

SEMIOTICS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION OF TRADITIONAL MARKET TRADERS IN MEDAN CITY: A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Ely Ezir¹, Devi Annisa Marpaung², Aisyah Noor Nasution³, Apriliyanti⁴

¹Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatra Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

²Department of Public Health, Universitas Nurul Hasanah Kuta Cane, Aceh, Indonesia

³Department of Nursing, Universitas Nurul Hasanah Kuta Cane, Aceh, Indonesia

⁴Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatra Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: ezirmrp.88@gmail.com

Received: 2025-11-02

Accepted: 2025-11-21

Published: 2025-12-10

Abstract

This study investigates the role of semiotics in the interpersonal communication of traders in traditional markets in Medan City through a pragmatic lens. Semiotics, as the study of signs and symbols, plays a central role in shaping meaning and mutual understanding in everyday interactions. Traditional markets offer a rich communicative environment where traders and buyers depend not only on verbal exchanges but also on gestures, intonation, cultural codes, and symbolic expressions to negotiate meaning and sustain social relationships. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design involving 20 traders selected purposively from three major traditional markets in Medan. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth semi-structured interviews to capture authentic communicative behaviors and interpretations of meaning. The data were analyzed using semiotic and pragmatic frameworks to identify the implicit functions of signs and contextual negotiation of meaning in interpersonal exchanges. The findings reveal that semiotic elements in traders' communication function to build trust, strengthen social solidarity, and create persuasive strategies that influence economic decision-making. From a pragmatic standpoint, meaning is constructed contextually, reflecting the traders' cultural values, social norms, and economic intentions. The study concludes that semiotic practices in traditional market communication represent not only linguistic phenomena but also socio-cultural strategies that sustain market interactions and preserve local wisdom. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of interpersonal communication as a dynamic process supporting the cultural and economic vitality of local communities.

Keywords: *cultural values; interpersonal communication; pragmatics; semiotics.*

1. Introduction

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human life, functioning as the primary medium through which individuals convey thoughts, express emotions, establish relationships, and sustain social interactions. Within the scope of communication studies, semiotics—the science of signs and symbols—offers an essential lens to understand how

meaning is constructed and interpreted in diverse contexts. Semiotics does not limit its attention only to verbal expressions but also encompasses nonverbal signals, bodily gestures, intonation, cultural symbols, and shared codes that all together form the basis of human interaction. In this sense, semiotics provides a deeper understanding of communication as not merely the exchange of words but as the complex negotiation of meaning shaped by cultural and social conventions.

In the Indonesian context, traditional markets remain a vital socio-economic institution that connects people in direct face-to-face interactions. Unlike modern shopping centres, where transactions are often standardized and mediated through technology, traditional markets preserve a communicative environment that is dynamic, flexible, and deeply rooted in local culture. In these markets, communication between traders and buyers goes beyond the exchange of goods and money; it involves persuasion, trust-building, negotiation, and the reinforcement of social bonds. Traders rely on a variety of communicative strategies to attract customers, maintain long-term relationships, and establish reputations within the market community. As Ahmed and Rahimi (2020) highlight, linguistic interactions in bazaars are not merely economic but also reflect power relations and social hierarchies that influence how meaning is negotiated in daily trade. Likewise, Becker (2018) views traditional markets as *performing spaces* where social identities and cultural values are enacted through semiotic practices, turning communication into a cultural performance. These strategies often manifest through verbal language enriched with humour, politeness, metaphors, or bargaining expressions, as well as through nonverbal elements such as eye contact, hand gestures, tone of voice, and symbolic actions that signify honesty, hospitality, or authority.

Medan City, as one of the largest urban centres in Indonesia, presents a unique setting for examining traditional market communication. The city hosts a variety of traditional markets that reflect its multicultural composition, where traders and buyers from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Batak, Javanese, Minangkabau, Chinese, Malay, and others, interact daily. This multicultural dimension enriches communicative practices, as traders must navigate not only linguistic diversity but also cultural norms, values, and symbolic systems. In such a complex environment, semiotics becomes indispensable for understanding how meaning is successfully negotiated across differences and how communication fosters both economic and social harmony. Additionally, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) and other local sources highlight the continuing socio-economic importance of traditional markets in Indonesia. The *BPS Profile of Traditional Markets, Shopping Centers, and Modern Stores (2018/2019)* provides a comprehensive overview of the functions of traditional markets as key distribution and marketing platforms for agricultural and fishery products. It also underscores their vital role in supporting local economies and offers a comparative analysis with modern markets. This source is particularly relevant in substantiating claims regarding the contribution of traditional markets to the utilization of agricultural and fishery products, the creation of local economic opportunities, and their overall impact on microeconomic development in Indonesia.

Previous studies on traditional markets have predominantly examined economic aspects such as pricing, supply chains, and the resilience of traditional markets but rarely explore their communicative or semiotic dimensions. Although several studies highlight interactional patterns or language variation in market settings, they do not analyse how semiotic signs function pragmatically within buyer–seller interactions. Moreover, existing research has not addressed how these semiotic and pragmatic strategies operate within

multicultural environments such as Medan, where ethnic diversity adds further layers of meaning negotiation. This unresolved intersection between semiotics, pragmatics, and multicultural market interaction constitutes the research gap that this study aims to fill. Thus, this study addresses a clear gap: the intersection of semiotics, communicative strategies, and multicultural market interaction in traditional markets in Medan.

Understanding this phenomenon is crucial because communication in traditional markets not only facilitates economic exchange but also preserves cultural heritage. The ways in which traders employ semiotic resources reflect values such as respect, solidarity, reciprocity, and trust, which are deeply embedded in Indonesian cultural norms. For example, the use of certain gestures or greetings may signify more than politeness; it can express acknowledgment of shared cultural identity or reinforce social hierarchy. Likewise, the pragmatic strategies of persuasion or humour used by traders are not merely functional for sales but also serve to maintain customer loyalty and strengthen interpersonal bonds. Therefore, a semiotic-pragmatic analysis provides insights into the richness of human communication that would otherwise be overlooked by purely economic or linguistic approaches.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it expands the application of semiotic and pragmatic perspectives in analysing interpersonal communication, offering a framework for understanding how signs function in real-life interactions beyond formal linguistic structures. Practically, the study sheds light on the communicative practices of traders, which may inform strategies for preserving traditional markets as cultural and economic institutions. Policymakers, cultural organizations, and local communities can benefit from recognizing that sustaining traditional markets requires more than economic support; it also involves maintaining the communicative traditions that form the social fabric of these spaces.

In addition, this research provides a deeper understanding of how communication operates in multicultural urban settings. Medan, with its diverse population, exemplifies how semiotic resources are adapted to negotiate meaning across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Such findings may contribute to broader discussions about intercultural communication, social cohesion, and the role of cultural practices in urban development. By highlighting the communicative dimension of traditional markets, the study emphasizes the importance of considering human interaction as a central factor in sustaining both cultural identity and economic vitality.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to identify the semiotic signs—both verbal and nonverbal—that traders in Medan's traditional markets employ in their interpersonal communication. Second, it seeks to analyse how these semiotic signs function pragmatically in shaping meaning, persuasion, and relationships between traders and buyers. Third, it intends to interpret the cultural values and social functions embedded within these communicative practices. Through these objectives, the research aspires to bridge semiotic theory with practical communication studies, demonstrating the relevance of semiotics in everyday life and its indispensable role in interpersonal interaction.

There remains limited research that explicitly applies a semiotic lens to the entire communicative ecology of traditional markets in Medan. For instance, Hamdani et al. (2024) investigated social interaction adaptation among grocery traders in a Medan traditional market. Meanwhile, studies on language variation (code-switching/mixing) in traditional markets have been conducted in Sifundo and Pagar Alam. However, what is missing is a holistic semiotic analysis of how verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies interact

with cultural symbols, ethnic diversity, and market dynamics in Medan's traditional markets. In particular, little work has addressed how traders from different ethnic backgrounds use semiotic resources (gestures, symbolic, and linguistic codes) to negotiate meaning and trust in buyer–seller interactions in a multicultural urban market context.

In conclusion, the introduction of semiotics into the study of traditional market communication in Medan City is timely and significant. By applying a pragmatic lens, the research not only reveals the functional roles of signs in transactional contexts but also underscores the cultural and social dimensions of communication. This study, therefore, stands to contribute to the interdisciplinary field of communication, linguistics, and cultural studies, while simultaneously affirming the value of traditional markets as sites where economic, social, and cultural life converge.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review is to situate the current research within the context of existing knowledge, highlight the theoretical perspectives that guide the study, and demonstrate the originality of the investigation. This section discusses prior research related to semiotics and communication, outlines the methods and techniques that have been applied in similar studies, introduces new ideas and concepts relevant to the topic, and establishes the theoretical frameworks that will support the analysis. In doing so, the literature review ensures that the present study on semiotics in interpersonal communication of traders in traditional markets in Medan City is grounded in scholarly discourse while also contributing new insights free from duplication.

2.1 Previous Studies on Communication in Traditional Markets

This section now includes more local Indonesian references and draws out key themes and gaps. A few local studies that have been initiated earlier can be described as such:

- *Komunikasi Pedagang Pasar Tradisional (Pekan) di Keude Buloh Blang Ara Kec. Kuta Makmur* (Taufiq, Maradi & Ali, 2021) examines communicative patterns of traders in a weekly traditional market in Aceh Utara. Their qualitative research highlights face-to-face persuasion, direct seller speech, and the use of WhatsApp/Instagram for promotion purposes.
- *Pola Komunikasi Budaya dalam Aktivitas Jual Beli pada Pasar Tradisional* (Nurmawaddah, 2022) investigates patterns of interpersonal communication (verbal and non-verbal) between sellers and buyers in Indonesian traditional markets, using ethnographic communication methods. It shows that communication extends beyond the transaction topic into broader social talk, and non-verbal cues (attire, posture) play a role.
- *Faktor Komunikasi Kebijakan Dalam Pengelolaan Pasar Tradisional* (Darmawan, 2015) focuses on policy communication in market management, emphasising that transmission clarity, consistency, and information quality affect market governance. Though not strictly interpersonal communication between traders and buyers, it provides insight into communicative contexts of markets

2.2 Semiotics and Its Relevance to Communication

Semiotics, as first conceptualized by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931), provides a foundational framework for analyzing signs and symbols in human

interaction. Saussure emphasized the structural relationship between the *signifier* (the form of a sign) and the *signified* (the concept it represents), whereas Peirce proposed a triadic model involving the *representamen*, *object*, and *interpretant*. These classical theories underscore the principle that communication is not limited to linguistic utterances but also involves a system of signs that derive meaning from cultural and social contexts.

In communication studies, semiotics has been applied to examine how individuals create shared meanings through both verbal and nonverbal codes. Scholars such as Roland Barthes (1972) expanded semiotics into cultural analysis, revealing how everyday interactions carry connotations beyond their literal meanings. For the purposes of this research, semiotics is essential in explaining how traders in traditional markets employ signs, verbal phrases, gestures, body language, and cultural symbols to negotiate meaning and achieve communicative goals.

2.3 Pragmatics as a Complementary Framework

While semiotics provides a lens for analysing signs, pragmatics emphasizes the use of language in context. According to Levinson (1983), pragmatics is concerned with the relationship between linguistic expressions and their usage in specific situations. Theories of speech acts (Austin, 1962) highlight how utterances perform functions such as requesting, persuading, or promising, which are central to traders' interactions in market settings. Similarly, Grice's cooperative principle and maxims of conversation (1975) are relevant in understanding how traders and buyers rely on implicatures, politeness strategies, and contextual cues to achieve mutual understanding.

In the context of traditional markets, pragmatics complements semiotics by illustrating how the interpretation of signs is dependent on situational factors such as social roles, cultural norms, and the nature of the economic transaction. The integration of semiotics and pragmatics provides a holistic framework for analysing interpersonal communication that is both sign-based and context-driven.

2.4 Socio-economic or cultural dimensions

Research on traditional markets in Indonesia and other regions has often focused on socio-economic or cultural dimensions. For example, studies have explored the survival of traditional markets in the face of modern retail competition, the role of markets as centers of social interaction, and the cultural practices embedded within market life. Some communication-focused studies have highlighted the role of bargaining language, politeness strategies, and verbal negotiation in market interactions.

Methodologically, these studies have employed qualitative approaches such as ethnographic observation, participant interviews, and discourse analysis. For instance, researchers examining bargaining language typically record conversations between traders and customers, transcribe the data, and analyze linguistic strategies. Nonverbal communication has also been studied through observation of gestures, body orientation, and other kinesics signals. However, while these methods shed light on isolated aspects of communication, they often lack a systematic integration of semiotics and pragmatics, leaving a gap in understanding how signs function holistically in market interactions.

2.5 Emerging Concepts and Theoretical Insights

Recent developments in communication studies introduce concepts such as multimodal communication (Kress, 2010), which recognizes that meaning is constructed through the integration of various modes: verbal, visual, gestural, and spatial. This concept is particularly relevant to market interactions, where communication is inherently multimodal. Traders use spoken words, facial expressions, and symbolic actions (such as handing goods in a particular manner) simultaneously to convey meaning.

Another useful concept is intercultural communication, especially in the multicultural setting of Medan City. Scholars like Ting-Toomey (1999) emphasize that cultural values and identity influence communicative choices, including the use of politeness, indirectness, and nonverbal signs. In markets where traders and customers belong to diverse ethnic groups, semiotic and pragmatic analysis must account for how cultural diversity shapes communication strategies.

2.6 Theoretical Framework for the Present Study

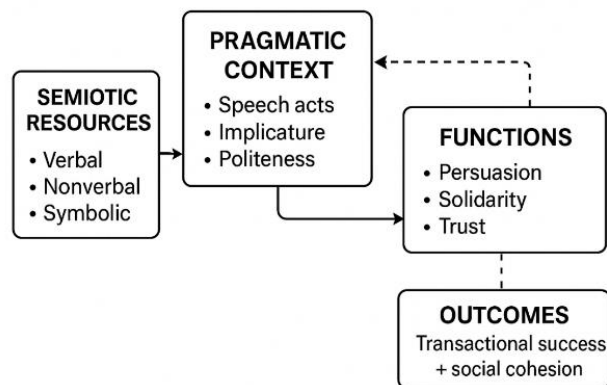
Drawing from the reviewed literature, this study is anchored in two main theoretical perspectives: semiotics and pragmatics. Semiotics provides the analytical tools to identify and interpret signs both verbal and nonverbal used by traders. Pragmatics, on the other hand, explains how these signs function contextually to perform communicative acts such as persuading, negotiating, and building trust. The combination of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive understanding of how meaning is constructed and negotiated in traditional market settings.

Furthermore, the study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology, which is consistent with prior research but distinguished by its integrated theoretical lens. By systematically combining semiotic and pragmatic analysis, the research avoids duplication of previous studies that focused narrowly on linguistic or socio-economic aspects. Instead, it contributes new insights by highlighting the functional role of signs in sustaining economic exchanges and cultural values in Medan's traditional markets.

2.7 Strengthening the Research Position

The originality of this research lies in addressing the gap between semiotic and pragmatic analyses of market communication. While prior studies have acknowledged the importance of nonverbal signs or bargaining strategies, they have not fully explored how these semiotic elements function pragmatically in real-life interactions. By situating the analysis within Medan's unique multicultural context, the study also contributes to the understanding of intercultural communication in urban Indonesia.

In summary, the literature reviewed demonstrates the relevance of semiotics and pragmatics to communication studies, outlines the methods previously applied to market research, introduces emerging concepts such as multimodal and intercultural communication, and establishes the theoretical framework for the present study. This foundation ensures that the research is both well-grounded and original, offering new perspectives on interpersonal communication in traditional markets and avoiding duplication of prior work.



3. Research Method

A rigorous research method is necessary to ensure that the study on the function of semiotics in interpersonal communication of traders in traditional markets in Medan City is conducted systematically and produces valid, reliable, and scientifically acceptable findings. This section outlines the research design, procedures, data collection techniques, data analysis methods, and validation strategies.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena by emphasizing meanings, experiences, and contexts rather than numerical generalizations. A descriptive approach was chosen to provide a detailed account of semiotic signs and pragmatic functions as they occur naturally in market interactions. This design allows the researcher to interpret how traders use verbal and nonverbal signs to negotiate meaning and build relationships with buyers in real-life contexts.

The qualitative design was particularly suited for semiotic and pragmatic analysis because it focused on the interpretation of communicative signs and their functions in specific settings (Silverman, 2016). In this study, the context is the traditional market, which is rich in cultural codes, social practices, and interpersonal dynamics that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurement.

3.2 Research Site and Participants

The research site is selected traditional markets in Medan City, such as Pasar Petisah and Pasar Sukaramai, which represent multicultural interactions and diverse communicative practices. Participants are traders who have actively engaged in market transactions for at least five years, as they are considered to possess communicative competence and established relationships with buyers. A purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2015) was used to select participants who can provide relevant and rich data about the research topic.

3.3 Research Procedure

The research procedure was structured chronologically to ensure systematic data collection and analysis. The main steps are as follows:

1. Preparation Stage

- Identifying research problems and defining objectives.
- Reviewing literature to establish theoretical frameworks in semiotics and pragmatics.

- Obtaining permission from local authorities and market associations to conduct fieldwork.

2. Data Collection Stage

- Conducting non-participant observation in market settings to capture natural interactions between traders and buyers.
- Recording audio and video of communicative exchanges, focusing on verbal expressions, tone, gestures, facial expressions, and other nonverbal signs.
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with selected traders to explore their perspectives on communication strategies, meanings of signs, and cultural values embedded in their practices.

3. Data Processing Stage

- Transcribing recorded conversations and translating them into written texts while retaining original expressions.
- Classifying data into categories: verbal signs, nonverbal signs, pragmatic functions (e.g., persuasion, negotiation, solidarity).

4. Data Analysis Stage

- Applying semiotic analysis to interpret signs based on Saussure's dyadic model (signifier and signified) and Peirce's triadic model (representamen, object, interpretant).
- Using **pragmatic analysis** (speech act theory, conversational maxims, politeness theory) to examine how traders' signs function in context.
- Integrating semiotic and pragmatic interpretations to generate comprehensive insights.

5. Validation and Conclusion Stage

- Triangulating data from observation, interviews, and recordings to ensure credibility.
- Member checking by discussing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy.
- Drawing conclusions about the functions of semiotics in interpersonal communication within Medan traditional markets.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Two primary techniques were used:

- Observation: Following Spradley (1980), observation allows researchers to understand naturally occurring interactions in their cultural settings. Field notes were taken to document communicative events, while recordings captured detailed semiotic elements.
- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews provided traders' perspectives on their communication practices. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes and were guided by open-ended questions, enabling participants to elaborate freely.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model:

1. Data Reduction: Selecting relevant communicative episodes and simplifying transcripts.

2. Data Display: Organizing semiotic signs and pragmatic functions into tables and diagrams.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting the meanings and validating them through triangulation and member checking.

The semiotic framework included Saussure's concept of *langue* and *parole* and Peirce's categorization of signs (icon, index, symbol), (1916/2011). Pragmatic analysis relied on Austin's speech act theory (1975), Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts (1969), and Grice's cooperative principle to interpret how signs function in communication (1975).

3.6 Data Validation

To ensure scientific credibility, several validation strategies were applied:

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple data sources (observation, recordings, interviews) to cross-check findings. Triangulation allows researchers to have more trust on the validation of the data. Techniques such as triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and thick description are employed to enhance the credibility and dependability. Lincoln & Guba (1985, pp. 301–305)
- **Member Checking:** Involving participants in reviewing interpretations to ensure authenticity.
- **Peer Debriefing:** Discussing findings with academic peers for critical feedback
- **Thick Description:** Providing detailed contextual accounts of communication to enhance transferability.

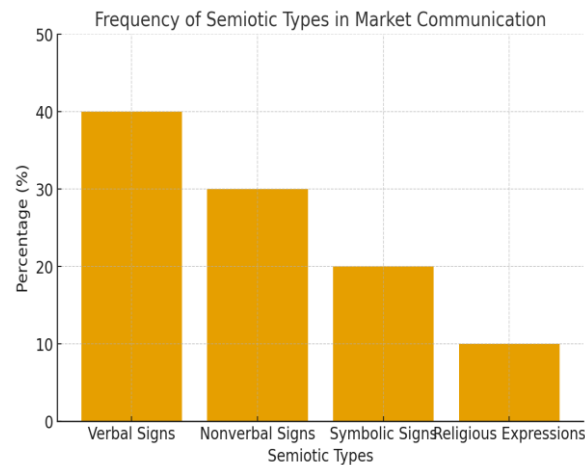
3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought to protect participants' rights. Consent was obtained before recording or interviewing, and participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential. The study adhered to principles of respect, integrity, and cultural sensitivity.

The research method integrates qualitative descriptive design, semiotic-pragmatic frameworks, and systematic data collection and analysis techniques. By combining observation, interviews, and semiotic-pragmatic interpretation, the study ensures that findings are both scientifically valid and culturally grounded. The chronological structure, represented algorithmically, reinforces the transparency and rigor of the methodology, distinguishing this research from previous studies and strengthening its academic contribution

4. Result and Discussion

The findings highlight that semiotics plays a central role in the interpersonal communication of traders in Medan traditional markets. The findings resonate with Chen and Huang's (2020) observation that semiotic expressions in traditional markets are culturally embedded and serve to maintain inclusivity and mutual understanding among traders and buyers in multicultural contexts. The discussion is organized into sub-chapters for clarity. The findings of this study also align with Ahmed and Rahimi's (2020) observation that communicative exchanges in traditional markets often reflect power dynamics and social positioning. Traders' semiotic choices—such as tone, address forms, and gestures—serve not only transactional purposes but also reinforce status relations and mutual respect within the market community.



4.1 Verbal Semiotic Signs and Pragmatic Strategies

Verbal communication remains the backbone of market interaction. Traders frequently employ greetings, persuasive phrases, and bargaining language. From a pragmatic perspective, these verbal signs function as speech acts (Austin, 1962). For instance, the greeting “Horas” not only performs a social act of respect but also implicitly establishes ethnic identity and solidarity. Similarly, bargaining phrases such as “Let’s meet halfway” represent commissive acts, promising compromise to maintain customer satisfaction. These findings align with Searle’s (1969) categorization of speech acts, demonstrating that traders use language not just for information exchange but to perform relational and economic functions.

4.2 Nonverbal Semiotic Signs and Multimodal Communication

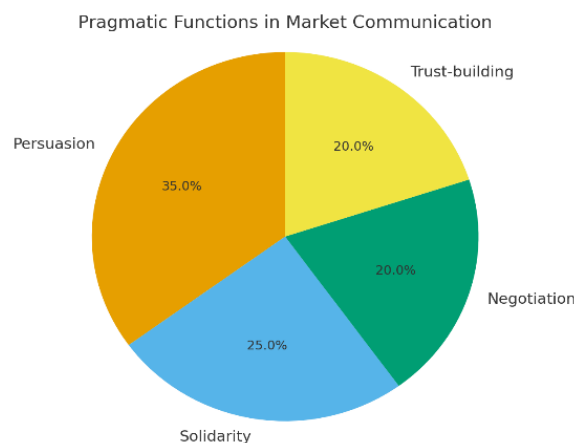
Nonverbal elements such as smiles, nods, hand gestures, and eye contact were found to be equally important. According to Kress (2010), meaning-making in interaction is multimodal, requiring attention to how different semiotic resources combine. Traders’ smiles and open body orientation create an atmosphere of friendliness, reinforcing verbal offers. Eye contact, in particular, serves as an indexical sign (Peirce), pointing directly to sincerity and reliability. The findings support the theory of proxemics, as traders often reduce physical distance to build closeness with buyers. In language, we use signs and symbols — whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, or even objects — to stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas, and feelings.” (Hall 1997: 1)

4.3 Symbolic Semiotic Signs and Cultural Identity

Beyond verbal and nonverbal acts, symbolic practices were observed. For example, *Ya, Allah*. Barthes (1972) emphasized that symbols in daily life produce *mythologies*—cultural narratives encoded in ordinary practices. As Iskandar and Suhartono (2022) emphasize, nonverbal elements such as gestures, body posture, and facial expressions often play a more decisive role than verbal exchanges in maintaining interpersonal harmony between traders and buyers in traditional markets. The use of red bags or traditional attire thus extends beyond practical function, symbolizing generosity, trust, and cultural pride. In Medan’s multicultural markets, such symbols also signal identity, allowing traders to connect with buyers from similar or different cultural backgrounds.

4.4 Pragmatic Functions in Market Interactions

The pragmatic functions of persuasion, solidarity, negotiation, and trust-building emerged as central themes. Traders' communicative strategies confirm Grice's cooperative principle (1975), but with local adaptations. For example, while traders sometimes violate maxims of truth (e.g., exaggerating product quality), these violations serve pragmatic functions of persuasion and are accepted as part of the cultural bargaining ritual. Similarly, the frequent use of religious references (e.g., "Ya, Allah, Demi Tuhan, By God, this is an honest price") reflects a culturally embedded politeness strategy that enhances credibility and builds trust.



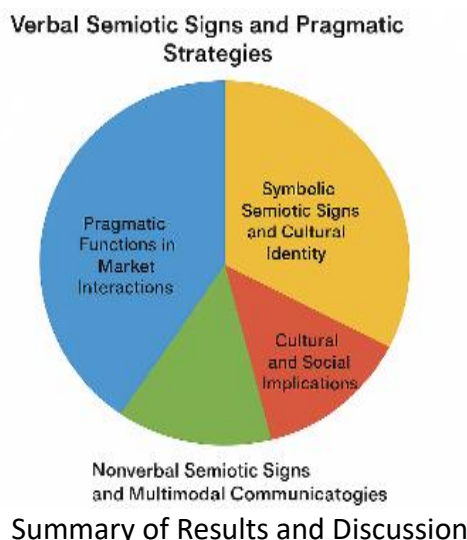
4.5 Cultural and Social Implications

The study reveals that communication in traditional markets is not merely transactional but socio-cultural. Semiotic and pragmatic practices reflect values of reciprocity, trust, and solidarity, which sustain market communities. This finding resonates with Ting-Toomey's (1999) intercultural communication theory, as traders in Medan must adapt communicative styles to buyers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Thus, semiotic practices contribute not only to successful transactions but also to maintaining multicultural harmony in the city.

4.6 Theoretical Contributions

By integrating semiotic and pragmatic analysis, the study bridges a gap in prior research that often examined linguistic strategies in isolation. The findings support the argument that communication in traditional markets is semiotically rich and pragmatically functional, embodying a holistic system of meaning-making. Traditional markets operate as performing spaces in which every day economic exchanges are also cultural performances. Vendors and buyers enact roles that communicate social identity, trust, and community belonging through semiotic expressions such as gestures, verbal styles, and spatial arrangements."

Becker (2018) strengthens the theoretical position that semiotics and pragmatics are interdependent frameworks for understanding real-life communication.



The study demonstrates that traders in Medan's traditional markets rely on a complex system of semiotic signs, including verbal, nonverbal, and symbolic elements. These signs perform pragmatic functions such as persuasion, solidarity, negotiation, and trust-building, which are vital for both economic transactions and social relationships. The findings highlight the cultural richness of market communication and contribute to broader discussions on semiotics, pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

5. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that interpersonal communication among traders in Medan's traditional markets is shaped by a complex interplay of semiotic and pragmatic elements. Traders rely not only on verbal signs such as greetings, persuasive offers, and bargaining expressions but also on nonverbal and symbolic resources, including gestures, eye contact, tone of voice, packaging styles, and traditional attire. These semiotic means are pragmatically employed to perform key communicative functions such as persuasion, solidarity, negotiation, and trust-building. Consequently, market communication transcends mere transactional exchange, emerging as a socio-cultural process that sustains interpersonal relationships, reinforces collective identity, and maintains community harmony.

Theoretically, this study contributes to communication scholarship by integrating semiotic and pragmatic frameworks to analyze interactional practices in Indonesian traditional markets—a perspective rarely explored in national academic discourse. By situating the analysis within the multicultural context of Medan, it underscores how semiotic systems operate across linguistic and cultural boundaries to negotiate meaning and preserve local wisdom. This highlights the traditional market not only as an economic institution but also as a living cultural arena where social cohesion, shared values, and local identity are continuously reproduced. Practically, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, cultural institutions, and community leaders. Understanding the communicative role of signs in persuasion, negotiation, and trust-building can inform strategies to strengthen the sustainability of traditional markets amid the rise of modern retail spaces. The findings suggest the need for training programs that enhance traders' communicative competence, especially in multicultural and multilingual environments, to foster more inclusive, persuasive, and culturally grounded interactions. Such initiatives can help preserve

traditional markets as vital cultural and economic centers that reflect Indonesia's social diversity.

Looking ahead, future research could expand this inquiry through comparative studies across regions or market types to identify both shared and context-specific semiotic practices. Quantitative or mixed-methods approaches may also help measure the impact of communicative strategies on consumer behavior and social cohesion. Interdisciplinary research involving cultural anthropology, sociology, and marketing would further enrich the understanding of how semiotics contributes to broader socio-economic development.

In conclusion, this research affirms that semiotics lies at the heart of interpersonal communication in traditional markets. By integrating semiotic and pragmatic perspectives, it offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how communication sustains both economic transactions and cultural continuity. Thus, this study successfully fulfilled its objectives of identifying semiotic signs, their pragmatic functions, and their embedded cultural meanings. The study also opens new pathways for scholarly exploration and provides actionable recommendations for preserving local communicative traditions that embody Indonesia's cultural resilience and community solidarity.

References

- Ahmed, S., & Rahimi, M. (2020). Power dynamics and language use in Afghan bazaars. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 7(8), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.06.005>
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
- Becker, T. (2018). Traditional market as performing space: A semiotic perspective. *Cultural Semiotics*, 4(1), 7–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41244-018-0024-3>
- Chen, X., & Huang, Y. (2020). Semiotic analysis of traditional market signage in multicultural communities. *Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(3), 145–162. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jcs.v22i3.5678>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Darmawan, D. (2015). Faktor komunikasi kebijakan dalam pengelolaan pasar tradisional (suatu studi di Kota Pontianak). *Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora*, 20(2).
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J. J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Vol. 3. Speech acts* (pp. 41–58). Academic Press.
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- Hamdani, & Jungjungan, M. A. (2024). Traditional market vs digital market: Adaptation in social interaction among grocery traders. *PERSPEKTIF: Journal of Social and Library Science*, 2(3), 133–141.
- Iskandar, D., & Suhartono, E. (2022). Nonverbal communication strategies in traditional Indonesian market vendors. *Journal of Southeast Asian Communication*, 5(2), 74–89. <https://doi.org/10.2345/jsac.v5i2.1023>
- Kress, G. (2010). *Communication and culture: A semiotic approach*. Routledge.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Original work published 1985). SAGE Publications.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

- Nurmawaddah, Muliadi, & Zelfia. (2022). Pola komunikasi budaya dalam aktivitas jual beli pada Pasar Tradisional Limbung Kabupaten Gowa. *Respon: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Muslim Indonesia*.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Peirce, C. S. (1931). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Harvard University Press.
- Saussure, F. de. (2011). *Course in general linguistics* (Original work published 1916). Columbia University Press
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Silverman, D. (2016). *Qualitative research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Taufiq, M., Masriadi, M., & Ali, M. (2021). Komunikasi pedagang pasar tradisional (pekan) di Keude Buloh Blang Ara Kecamatan Kuta Makmur. *Jurnal Jurnalisme*, 10(1), 77–90. <https://doi.org/10.29103/jj.v10i1.4883>
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). *Communicating across cultures* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press.