government services, online legal education, and public discussions concerning legal rights and obligations. Community members therefore increasingly construct legal expectations through multiple information channels rather than relying exclusively upon local institutional authority. This diversification of legal knowledge has the potential to strengthen legal awareness while simultaneously generating competing interpretations of legal norms that mediators must reconcile during dispute resolution (Van Dijk 2020; Ewick and Silbey 1998).

Another important implication concerns the evolving relationship between legal pluralism and digital governance. Indonesia has long been characterized by the coexistence of state law, customary law (*adat*), religious norms, and informal community practices operating simultaneously within the same social environment (Griffiths 1986; Bowen 2003). Digitalization does not diminish this pluralistic legal order; instead, it creates new arenas in which these normative systems interact. Community mediation increasingly incorporates statutory regulations governing electronic information, digital privacy, cybercrime, and data protection while continuing to rely upon customary deliberation and restorative principles. Consequently, digital governance does not replace legal pluralism but expands its institutional complexity by introducing additional normative frameworks that communities must integrate into existing dispute resolution practices (Bedner 2008; Lindsey and Butt 2018).

These developments also reshape the governance role of community leaders. Historically, village heads, customary authorities, religious figures, and neighborhood leaders exercised authority primarily through their social status, moral reputation, and cultural legitimacy. Digital transformation broadens these responsibilities by requiring community leaders to function simultaneously as mediators, information managers, digital facilitators, and guardians of trustworthy communication. Their effectiveness increasingly depends upon the capacity to authenticate digital evidence, moderate online interactions, counter misinformation, and maintain constructive dialogue across multiple communication platforms. Leadership therefore becomes increasingly multidimensional, combining traditional moral authority with digital competence and organizational adaptability. This evolution reflects broader shifts toward collaborative governance in which authority is exercised through coordination, communication, and network management rather than hierarchical control alone (Meijer and Bolívar 2016; Castells 2010).

From the perspective of procedural justice, digitalization similarly presents both opportunities and institutional responsibilities. Tyler (2006) argues that individuals are more likely to accept legal decisions when they perceive dispute

resolution procedures as fair, neutral, respectful, and participatory. These principles remain equally relevant within digital mediation but require new procedural safeguards adapted to online communication environments. Community institutions must ensure that digital platforms facilitate equal participation, protect confidentiality, verify information accuracy, and prevent technological inequalities from influencing mediation outcomes. Procedural justice therefore extends beyond interpersonal fairness to include what may be termed digital procedural fairness, encompassing equitable technological access, responsible information management, and transparent digital communication throughout the mediation process (Tyler 2006; Nissenbaum 2010).

Taken together, these transformations indicate that the digitalization of community-based dispute resolution represents a process of institutional adaptation rather than institutional displacement. Informal justice mechanisms continue to derive their normative authority from deliberation, consensus, and restorative values, yet these principles are increasingly implemented through digital communication infrastructures that reshape participation, authority, and legal interaction. Sociolegal analysis therefore suggests that technological innovation does not determine institutional change independently; rather, institutional outcomes emerge through continuous interaction between technology, legal culture, and community governance. The resilience of community mediation depends not upon preserving traditional practices unchanged but upon their capacity to incorporate digital innovation while maintaining the social legitimacy that has historically distinguished informal justice within Indonesian society (Banakar and Travers 2005; Cotterrell 1992).

This analysis further suggests that digital transformation requires an expanded understanding of community governance. Governance can no longer be conceptualized solely as the administration of local institutions or the implementation of formal legal rules. Instead, governance increasingly involves the management of communication networks, digital participation, information credibility, and collaborative decision-making across interconnected social environments. Community-based dispute resolution therefore occupies a strategic position within Indonesia's broader digital transition because it demonstrates how local legal institutions negotiate technological change without abandoning culturally embedded principles of consensus, participation, and social solidarity. These findings provide the foundation for developing a sociolegal framework capable of explaining the evolving relationship between digital society, legal legitimacy, and community governance in Indonesia. This framework is presented in the following section as the principal theoretical contribution of this study.

VI. TOWARDS A SOCIOLEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR DIGITAL COMMUNITY DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The transformation of community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia demonstrates the need for a sociolegal framework capable of explaining how digital technologies interact with existing legal cultures and community governance structures. Existing approaches to digital dispute resolution often emphasize technological efficiency, procedural innovation, or institutional modernization, while studies of community justice traditionally focus on cultural

legitimacy, social relationships, and informal normative systems (Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017; Griffiths 1986). Although both perspectives provide important insights, they frequently examine technology and community-based justice as separate domains. The Indonesian experience suggests that digital transformation occurs through a process of interaction between technological infrastructures and socially embedded legal practices. Therefore, a more integrated framework is required to understand how digital society reshapes informal justice mechanisms.

This article proposes the concept of Digital-Embedded Community Dispute Resolution as a sociolegal framework for analyzing this transformation. The framework argues that digitalization does not replace community-based dispute resolution but embeds new technological capacities within existing social, cultural, and legal structures. In this framework, dispute resolution emerges from the interaction of five interconnected dimensions: (1) digital communication infrastructure, (2) transformation of social interaction, (3) hybrid mediation practices, (4) procedural legitimacy, and (5) community governance adaptation. These dimensions operate dynamically rather than sequentially, reflecting the complex relationship between technology, law, and society characteristic of sociolegal change (Banakar and Travers 2005; Cotterrell 1992).

The first dimension concerns digital communication infrastructure. Digital platforms provide the technological foundation through which communities exchange information, coordinate activities, and manage disputes. However, technology itself does not automatically produce institutional improvement. The effects of digital platforms depend on how communities incorporate these technologies into existing normative frameworks and governance practices. Castells (2010) emphasizes that networks reshape social organization by altering patterns of communication and authority, but the meaning and consequences of network participation remain influenced by local cultural contexts. In Indonesia, digital communication platforms function effectively because they are integrated into existing community relationships rather than operating independently from them.

The second dimension involves the transformation of social interaction. Digital society changes how communities experience relationships, construct conflicts, and participate in collective decision-making. Disputes increasingly emerge within hybrid social environments where physical interactions and digital communications are interconnected. Community members may experience conflict through social media exchanges, messaging applications, and online public discussions before disputes reach formal mediation processes. This transformation requires community institutions to recognize that conflict management now involves both interpersonal relationships and digital communication environments. As Couldry and Hepp (2017) argue, media technologies increasingly shape the construction of social reality itself, meaning that digital spaces have become important arenas where social norms, identities, and conflicts are produced.

The third dimension concerns hybrid mediation practices. Digital-embedded dispute resolution does not eliminate traditional mechanisms such as *musyawarah*, consensus-building, and face-to-face negotiation. Instead, it combines conventional mediation principles with digital tools that enhance communication, documentation, and coordination. This hybrid approach reflects the continuing

importance of cultural legitimacy while acknowledging technological change. Similar developments can be observed in broader Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) scholarship, which demonstrates that digital platforms are most effective when they support rather than replace human negotiation and relational processes (Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017). Within the Indonesian context, hybrid mediation allows communities to maintain restorative values while adapting to new forms of digitally mediated conflict.

The fourth dimension involves procedural legitimacy in digital environments. Traditional community mediation derives legitimacy from participation, fairness, and social trust. Digital transformation requires these principles to be extended into technological settings through mechanisms that ensure equal participation, information accuracy, privacy protection, and transparency. This article conceptualizes this process as digital procedural fairness, referring to the conditions under which digital mediation remains accessible, respectful, and legitimate for all participants. Procedural justice theory emphasizes that individuals evaluate dispute resolution not only by outcomes but also by the fairness of the process through which decisions are reached (Tyler 2006). Accordingly, digital mediation must preserve procedural fairness while addressing new technological challenges such as unequal digital access, misinformation, and privacy risks (Nissenbaum 2010).

The fifth dimension concerns community governance adaptation. Digital transformation requires local institutions to redefine their roles and capacities. Community leaders are no longer solely responsible for facilitating interpersonal reconciliation; they increasingly function as managers of digital communication, moderators of online discussions, and interpreters between technological systems and local social norms. This transformation does not necessarily weaken traditional authority. Instead, it creates new forms of legitimacy based on the ability to combine cultural knowledge with technological competence. Such adaptation reflects broader changes in governance, where authority increasingly operates through networks, collaboration, and information management rather than through hierarchical structures alone (Meijer and Bolívar 2016). The framework proposed in this study can be represented as follows:



This model highlights that digital transformation is not a linear process in which technology simply improves existing institutions. Instead, it represents a continuous negotiation between technological possibilities and social expectations. Digital tools may enhance accessibility, transparency, and participation, but their success depends upon whether communities can integrate them within legitimate normative frameworks. In other words, technology becomes socially meaningful only when embedded within existing systems of trust, authority, and collective values (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Cotterrell 1992).

The framework also contributes to broader sociolegal debates concerning the relationship between law, technology, and governance in developing societies. Much research on digital justice has focused on formal institutions, courts, and commercial Online Dispute Resolution systems, while less attention has been given to how local communities adapt digital technologies within informal justice mechanisms. By examining Indonesia's experience, this study demonstrates that digital transformation operates through processes of legal adaptation rather than legal replacement. Community-based dispute resolution remains relevant because its legitimacy derives from social relationships and cultural recognition, but its future effectiveness increasingly depends upon its capacity to operate within digitally mediated environments.

Therefore, the concept of Digital-Embedded Community Dispute Resolution provides an analytical framework for understanding how communities negotiate technological change while preserving the normative foundations of informal justice. It demonstrates that digital society does not necessarily produce the decline of community-based legal mechanisms; instead, it creates opportunities for their transformation into more adaptive, participatory, and technologically responsive forms of governance. This perspective contributes to contemporary sociolegal scholarship by showing that the future of dispute resolution lies not in choosing between traditional justice and digital innovation, but in developing institutional arrangements that integrate both dimensions within culturally legitimate frameworks.

VII. CONCLUSION

The transformation of community-based dispute resolution in Indonesia demonstrates that digitalization is not merely a technological development but a broader sociolegal process that reshapes the relationship between law, society, and governance. This study argues that digital society does not replace traditional mechanisms of community dispute resolution; rather, it transforms the ways in which these mechanisms operate through the integration of digital communication, hybrid mediation practices, and new forms of participation. Community-based dispute resolution continues to rely on deliberation, consensus, and social legitimacy, but these principles are increasingly practiced within digitally mediated environments. In this context, digital technologies provide important opportunities for improving accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and community participation, while simultaneously generating challenges related to misinformation, privacy, digital inequality, and procedural fairness (Castells 2010; Van Dijk 2020; Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy 2017).

This study contributes to sociolegal scholarship by demonstrating that digital transformation should be understood as a process of institutional adaptation rather than institutional replacement. The proposed concept of Digital-Embedded Community Dispute Resolution highlights how technological infrastructures interact with legal culture, community norms, and governance practices to produce new forms of informal justice. The Indonesian experience shows that the legitimacy of community-based dispute resolution increasingly depends not only on cultural recognition and interpersonal trust but also on the capacity of local institutions to manage digital communication, maintain procedural fairness, and sustain public confidence within networked environments. This perspective expands existing discussions on digital justice by emphasizing the importance of socially embedded legal practices in understanding technological transformation (Cotterrell 1992; Banakar and Travers 2005; Couldry and Hepp 2017).

The findings suggest that effective digital transformation of community dispute resolution requires balancing technological innovation with cultural legitimacy, inclusiveness, and institutional capacity. Policymakers and local governance institutions should therefore focus not only on expanding digital infrastructure but also on strengthening digital literacy, protecting privacy, developing ethical guidelines for digital mediation, and ensuring equal participation among community members. Future research should further investigate empirical variations across Indonesian regions and examine how different communities negotiate the relationship between digital technologies and local justice traditions. Ultimately, the future of community-based dispute resolution in digital society depends on the ability of legal institutions to integrate technological change while preserving the participatory and socially grounded character of community justice (Griffiths 1986; Bowen 2003; Nissenbaum 2010).

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Generative AI Statement

None