



Interaction and Interpersonal Communication of Vendors (Symbolic Interaction Study of P&D Traders and Buyers at Pasar Raya Kota Solok)

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Abstract: This study to examine of traders' verbal and nonverbal communication at Pasar Raya Kota Solok, and their utilization of verbal and nonverbal symbols in interpersonal interactions within the realm of trade transactions. This research uses a qualitative approach by collecting data through participatory observation and interviews with traders and buyers. The results of the study show that verbal communication between sellers and buyers involves the use of greetings, bargaining, and questions about products. In addition, non-verbal communication consisting of body language, facial expressions and body movements also plays an important role in the interaction between traders and buyers. Using appropriate non-verbal communication, such as smiles, eye contact and friendly gestures, can help build good rapport and increase buyer loyalty to merchants. This study also emphasizes the importance of symbolic interaction theory in understanding social interaction in traditional markets. Social interactions between merchants and buyers involve the use of dynamic symbols, such as language and body movements, to communicate and understand each other's needs and wants. This theory shows that traders' thoughts and self-construction are inseparable from the social context and interactions with society. Traders use symbols and social interactions to convey messages, create meaning, and develop self- images that conform to the norms and values in society. Communication and the formation of social meaning in this interaction have an important role in shaping the self-concept of traders as sellers who are competent and care about customers.

Keywords: Non-Verbal Communication, Solok Market, Symbolic Interaction, Traders, Verbal Communication

Introduction

Traditional markets remain the primary choice for shopping among the community, including in West Sumatra. Markets also serve as a reflection of the social orientation of society (Effendi: 2016). In communal societies like the Minangkabau, markets are not only economic centers but also places for people from various backgrounds to interact with each other. In the context of communication, markets, especially traditional markets, are not only venues for economic transactions but also for interpersonal communication between traders and buyers.

One of the trading centers in West Sumatra is Pasar Raya Solok, located in the heart of Solok City, making it an economic hub in the strategically located area between the provinces and districts of Solok, Dhamasraya, Sijunjung, and Sawahlunto. In Solok City, traditional markets continue to dominate the economy, with people engaging in buying and selling activities in these markets.

Many traders from outside Solok City come to Pasar Raya Kota Solok for shopping, turning the city into a shopping center for surrounding areas like Sawahlunto, Sijunjung, and Alahan Panjang. Data from BPS (2021) indicates that the wholesale and retail trade sector, as well as repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (26.41%), is the main contributor to the economy in Kota Solok.

Pasar Raya Kota Solok, a traditional market situated in the city center, plays a vital role in the local community's life. Its presence has become part of the cultural and economic identity of the region. Amidst the bustling atmosphere, this market facilitates various traditional traders offering a wide range of goods to visitors. In every transaction, the friendly interaction between traders and buyers creates an engaging and distinctive landscape at Pasar Raya Kota Solok.

The unique character of this traditional market allows for distinct and different forms of communication compared to modern markets. Amidst the hustle and bustle of buying and selling activities, traders skillfully use body language, hand gestures, and spoken language to attract potential buyers. They proficiently convey messages, wink as a discount sign, and offer friendly smiles to attract buyers' interest.

This research is highly relevant to comprehensively understand how traditional traders at Pasar Raya Kota Solok communicate during transactions from a symbolic interaction perspective. In a market rich in local culture, the symbols and implicit meanings in every communication play a vital role in shaping harmonious interactions between traders and buyers. Understanding this perspective provides valuable insights for the local community and traders to improve transaction quality and strengthen relationships in a market that is an integral part of their daily lives.

As a traditional market rich in cultural heritage and local values, Pasar Raya Kota Solok presents a unique atmosphere compared to modern markets. The symbolic interactions within it reflect the spirit of cooperation and intimacy between traders and buyers. Therefore, this research is crucial to capture the distinctive nuances of traditional markets and observe how the symbols and meanings used by traders contribute to maintaining the sustainability and appeal of this unique market.

This study focuses on the verbal and nonverbal communication of traders in Pasar Raya Kota Solok and how they utilize verbal and nonverbal symbols in interpersonal interactions during trading transactions. The study employs symbolic interactionism theory as the foundation to discuss the findings from the field. This theory posits that individuals tend to act based on the meanings they assign to people, objects, or events. These meanings are created through language individuals use to communicate with others or themselves.

Symbolic interactionism also states that human beings act towards others based on the meanings attributed to them by others. In other words, individual behavior is influenced by how others perceive and interpret them. In the context of this research, traders employ verbal and nonverbal symbols to communicate with customers, trading partners, and possibly other traders. These symbols encompass words, phrases, body gestures, facial expressions, and other actions that hold specific meanings in the context of trading transactions.

By analyzing the verbal and nonverbal interactions of traders, this research aims to understand how these symbols are used in their communication and how these symbols shape and influence interpersonal interactions during trading transactions. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, this study acknowledges the importance of individual meanings attributed to these symbols in shaping their actions.

Research Methodology

Using a qualitative method and an analytical descriptive approach, the researchers provide a detailed explanation of the verbal and nonverbal communication between traders and buyers in traditional markets, as well as understanding the meanings and social constructions that occur within these interactions. This study enables researchers to gain a deeper insight into the role of interpersonal communication in influencing buyer loyalty towards traders in traditional markets. The constructivist perspective asserts that the universe is a result of social construction, where humans play a central role in the communication process. Communication is understood, regulated, and brought to life through purposeful statements (Ardianto, 2009:154). The researchers chose the constructivist paradigm to unveil the communication patterns of traders in Pasar Raya Kota Solok, understanding that interaction and behavior in communication are not natural occurrences but rather products of social construction.

Result and Discussion

The uniqueness and differences among sellers in traditional markets can vary significantly depending on factors including: 1) Offered products, 2) Quality and Price, 3) Experience and expertise, 4) Service and personality, 5) Location and business site. These differences reflect the diversity within traditional markets and provide buyers with a wider range of choices in seeking products and shopping experiences that match their needs and preferences.

Verbal Communication

Oral Language

Traditional markets typically employ both verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, whereas modern markets prioritize verbal communication such as promotions and advertisements. Sellers in traditional markets tend to use everyday language and possess strong verbal skills, particularly in the local language, to communicate with buyers. In Pasar Raya Kota Solok, the use of the Minang language is common for transactions, in line with the practice in other cities in West Sumatra. The use of the Indonesian language is typically employed when buyers communicate in Indonesian, and sellers respond in the same language. Sellers may also adjust their language if the buyer is not fluent in the local language. In the process of buying and selling, the communication between sellers and buyers involves interpersonal interaction, including face-to-face engagement and direct message exchange. The use of media for communication is occasionally employed, particularly for regular customers. Regular customers may request the seller's contact information and establish communication before visiting the market.

Written Communication

An example of written communication is when a seller informs a buyer of the prices of goods after the buyer hands over a list of desired items. In some cases, sellers might need to provide additional information, such as price increases or out-of-stock items. Through writing, sellers can clearly convey this information to buyers, ensuring they understand the current situation before proceeding with the transaction. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, some buyers continued to opt for written communication when transacting in the market. Buyers use writing to record items they plan to purchase in bulk, preventing them from forgetting or missing specific items. This practice minimizes errors in purchasing and ensures buyers obtain all the items they need.

Nonverbal Communication

Communication between traditional vendors and buyers involves intricate social interactions. Vendors use distinct language and specific body movements to present products and persuade buyers to make purchases. They also utilize facial expressions and gestures that convey confidence and expertise in selling goods.

On the other hand, buyers use different language and body movements to respond to vendors' offers. They may use polite and friendly language or even negotiate the prices of items offered by vendors. Buyers also observe the vendors' facial expressions and body movements to assess their trustworthiness and credibility as traders.

Friendly expressions during buyer interactions encompass not only facial smiles but also cheerful countenances accompanied by greetings and banter. Comprehensive nonverbal communication is essential in interpersonal communication, involving a smiling face, persuasive intonation, and body posture that supports the message of friendliness from vendors, all of which must be synchronized. These nonverbal cues are then reinforced by persuasive verbal language, making buyers comfortable in conducting transactions.

In the context of traditional markets, vendors skilled in nonverbal communication can help enhance buyer loyalty. For instance, friendly smiles and facial expressions, direct eye contact, and amiable body movements can make buyers feel noticed and valued. This can contribute to establishing a better relationship between vendors and buyers and increasing buyer loyalty. The following is a detailed explanation of how nonverbal communication is employed during buying and selling transactions in Pasar Raya Kota Solok:

1. Eye Contact

The buyer's gaze can provide signals to vendors about the buyer's interest in a product. When a buyer looks at merchandise with an interested gaze, vendors often respond by offering the product or inquiring about the buyer's needs or interests. The buyer's eye contact can be regarded as nonverbal communication signaling the buyer's interest or attraction to a product.

Thus, eye contact plays a significant role in market communication. Whether in situations where verbal communication is hindered by mask use or in normal circumstances, eye contact between vendors and buyers can facilitate improved communication and help vendors respond more effectively to buyers' needs and interests.

2. Smile and Facial Expressions

When vendors serve buyers, a sense of friendliness is evident in the vendors' facial expressions. This friendliness is what makes buyers loyal to their shops. It creates a comfortable and enjoyable environment for buyers, making them feel valued and acknowledged. Based on interview data collected, buyers note that the friendly service, evident through the vendors' facial expressions, makes them comfortable conducting transactions at their preferred stalls. This highlights the crucial role of nonverbal communication in building a positive relationship between vendors and buyers.

3. Body Posture

Prompt customer service not only provides comfort but also demonstrates the vendor's responsiveness and concern for the buyer's needs. In traditional markets, where direct interaction between vendors and buyers takes place, prompt and efficient service can build trust and enhance buyer satisfaction, making them more likely to return to the same place for shopping. The emphasis on buyers in traditional markets underscores the importance of understanding and fulfilling each buyer's individual needs. In interpersonal communication, prompt service and responsiveness to buyer needs can help build a strong relationship and enhance customer loyalty.

4. Voice Intonation

Vendors also use assertive and clear voice intonation, especially in the Minangkabau language, to persuade buyers. Firm and clear intonation helps emphasize product strengths, competitive pricing, or benefits that buyers will gain from the purchase. In verbal communication, strong and clear intonation can also help build trust and convince buyers.

Overall, the use of a flat yet persuasive voice intonation, whether in the Minangkabau language or other languages, is a communication strategy used by vendors to capture attention, influence, and persuade buyers in traditional markets.

The Market as A Place Of Interaction And Various Symbols

According to Ahmadi, D. (2008), symbolic interaction theory emphasizes two crucial aspects in understanding human communication and interaction within society. Firstly, this theory reveals that humans are always engaged in social interactions within society. In this regard, the traditional market serves as a relevant example of social interaction. Traders and buyers interact within the context of the traditional market, establishing social relationships and conducting economic transactions. Furthermore, symbolic interaction theory provides an understanding that the traditional market, as a form of social interaction, involves the use of dynamic symbols, wherein humans interact and create meaning together in the context of trade. Secondly, symbolic interaction theory states that social interactions within society involve the use of dynamic symbols. These symbols can take the form of language, body movements, facial expressions, or other signs used to communicate and create shared meanings. In the traditional market, these symbols are also evident in the communication between vendors and buyers, such as facial expressions, hand gestures, and verbal or nonverbal language used to understand buyers' needs and desires, as well as to offer merchandise.

Symbolic interaction theory provides an understanding that the traditional market, as a form of social interaction, involves the use of dynamic symbols, wherein humans interact and create meaning together in the context of trade. Intense interactions also lead to trust, as traditional vendors are willing to extend credit (loans) to buyers, especially to those who are purchasing for resale. One of the vendors, named Ravel, is willing to provide credit to buyers, allowing them to take goods first and pay later. Usually, he provides credit to long-standing buyers with a good reputation, and the purchased items serve as business capital (food vendors and retail vendors). Therefore, the amount of goods that can be taken initially is usually substantial, as they are intended for resale.

This kind of trust is based on buyers who are frequent and personally known, with a positive personal branding recognized by the seller, enabling the seller to provide the needed goods on a credit or loan basis. Hougard and Bjerre (2002) stated that the buying process becomes easier when consumers have established a harmonious relationship with the seller. Thus, it can be concluded that buyers consider a personal relationship with the seller when engaging in buying and selling transactions. This finding is reinforced by Pirasatnawati (2013), who concluded in their research that buyers tend to become loyal customers to a seller due to interactions.

In the context of the market, the social interactions that occur reflect certain patterns formed in relation to society. Individuals interact and understand each other in the market. Society as a tangible entity place demands on individuals in conducting market activities, such as determining what can be traded, how the buying and selling process is conducted, and where the buying and selling process takes place. The meeting between sellers and buyers in the market creates social interactions influenced by the socio-cultural context within society.

Symbolic interaction between vendors and buyers reflects a shared understanding of symbols related to trade transactions. Vendors use these symbols, such as fixed prices, to communicate values and customs accepted by society or their customers. As a result, buyers like Rida can identify and appreciate these symbols in their transactions with vendors.

Thoughts, Self-Concept, and Society in Market Perspective

The use of language or symbolic gestures by vendors in their social interactions within society gives rise to thoughts and the construction of the "self" in individuals. This is in line with the symbolic interaction theory proposed by Blumer, as explained in Sobur (2004: 199), which states that it is only using significant symbols, especially language, that individual thoughts emerge. In this context, customers or buyers strive to understand the symbols used by other vendors, and in the process, they also participate in the construction of social meaning. Data from interviews indicate that thinking can be regarded as an internalized or implicit conversation between vendors and society using these symbolic signals. Vendors, when interacting with their customers, have thoughts focused on efforts to attract other customers to subscribe or transact with them, which in turn shapes the perception and identity of the vendors. They acknowledge the importance of shaping the meaning of behavior in their relationship with society, and the process of symbolic interaction plays a central role in shaping and reinforcing these meanings. In the context of symbolic interaction, the communication process is crucial and inseparable. The symbolic meanings used by vendors are initially conveyed to society through actions and symbols they use and are subsequently constructed interpretively by society through shared interaction processes, resulting in mutual understanding and co-constructed social meanings.

In the perspective of symbolic interaction, vendors at Pasar Raya Kota Solok form a self-concept as friendly sellers with extensive knowledge about their merchandise. Through social interactions with customers, these vendors use verbal and nonverbal symbols, such as friendly demeanor, providing information, and offering advice, to convey a message about their concern for customer needs. In this process, vendors actively develop an image of themselves as committed to providing good customer service. Customers respond to these interactions by giving trust and respecting the knowledge held by the vendors, validating the vendor's social construction as a competent seller.

The interaction between vendors and customers shapes the understanding and behavior of vendors in the context of the market. Vendors realize that the self-concept formed through social interaction with customers has direct consequences for their business relationships and opportunities for returning customers. In this example, the vendor's self-concept as a competent and customer-oriented seller is a social construction that develops through interaction with customers and the market environment. Vendors use symbols such as language, product knowledge, and personal interaction to build and reinforce their self-image. Over time and through continuous interaction experiences, the vendor's self-image becomes more formed and influences how they interact and behave in the market context. In other words, these interactions not only shape the vendor's perception of themselves but also influence how they communicate, conduct business, and treat customers.

Conclusion

Verbal and non-verbal communication between traders and buyers in traditional markets plays a crucial role in enhancing buyer loyalty. Skillful communication by traders can provide a positive shopping experience by offering detailed explanations about products, useful recommendations, and better prices to loyal customers. Moreover, non-verbal communication such as body language, facial expressions, and body movements also play a significant role in building strong relationships with buyers. Symbolic interaction theory explains that traders' thoughts and self-construction are influenced by social interactions with customers and the market environment. The use of symbols and social interactions shape traders' understanding and behaviors within the market context, while customer responses and interpretations also impact traders' thoughts. Communication and the creation of social meanings play a vital role in this process, and the concept of traders' self-identity as competent and customer-focused sellers is a result of social interactions with customers and the market environment.

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