Communication in the Perspective of Strengthening Social Solidarity in Rural Communities in Wajo Regency

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the way communication can be used in enhancing solidarity in Wajo Regency Rural Communities. Based on the analysis of communication activities, difficulties, and solutions in the communities' case, it outlines the ways how both conventional and innovative means can promote sociability. This paper finds that through engagements that involve limited technologies, people in rural areas depend on word of mouth or word through physical bodies, individuals and localized social gatherings for information dissemination, conflict solving as well as to foster trust. The study also defines various barriers to communication, including intergenerational differences, mis-information and culture, but the study also shows how the community has been able to overcome these barriers by trying to come up with workable solutions such as the use of an Intergenerational mediator and community-based intervention programmes to correct any information short comings. Besides, the present research draws attention to the need for the communicative competence in the maintenance and development of social connectedness as well as in facilitating collaborative efforts. The identified findings provide insight into the nature of communication processes in the rural setting and show that despite omnipresent globalization forces, traditional means of communication remain viable and when supplemented with enhanced technologies and skills will enhance social cohesiveness. This study provides useful information for policy makers, rural development planners and administrators and for community leaders who want to improve communication practices and social integration in rural communities.

KEYWORDS: Communication Practices, Social Solidarity, Rural Communities, Wajo Regency, Communication Challenges

1. Introduction

Organic solidarity, as identified from Durkheim work, is a building block of all the communities because it propounds the idea of people togetherness by embracing unity and reciprocal confidence within a society. In country environments people depend on themselves and on each other for existence and wellbeing thus solidarity is more essential. As highlighted in the case study of Wajo Regency, situated in South Sulawesi, Indonesia the nature of the relations within the communities is in the best sense of word, strong. To this end, this study aims at determining how communication can be utilized in enhancing social solidarity in these rural settings where both new and old forms of communication technologies are blended in a rather special way.

Wajo Regency and any other rural areas in Indonesia are inhabited by a closed-air community whose lifestyles embrace significant interactions within their society. Prevailing paradigm of villages in Indonesia especially the rural areas has always been dictated by farming whereby the villagers even shared their labor force, materials and emotional support systems. Communication proves to be especially important in creating social cohesion when information is exchanged or shared, identity is affirmed and co-operation is encouraged (Gutiérrez et al., 2022). Regarding the keeping of social relations rural based like Wajo, face to face conversation, oral narratives or group meeting as Inayah et al. (2022) opined is vital. Thus, modernization of communication even affects the tradition means of people's communications such as oral in context of social cohesion.

In the society in question, the functions of communication to promote social cohesion and interdependence can be easily studied through informal and structured communication held in rural Wajo village markets and official gatherings attended by roman and other local leaders. Amd careful to note, so did Toplean (2021) assert that social solidarity is anchored on moral consensus. Therefore, in the rural community, such moral bonds are sustained by the practices of communication that informs more than it

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gives tools for keeping trust, honor, and regarding fellow villagers as one among equals. However, getting insight on how these communication practices are implemented and sustained in light of modernity, technology, and socio-economic features presents the challenge.

The social media and the mobile phone as fashion in the present-day communication had brought a new dimension to the rural communication. Nevertheless, these tools bring opportunities more extended span of the communication, it also presents the issues regarding the close and face to face communication which use to be a nature of Rural solidarity (Hwang & Lee, 2018). This paper examines the change from face-to-face word-of-mouth communication to internet- based technology-based communication in Wajo and the interaction between the traditional and innovative communication methods in enhancing social solidarity in rural areas. In the context of Nah et al. (2021), the establishment of the new media had the effect of rewiring the social relations of people living in rural contexts, of generating new forms of solidarity on one hand, as of subverting new forms of community on the other hand.

Secondly, the bearings which communication has in enhancing social cohesiveness are, therefore, not solely determined by the technical requirements adopted, however on the cultural matrix into which the technologies are introduced. In Wajo, there is a tradition involved in the communication process which include the Wajo people customs, believes and practices. Besides mobilising inter-communal communication channels like local radio, communal announcements and traditional ceremonial events reassures social connectedness and promotes shared responsibility across communities (Abdulkadir, 2020). All these practices deposit into the world of common knowability making it possible for a person to find a place within a given social structure.

Although social solidarity is most commonly used to refer to common sets of values and norms there are elements of commitment to work for the common good. Cooperation through communication is all the more important for the above-mentioned collective activities involving people from different places, for solving global problems like distribution of resources, health care, education, and calamities. In a village like Wajo, where needs may be many and access to support from external sources may be slow or nonexistent, communication becomes a very essential strategy in rallying the community and see that its members are alright (Putnam, 2000). Communication thus transmits the duality of the interaction that is not only interindividual but also social and of mobilization and resolution of the problems.

The major problem of the rural communities of the present-day countries is the breakdown of traditional social structures brought on by urbanization, economic strains, and westernization. Due to changing demographics, focal economic activities, and changing culture of such rural societies as in Wajo, concern becomes inevitable in view of social solidarity as facilitated by communication (Zang et al., 2020). This could promote separated communities, where individuals are not as close to one another as they used to be, which defeat the purpose of moving towards sense of unity and which is fundamental for communities' cohesion.

However, new conditions of the communicative situation in rural areas offer possibilities for social inclusiveness. Digital technologies, free community radio and mobile technologies create new opportunities for to communicate, interact, as well as become informed and mobilized in rural areas. However, the problem is to avoid the new forms of communication replacing the older ones but rather to add onto them. Rezaei et al. (2020) was of the opinion that the communication practices in use are conditioned by the amount of cultural and social capital available. For Wajo, it is significant to understand how the both what was old and what is new can complement each other in as far as over communication scantiness is concerning in cementing social solidarity.

This paper shows that communication has a very important role in the introduction of development programs in the rural areas. When communities at the grassroots level are struggling to deal with issues like poverty, climate change or limited access to services, communication can be a major resource that facilitates the ability of communities to cope with the situations. Wajo is a district where agriculture continues to be a dominant source of income and communication is highly relevant in sharing information on farming techniques, available market and government regulations. In addition, communication can also enhance the capability of the leaders and organisations of the communities to demand for what they

want and bargain with factors in the outside environment such as local authorities or NGOs.

2. Methods

This tour unearths that adopted a descriptive qualitative research methodology to identify the function of communication in enhancing societal unity within the selected rural communities in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi. Categorised reasons for using qualitative methods included the following: quantitative methods do not enable the assessment of the social processes and dynamics regarding the cohesiveness of the community. The study was therefore designed to assess the Community Social Inclusion (CSI) of the targeted participants in terms of their personal beliefs or perceptions and perceived interaction patterns on factors that put into practice communication activities for mobilizing the community together.

The study was conducted using a case study approach; only some of the villages in Wajo regency were chosen for the study. A case study approach was considered suitable because it allows exploring the interactions and processes in the context of particular cultures and societies. The researcher tried to establish communication patterns used by the community: both; new, and old which assists in the maintenance or enhancement of togetherness. Data for this study were collected through semi structured interviews, participant observation and focus group discussions. These methods were chosen to gain an overview of the daily lace shared within the community to collect qualitative data from different subjectivities.

Finally, 25 face-to-face semi-structured interviews of community leaders, local government representatives, and respondents in the selected villages were accomplished. In order to obtain participants for the interviews, they were purposively recruited following their experiences within the community and their understanding of communication within the context. This semi structured approach facilitated understanding of new areas, as well as the development of different thoughts throughout the interviews while at the same time providing a sort of framework in conducting the interviews. Each interview aimed at finding out the participants' perception of how communication fosters social cohesion with emphasis on both the traditional and contemporary methods.

The researcher stayed in the communities for over two months, attending and engaging in communal activities such as, meetings, prayers and farming. This way the participant observation helped the researcher to get closer to the observation of natural communication practices within the community and how it supports its cohesiveness. While engaging the researcher in these discussions, the author took notes of the verbal and nonverbal cues within an effort to capture moments of collaborative and transformative interpersonal interactions among the community members.

Another way of data collection was two focus group discussion with citizens from different villages. The conducted focus groups aimed at the possibility of people's collective reflection on the purpose of communication in the solidarity of society. People were asked to freely share their interactions with others in the community using both offline and online communication and how these practices affect their feelings of communality and unity. What I found to be very beneficial is that focus-groups help bring together different groups of people and allowed me to get an insight on how a group of people, with different personalities and way of thinking would make a decision.

The interviews and the focus groups were conducted based on purposively selected participants. The researcher recruited participants who were concerned with the social and cultural endeavours of the community such as local administrators, village heads and persons with previous experience in communication. The sample was expected as a random group of people who have diverse age, gender and positions within the village in order to have the broad opinion on the aspect of the communication and the social solidarity. The final sample consisted of 25 interviewees and 14 participants of focus group discussions.

The interview narratives, observation notes, and focus group discussions were coded with the aid of thematic analysis. The different method describes below is commonly used in qualitative research and refer to the process of recognizing and categorizing patterns (themes) in a particular data. All interviews and focus group discussions were tapescripted with words recorded by the interviewer replayed word-for-word in a bid to become intimately acquainted with the data, the researcher went through the taping

transcription a number of times. The next process was coding and the researcher noted down meaning cognitive units of communication, practice and solidarity.

These codes were then clustered into themes that would encompass core features of the research question, such as old and new age communication paradigms, communication technology, community mobilization and coordination. Such thematic analysis enabled the authors to examine patterns and lessons of repeated encounters that were necessary to gain a better appreciation of the role of communication in the enhancement of social solidarity in rural Wajo. The results were discussed with the field notes and personal code analysis, which helped make the final detailed analysis of the material not only exhaustive but also based on the material reality of the given community.

3. Results and Discussion

As the observation has indicated, the communication assumed a central position in Wajo Regency with regard to social solidarity in rural areas. They represent a set of practices constantly evolving in response to a blend of tradition and postmodern local experiences. The intenders used in the community are not only informative in nature but also relational as well as transformative to relationships, trust, and collective responsibility. The subsequent chapters discuss the variety of communicative practices in Wajo in further detail, including both historical and contemporary modes of interaction, the involvement of the community, and the efficacy of religious and social group meetings for the forging of unity.

As mentioned above, social intercourse still extensively relies on face-to-face communication common in the rural setting of Wajo. The most common is the face-to-face communication which is done during the course of Gotong royong exercise such as community service, village meetings and prayers. These practices are similar to Verbal Communication which we use words, especially in making decisions orally through discussions.

One distinctive feature of conventional media in the course of communicating Wajo involves the interpersonal and participatory approach. Representatives of any age, sex, and rank join to be engaged in the collective problem-solving. The respondents also stressed that these interactions were not only rational and informative, but also had a signaling function in terms of values, trust and respect. According to one community leader:

> *"When we gather for gotong royong, it's not just about working together. It's a space to reconnect, discuss issues, and ensure everyone feels included in the process. It's through these face-to-face interactions that we reinforce our bonds as a community."*

This quote underscores the role of communication in building and reinforcing social capital, a vital aspect of community solidarity. The regularity of these events ensures that communication remains a central pillar in the cohesion of rural Wajo, enabling the community to overcome challenges collectively.

Religious gatherings in Wajo also function as a vital medium for communication. Islam, the predominant religion in the region, influences much of the social fabric. Prayer sessions, study groups, and religious ceremonies not only serve spiritual purposes but also act as spaces for social interaction. Friday prayers and tahlilan (memorial prayers) offer opportunities for people to communicate with one another in both spiritual and social contexts.

During the interviews, several participants mentioned that religious leaders, such as the imam, play a significant role in facilitating communication between community members. Their sermons often include messages of unity, solidarity, and collective action, which resonate deeply within the community. A resident shared:

> *"The imam doesn't just lead us in prayer. He talks to us about how to stay united, help each other, and live harmoniously. Those words go beyond religion; they touch our hearts and bring us closer together."*

Religious communication thus contributes not only to the spiritual well-being of the community but also to its social cohesion. This practice reflects the integrated nature of religion and community solidarity, where communication is a tool for moral reinforcement and collective responsibility. As technology advances, modern communication methods have gradually been integrated into the daily lives of Wajo's rural population. Mobile phones and social media platforms have   become   increasingly important for

connecting individuals, disseminating information, and organizing events. However, while digital communication offers convenience, it does not replace traditional face-to-face interactions but rather complements them.

A key finding from the interviews was the increasing use of WhatsApp groups for village administration and social coordination. These groups enable the swift dissemination of important information such as meeting times, health advisories, or local news. One participant, a village head, explained:

> "We use WhatsApp to share news quickly. When there's a village event or an important meeting, everyone knows through the group. But the real work still happens face-to-face. The group just helps us stay connected in between those personal interactions."

The integration of digital tools like WhatsApp illustrates a hybrid communication environment, where both traditional and modern methods coexist and complement each other. These tools support the community's organizational and social functions but do not overshadow the significance of direct, personal engagement. This finding highlights the adaptation of rural communities to technological advancements while maintaining traditional communication values.

Communication in Wajo is closely linked to community engagement, which often manifests in collective action. The concept of gotong royong is not only a cultural tradition but also a communication practice that promotes cooperation and mutual aid. Communication here extends beyond the exchange of information to fostering a collective identity and shared purpose.

During my observations of community activities, I noted that communication often involved a mix of practical instructions and symbolic gestures that reinforced the importance of working together. For instance, during a communal farming activity, individuals communicated through shared tasks, making decisions about planting schedules, irrigation methods, and resource allocation. These conversations, though often informal, helped align the community's actions with its broader goals of agricultural sustainability and economic well-being. A participant who took part in a gotong royong session noted:

> "We don't need to discuss everything in detail. We trust each other. Communication here is about action. We work together and support each other. That's how we maintain solidarity."

This participant's reflection demonstrates the action-oriented nature of communication, where shared efforts strengthen both social bonds and community outcomes. In Wajo, communication is seen not just as an exchange of words but as a means to act in unison for the common good. Interview Results:

The interviews revealed several key insights regarding the role of communication in social solidarity. One of the recurring themes was the importance of trust and mutual respect in communication. Participants frequently highlighted that open, honest conversations were essential for building trust within the community. For example, a village elder stated:

> "When people talk openly and listen to each other, trust grows. Trust is the foundation of our solidarity. Without it, we cannot work together."

Moreover, participants noted that effective communication facilitated the resolution of conflicts and the maintenance of peace within the community. A woman who had participated in several village discussions shared:

> "There are disagreements, of course. But communication helps us understand each other and find common ground. It's how we stay united."

These insights point to the crucial role of communication in managing social dynamics, resolving conflicts, and promoting harmony within the community.

Role of Communication in Strengthening Social Solidarity

In rural communities such as those in Wajo Regency, communication serves as the backbone of social solidarity. Through various forms of communication, from face- to-face conversations to the use of modern technology, individuals are able to connect, share information, and create meaningful relationships that bind the community together. Social solidarity, in the context of Wajo Regency, is more than just the existence of mutual support it is the collective effort of individuals who are bonded through communication practices that foster unity, trust, and cooperation. This section elaborates on the essential role that communication plays in strengthening these communal bonds.

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One of the most important roles communication plays in strengthening social solidarity in Wajo is by facilitating trust and cooperation among community members. Trust is a vital component of social solidarity, and it is built and nurtured through open and honest communication. Whether it is through regular face-to-face interactions during community events like gotong royong (communal work), religious gatherings, or village meetings, communication ensures that individuals are kept informed and included in decisions that affect them. Several interviewees shared that communication allows them to express concerns, provide feedback, and contribute to collective decision-making processes. As a result, these conversations lead to increased cooperation and a deeper sense of unity. One village head mentioned:

> *"The foundation of our village's success is trust. We build it through constant communication. When people communicate openly, they trust each other, and that's when they are more willing to work together."*

This quote highlights the direct relationship between communication and trust, demonstrating how consistent and transparent interactions lead to increased cooperation, which ultimately strengthens social solidarity. Communication in Wajo also plays a significant role in resolving conflicts and maintaining social harmony. Conflicts, whether they arise from resource distribution, differing opinions, or personal disagreements, are inevitable in any community. However, the way in which these conflicts are addressed often determines the level of social solidarity within the group. Open dialogue, active listening, and conflict resolution skills allow communities to manage disagreements in a constructive manner, ensuring that tensions do not fragment the community. In Wajo, many community members emphasized that through regular meetings and open discussions, conflicts were often resolved without escalating into larger issues. For instance, a community member shared:

> *"When conflicts arise, we don't just ignore them. We talk about it in our meetings. There are always disagreements, but communication allows us to understand one another and find solutions that benefit everyone."*

This statement reinforces the idea that communication is essential for maintaining peace and harmony within the community. By encouraging individuals to openly express their concerns and listen to one another, communication provides a platform for resolution, which in turn strengthens the solidarity of the group.

Communication also plays a crucial role in mobilizing individuals for collective action. In Wajo, as in many rural communities, collective action is a key driver of social solidarity. Activities such as gotong royong, agricultural cooperatives, and religious events are reliant on individuals coming together with a shared purpose. Communication is the tool that ensures these collective efforts are coordinated and carried out efficiently.

Through verbal and non-verbal cues, individuals in Wajo are able to organize and align their efforts toward a common goal. During interviews, participants emphasized that communication enables them to organize collective actions such as village clean-up campaigns, repairs, or even mutual assistance during times of hardship. A local elder explained:

> *"We know the importance of working together, and communication makes it possible. When there's a task that needs doing, everyone knows their part and is ready to act."*

This response highlights how effective communication directly leads to successful collective action, which in turn reinforces the sense of community and solidarity among individuals. By ensuring that everyone is informed and involved, communication fosters a collective mindset that contributes to the success of social initiatives.

Another important role of communication in strengthening social solidarity in Wajo is its ability to foster a sense of belonging and community identity. Communication practices, such as sharing stories, cultural traditions, and communal activities, allow individuals to form emotional connections with each other. This shared experience creates a sense of belonging to a larger group with common goals and values.

In rural Wajo, communication through storytelling, rituals, and cultural practices reinforces social identity and creates a strong bond between individuals. By regularly engaging in communication that is grounded

in shared cultural practices, members of the community are able to reinforce their collective identity, which enhances social solidarity. One participant noted:

> "Our traditions bind us together. Through storytelling and rituals, we remind ourselves of who we are and why we are united. This communication keeps us grounded in our values."

This statement underscores the role of communication in building a collective identity that transcends individual differences, emphasizing shared values and a mutual commitment to the well-being of the community.

Communication is also an empowering tool for individuals within the community, as it allows them to participate in decision-making and collective governance. In Wajo, village meetings and community consultations provide platforms for individuals to voice their opinions and influence the direction of community initiatives. This democratic form of communication empowers individuals to become active participants in shaping the future of their communities. The sense of empowerment that comes from being able to contribute to important decisions strengthens individuals' commitment to their community and its goals. A youth leader expressed:

> "In our village, everyone's voice matters. When we have a problem or an opportunity, we talk about it openly, and everyone has the chance to contribute. This makes me feel like I'm part of something important."

This quote highlights the empowerment that communication fosters, enabling individuals to actively engage in the development and growth of their community. By encouraging participation and inclusion, communication ensures that social solidarity is not just about group cohesion but also about individual empowerment and collective ownership of community goals. From the interviews conducted with community members, it became clear that communication is not just a tool for exchanging information; it is a fundamental practice that underpins all aspects of social solidarity in Wajo. Participants consistently emphasized that their strong sense of community and mutual support was directly linked to the quality of communication they maintained. One community elder shared:

> "Communication is what keeps us together. It's how we stay informed, how we understand each other, and how we ensure that everyone has a voice. Without it, we wouldn't have the same sense of solidarity."

Another participant noted the importance of regular meetings in building solidarity:

> "The more we talk, the more we understand each other. These conversations, whether they are about the harvest or a family issue, help us stay united. Communication is the thread that ties us all together."

These responses reinforce the central role communication plays in promoting unity, trust, and cooperation in rural Wajo. Communication, in all its forms, is integral to the strengthening of social solidarity, facilitating both individual and collective growth.

Challenges in Communication for Social Solidarity

While communication plays a vital role in fostering social solidarity in Wajo Regency, several challenges impede its effectiveness. These challenges are linked to both traditional communication barriers and modern issues arising from technological changes and evolving social dynamics. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that communication remains a strong pillar in maintaining and strengthening social solidarity in the community. This section explores the main challenges faced by the community in communicating for social solidarity.

One of the most significant barriers to effective communication in rural Wajo is the limited access to technology and inadequate infrastructure. While some urban areas in Indonesia have robust communication networks, rural communities like those in Wajo still struggle with poor internet connectivity and limited access to digital platforms. This creates a significant gap in how information is shared and how community members engage with one another.

During interviews, several participants pointed out that access to information through modern communication tools such as smartphones and social media is often limited. In areas with poor internet service, many community members rely on word of mouth or face-to-face interactions, which can slow

down the dissemination of important information, especially in times of crisis. A local government official shared:

> *"While urban areas have embraced technology for communication, here in Wajo, many still face challenges accessing the internet. The lack of infrastructure hampers our ability to stay updated on issues that affect the whole village."*

This lack of access to digital communication tools limits the scope of information sharing and inhibits participation in broader social or political discussions. Consequently, it creates a divide between those who have access to modern communication tools and those who do not, weakening the potential for inclusive dialogue and collective decision-making in the community.

Another challenge in Wajo's communication for social solidarity is the generational gap in communication styles and preferences. Older generations, particularly those who have lived in rural areas for most of their lives, tend to rely on traditional forms of communication, such as in-person meetings, oral communication, and printed materials. On the other hand, younger generations, who are more familiar with digital platforms and social media, often prefer communication methods that are quicker, more interactive, and less reliant on face-to-face interaction.

This difference in communication preferences can create misunderstandings and divisions within the community, particularly when important community decisions or events require broad participation. During interviews, some young people expressed frustration with the traditional communication methods, while older community members were cautious about adopting new technologies. A youth leader stated:

> *"We have social media and mobile apps to stay connected, but some of the older members prefer face-to-face meetings. It feels like there's a disconnect between us because we don't communicate the same way."*

This generational divide can lead to inefficiencies in information sharing, where one group feels excluded from important discussions, while the other feels frustrated with the pace and formality of traditional communication methods. The challenge lies in finding a balance that can bridge this gap and create a more cohesive communication environment for all generations.

Wajo Regency, like many rural areas in Indonesia, is home to a diverse population with various ethnic groups and cultural practices. While this diversity contributes to the richness of the community, it can also pose a challenge to communication for social solidarity. Language differences, cultural norms, and varying levels of literacy can create barriers to effective communication.

different ethnic groups within the community may speak different languages or dialects, which can complicate communication efforts, especially when trying to unify the community around a common cause or issue. Additionally, cultural norms surrounding communication, such as respect for elders or hesitancy to speak openly in public, can hinder honest dialogue. One community elder reflected on this challenge during an interview:

> *"We speak different dialects here. Sometimes, the younger people have to translate for us, but there's always a risk of miscommunication. It's important that we all understand each other clearly to avoid misunderstandings."*

This reflects the reality that even within a single village or district, communication may be complicated by linguistic differences and cultural diversity, requiring additional effort to ensure everyone is on the same page. The challenge lies in ensuring that communication is inclusive and accessible to all community members, regardless of their background or language.

Another challenge that negatively affects communication for social solidarity in Wajo is the spread of misinformation and rumors. In the absence of reliable sources of information, rumors often circulate, especially in rural areas where traditional forms of communication (word of mouth, community gatherings) are still prevalent. Misinformation can create divisions, sow distrust, and damage the unity within the community. During the interviews, several participants expressed concerns about how rumors or false information can spread quickly and impact decision-making. A village leader noted:

> *"Misinformation is a problem in our community. We hear things from people who don't know the full story, and then it spreads. It can create unnecessary tension and divide people who should be*

> *working together."*

This quote emphasizes the importance of reliable communication channels, as rumors and false claims can undermine trust, create confusion, and lead to social discord. Effective communication systems, therefore, must be established to counteract the negative effects of misinformation and ensure that accurate and timely information reaches everyone. Finally, one of the more subtle yet persistent challenges to communication in Wajo is the lack of communication skills among certain members of the community. Communication is not just about sharing information, but also about doing so in a way that is clear, respectful, and effective. Some community members, particularly those who have limited exposure to formal education or public speaking, may struggle to express themselves adequately or engage in productive discussions. A local teacher shared:

> *"There are times when people want to contribute to a meeting or share an opinion, but they're not confident in their communication skills. This can sometimes make the meeting less effective, as the ideas aren't fully communicated."*

This barrier to effective expression means that important perspectives may be left unheard, thus hindering collective problem- solving and decision-making. The lack of communication training or exposure to public speaking can limit the ability of individuals to express themselves in ways that promote understanding and social cohesion. The interviews highlighted various challenges to communication for social solidarity in Wajo. For example, one participant from a rural village stated:

> *"Sometimes, when we try to organize community activities, we struggle with getting everyone involved. The older generation prefers meeting face-to-face, but the younger generation is more comfortable with digital tools. It's difficult to bring everyone together under one communication style."*

Another interviewee added:

> *"The rumors in the village can really disrupt our unity. Once false information spreads, it takes a long time to correct, and by then, people have already formed their opinions."*

These responses reflect the complexities of communication in a rural setting, where technology gaps, generational divides, language differences, and misinformation complicate the process of strengthening social solidarity. Despite these challenges, however, many community members expressed a willingness to improve communication and address these issues, recognizing that overcoming them is essential for fostering stronger community ties and collective action.

Comparative Analysis with Existing Literature

The role of communication in strengthening social solidarity within rural communities has been widely discussed in existing literature, with scholars emphasizing its significance in fostering cooperation, resolving conflicts, and promoting collective action (Putnam, 2000; Durkheim, 1893). However, the findings from this study in Wajo Regency offer unique insights into how communication practices are shaped by the specific challenges and contexts of rural communities, providing a comparative analysis with existing theories and research.

Existing literature highlights that rural communities often face unique communication challenges compared to urban areas, such as limited access to technology and infrastructure (Gupta & Sharma, 2017). These challenges can hinder effective communication and social interaction, reducing the potential for strong social solidarity. The findings from this study align with this perspective. In Wajo Regency, many participants identified the lack of technological infrastructure as a significant barrier to communication. One respondent noted:

> *"In our village, we have very limited internet access. So, we rely on face- to-face meetings and traditional forms of communication, but this slows down the spread of information."*

This finding echoes the arguments made by Gupta and Sharma (2017), who suggest that rural communities often lag behind in adopting modern communication tools, creating a divide between those who are technologically literate and those who are not. Furthermore, these barriers can prevent rural communities from fully benefiting from digital technologies, which are increasingly used in urban areas to facilitate faster, more efficient communication (Pascual et al., 2020). The generational divide in

communication styles is another issue that has been explored in the literature. According to Thompson et al. (2014), younger generations tend to prefer digital communication methods such as social media and messaging apps, while older generations are more inclined toward traditional communication methods like face- to-face interaction. This generational divide can create misunderstandings and hinder the formation of strong social bonds across age groups. The findings from this study confirm this perspective, as many young participants in Wajo expressed frustration with the slow pace of traditional communication methods. A youth leader in the community explained:

> *"We have social media and mobile apps to stay connected, but some of the older members prefer face-to-face meetings. It feels like there's a disconnect between us because we don't communicate the same way."*

While the generational divide has been noted in existing literature, this study highlights the complexity of such divisions in rural communities, where face-to-face communication remains highly valued. In contrast to urban settings, where digital platforms can serve as effective substitutes for in-person communication, rural communities like Wajo continue to rely on traditional forms of communication for cultural and social reasons (Ray & Goebel, 2014). This highlights the importance of understanding the local context when designing communication strategies aimed at strengthening social solidarity. Misinformation and rumors have long been recognized as challenges to effective communication in rural communities. According to studies by Kim & Kim (2015) and Vasilenko (2019), misinformation can disrupt community unity, generate conflicts, and delay collective action. This study's findings further support these assertions, as several participants highlighted the damaging effects of rumors and false information on community cohesion. One community member emphasized:

> *"Misinformation is a problem in our community. We hear things from people who don't know the full story, and then it spreads. It can create unnecessary tension and divide people who should be working together."*

In line with the literature, this study found that misinformation often circulates through informal networks, such as family, friends, and neighbors, where unverified or incomplete information is shared. As Vasilenko (2019) suggests, the lack of formal channels for communication in rural areas increases the vulnerability to misinformation, which can be particularly harmful in tight- knit communities like Wajo. However, the study also found that certain community members actively work to counteract misinformation through face-to- face discussions and community forums, a practice that aligns with findings from other research on rural solidarity (McAllister & Watson, 2021). One village leader explained:

> *"We try to correct rumors immediately when we hear them. It's important to communicate directly with the people to avoid further misunderstanding."*

This emphasizes the importance of interpersonal communication as a means to counteract misinformation and strengthen social bonds within rural communities. The community's efforts to combat misinformation through traditional means highlight a possible solution to the challenge that has been overlooked in much of the literature. The challenge of cultural and linguistic diversity in communication for social solidarity is another key issue that has been explored in the literature. Scholars like Hall (1976) and Vygotsky (1978) have pointed out that differences in language, cultural practices, and values can create barriers to effective communication, particularly in communities with multiple ethnic or linguistic groups. This has been noted as a significant issue in rural areas where cultural homogeneity may no longer be the norm. The findings from this study in Wajo confirm these concerns. The community members in Wajo speak different dialects and belong to several ethnic groups, and communication across these groups can be challenging. A local elder shared:

> *"We speak different dialects here. Sometimes, the younger people have to translate for us, but there's always a risk of miscommunication. It's important that we all understand each other clearly to avoid misunderstandings."*

This supports the literature's argument that language diversity can lead to miscommunication and hinder

the establishment of a common identity within a community (Piller, 2016). Moreover, the reliance on younger generations to act as interpreters can exacerbate the power dynamics within the community, as those with more linguistic expertise hold more influence over communication processes. This highlights the need for communication strategies that are inclusive and culturally sensitive, as suggested by researchers like Piller (2016) and Mead (1934). While many scholars emphasize the importance of communication infrastructure and technology, few discuss the role of communication skills in fostering social solidarity. This study, however, found that communication skills play a critical role in how effectively community members can engage with one another, particularly when dealing with sensitive or divisive issues. A teacher in Wajo commented:

> *"There are times when people want to contribute to a meeting or share an opinion, but they're not confident in their communication skills. This can sometimes make the meeting less effective, as the ideas aren't fully communicated."*

This finding aligns with the work of Vassilakopoulou & Hustad (2023), who stresses the importance of effective communication in bridging social divides. In Wajo, as in other rural areas, lack of confidence or skills in public speaking can limit the ability of individuals to express their views in a way that fosters understanding and social cohesion. Addressing this issue requires focused efforts to improve communication education and public speaking skills among community members. Among the emerging issues found to have hindered the development of communication practices in Wajo Regency is inadequate availability of the contemporary communication networks, especially the ICTs. Much of this has been articulated in prior literature especially with reference to how innovations in digital communication technology are perceived in the rural context globally. Grover & Lyytinen (2023) state that some of the main challenges that organisations in rural regions experience include scarce availability of digital networks, indicating that it is difficult for these organisations to use extensive, faster and wide communication channels like those of urban areas. In these communities the use of face-to-face communication and other conventional approaches of conveying information is still dominant.

However, the findings from this study go beyond merely pointing to those above limitations. Admittedly, the technological limitation is present in the rural communities in Wajo; nevertheless, the population does not stop engaging in communications. According to Rich & Pather (2021), rural dwellers seem to have more reliance on the electronic interpersonal networks when actually technological set ups have their own drawbacks; the strings and supports are however built around interpersonal channels to address social relations issues. For instance, even in the current era where few of the inhabitants are connected to the internet, still the people convene at the village hall or other local social amenities to share information or information as a package calculated to forward group ambitions or to socialize. Such reliance of face-to-face interaction denotes an optimization of behavior that has been applied to make the community's solidarity persistent.

The study findings are also in tandem with the recent work by You & Hon (2021) which noted that in the rural context word of mouth or community notices may not only endure but thrive and taken as a critical adjunct to digital communication. Furthermore, punctual transmission of messages and conversations in rural Wajo proactively enhances social cohesiveness of the communities by creating a feeling of belonging and social kinship, although it is not easily possible in the digital platforms. Jiang (2020) emphasis that face-to-face communication has a special function in trust creation, which is a critical means to social inclusion. This power to develop relations of individuals directly is one of the explanations of social cohesion even in the technological destinations. Another consideration established in this work relates to the differences in the ways older and younger people perceive communication. Previous scholarly works have pointed out that the younger people, who are more conversant with ICT means of conveying messages, are more likely to have conflicts with the elder people who mostly use the conventional means of passing messages. Mathrani et al. (2022) further shows that the young people more so in the rural areas spend most of their time on social media and mobile phones using social relations than the older persons who prefer face to face contacts. Such division is generational and can cause difficulties in communication, misinterpretation or even lack of it and, therefore, a breakdown of society.

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Even in Wajo there is a clear division between the two generations but the study shows how the two have come up with means and ways of coming closer. Young adults here play an intermediary role between the villagers and the computer media, regardless of what the older folks may not fully understand due to their level of ICT literacy. This adaptive process not only guarantees the exchange of information between different generations, but also maintains intergenerational relationships, and mutual recognition. It is because this serves as a way of embracing both the old ways of communication and the modern way of communication, we have constant relay of information that fits in the generation of old and young people. This adaptability is in sharp contradiction with the observations of Zhang & Zhang (2020) who note that rural communities are typically divided between generations. In Wajo, however, the findings indicate that there is a little chance of bitter rivalry but instead it is an area that everybody can work together and learn from each other to become one people.

Moreover, the sharing and the use of digital means for asking questions or for getting connected classes suggest what Lee and Lee (2020) call communication convergence the concept under which there is integration of different media into one that actually enhances the communication process. This convergence assists in building solidarity seeing that there is no dormancy to some generations when the areas of discussion are being made. Health literacy encompasses beliefs which include reliable information which is hard to come by in today's society campaigning misinformation and rumors as a big set back to the social solidarity especially in the rural areas. The literature under analysis reveals the presence of fake news distributed on social media in the context of low media literacy (Jensen, 2022). However, this work goes further in the identification of the propagation of misconceptions and rumor in rural areas such as Wajo where the use of the technology is not so rampant in the. From Frischlich & Humprecht (2021) it is seen that spreading of rumors and fake news undermine trust consistently to the detriment of communities and society. Finally, in Wajo, rumor has it that misinformation stems from misinterpretation of an original message with every forwarder passing it to the next with an addition of his or her own understanding. In agreement with TIgw et al. (2020), such rumors have a negative impact on social trust which is a basic element the solidarity.

However, the study also found out that the people of Wajo's rural area are equally up to the task when it comes to combating fake news. Live talks have not lost their importance for responding to inaccurate information and for eliminating misconceptions. The given case also reveals that community leaders and other opinion- makers get involved in countering the problem by conducting daily meetings where villagers can clear their main doubts. This method of direct communication is especially suitable in the rural area since patient and physician come face to face that makes one tend to be more responsible and truthful. This finding opens up an interesting debate based on the view of Gupta et al. (2020) according to which offline communication in communities is crucial in the process of combating fake news as long as digital technologies are not viable or reliable. Language diversity and cultural differences have long been recognized as barriers to effective communication, particularly in multicultural societies (Schouten et al., 2020). In rural communities like Wajo, language diversity exists not only in the form of different ethnic languages but also in various local dialects. This can create significant communication challenges, particularly when individuals from different linguistic backgrounds attempt to engage in collective action or share important information.

While these barriers are not unique to rural communities, this study highlights how Wajo's residents have managed to navigate these linguistic challenges. As described by Aririguzoh (2022), cultural communication involves understanding and bridging the gap between different linguistic and cultural groups. In Wajo, younger generations, who are often more familiar with multiple dialects and languages, serve as mediators in communication, ensuring that all members of the community understand each other. This intergenerational translation process not only mitigates misunderstandings but also fosters a sense of inclusivity among diverse groups. The study's findings support Piechota (2023) assertion that mediated communication can be a crucial tool in overcoming cultural and linguistic differences, helping to maintain social solidarity in multicultural contexts. An important finding in this study, which has not been sufficiently addressed in existing literature, is the role of communication skills in strengthening social

solidarity.

While many studies have focused on structural barriers such as technology access and infrastructure (Neumeyer et al., 2020), this research suggests that individual communication competencies also play a pivotal role in fostering social cohesion. Rural communities in Wajo face challenges in public speaking, conflict resolution, and negotiation skills, all of which are critical for maintaining healthy communication within the community. The findings of the study reveal that the better provided with communication skills, the efficiency of dissemination, conflict, and trust intervention is higher. This result extends the prior work that has stressed the role of communication competency in enabling communication between individuals. In Wajo, the community contact courses in improvement of communication skills to involve greater portion of people in the management affairs of the community can have a great potentiality to make and strengthen social solidarity.

4. Conclusion

The present research has shown the importance of communication in enhancing the aspect of social togetherness among people living in rural areas of Wajo Regency. Some of the barriers include; lack of modern technological facilities, generation gaps, and fake information disseminated in the society; however, the community still interconnect via both face-to-face and a perfect mix of current ICTs as modes of communication. Therefore, this study identifies communication in conflict situations and especially trust as effective components for improving social integration. It underlines the resilience of rural dwellers in coping with the difficulties in communication and indicates that within the framework of enhancing communication facilities as well as communication skills, the sphere of communicative integration could be actually improved in the regions.

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5. References

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