

Etnography of The Communication Memayu Buyut Trusmi Ritual in Cultural Preservation

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Abstract. The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is a traditional custom that is still preserved by the Trusmi community as part of their efforts to preserve local culture. This study aims to analyze the role of communication practices in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual in maintaining cultural values, collective identity, and social solidarity within the community. This study uses a qualitative approach with a communication ethnography method. Data were obtained through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with religious leaders, key figures, and the community directly involved in the ritual. Data analysis was conducted using Dell Hymes' SPEAKING framework, which includes the elements of Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. The results of the study show that the Trusmi Memayu Buyut Ritual is a structured and meaningful cultural communication event. Cultural preservation is not only reflected in the physical maintenance of sacred buildings through the replacement of *welit*, but also through ritual communication that is symbolic, repetitive, and participatory. The involvement of traditional and religious authorities and the active participation of the community confirm that ritual communication plays an important role in the inheritance of values, the strengthening of cultural identity, and the sustainability of the traditions of the Trusmi community.

Keywords: Etnography, Ritual, Culture, Memayu, Trusmi

1 Introduction

The preservation of local culture faces serious challenges amid the tide of modernization and globalization. Changes in lifestyle, technological developments, and the rapid flow of information have caused a number of traditions to undergo shifts in meaning and practice, especially among the younger generation. This situation raises concerns about the sustainability of cultural values and traditional practices within local communities. In this context, ritual communication plays an important role as a cultural mechanism that enables communities to transmit values, meanings, and collective identities across generations. As explained by [1], Ritual communication functions strategically in preserving cultural values while strengthening social cohesion through symbolic actions that are performed repeatedly within communal traditions.

One ritual that still survives is Memayu Buyut Trusmi in Trusmi Village, Cirebon Regency. This tradition is a form of respect for Ki Buyut Trusmi, who is recognized as a central figure in the religious and cultural history of the Trusmi community. The Memayu procession is manifested through activities to maintain and beautify the Buyut Trusmi tomb complex, which is understood by the community as a symbol of spiritual renewal and respect for ancestral values. The implementation of this ritual involves various actors, including traditional leaders, caretakers, religious figures, and villagers, each performing distinct communicative roles within the sequence of ritual activities. Through symbolic expressions, verbal interactions, and collective participation, the ritual becomes a communicative event that reflects shared cultural meanings within the community.

Previous studies on ritual communication demonstrate that rituals function as symbolic media that maintain social harmony and collective identity. Research by [2] revealed that the Larung Sesaji tradition strengthens gratitude and togetherness among coastal communities, while [3] shows that the Nyadran tradition plays an important role in maintaining collective identity through ritual practices. Similarly, [1] found that the Memaos Lontar tradition functions as a medium for the regeneration of cultural values. However, studies specifically examining the communicative processes within the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual remain limited. Research conducted by [4] explored the Memayu tradition in the Kanoman Palace, focusing primarily on spatial journeys and sacred spaces rather than communication patterns. Meanwhile, [5] examined the Kramat Buyut Trusmi

complex from an architectural perspective without addressing ritual communication practices or symbolic interactions among community members. Therefore, the communicative dimensions of the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual, including interaction patterns, symbolic meanings, and social roles embedded in the ritual process, have not yet been comprehensively analyzed.

To address this gap, this study employs Hymes' (1972) ethnography of communication approach, which views communication as a culturally situated practice and can be analyzed through the SPEAKING framework (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre). This framework allows the researcher to systematically examine communicative events within the ritual context [6]. In addition, this study also draws on Carey's ritual communication perspective, which conceptualizes communication as a symbolic process that maintains shared cultural meanings and social bonds within a community. By integrating these two theoretical perspectives, this research aims to analyze the patterns of communication, symbolic meanings, and social functions embedded in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual. Furthermore, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of cultural communication studies while also providing insights for community-based efforts to preserve local cultural traditions.

2 Literature Review

Studies on communication in a cultural context place ritual practices as an important arena for understanding how a community builds, maintains, and transmits its social meaning. The ethnographic approach to communication developed by Dell Hymes provides the main foundation for observing how communities use language, symbols, actions, and rules of interaction in specific cultural situations. Through this framework, communication is understood not merely as the delivery of messages, but as an activity embedded in the social context and values of the community that carries it out. Ethnography of communication emphasizes that communicative events must be interpreted within their cultural context, including the roles of participants, interaction patterns, and symbolic expressions that shape meaning in a community. In tradition, rituals often appear as a form of communication that represents collective identity while also serving as a medium for preserving local wisdom, thus reinforcing the view that culture survives because it is continuously reproduced through symbolic practices and behaviors carried out collectively.

James W. Carey's ideas enrich our understanding of rituals as a model of communication that serves to maintain social cohesion. Carey conceptualizes ritual communication as a symbolic process through which communities share beliefs, maintain social bonds, and reproduce cultural meanings through collective practices. Carey distinguishes between communication as transmission and communication as ritual, the latter of which is oriented towards the formation of shared meaning, the strengthening of solidarity, and the preservation of cultural reality. This view is relevant to the mechanisms of tradition preservation, which depend not only on formal policies, but primarily on communicative practices that are brought to life by the community. This is in line with [7] which shows that the Sedekah Bumi ritual in Gresik has been able to survive because it has become a vessel for cultural value regeneration, as well as [8] who found that the Seba Baduy ritual serves as a symbol of identity and a strategy for preserving ancestral values. These findings show that cultural preservation works through ritual communication that is repetitive, meaningful, and lived together by the community.

The dimension of participation in rituals is a crucial aspect that strengthens the function of communication as a preserver of culture. The theory of communication participation developed by Thomas Tufte and Paolo Mefalopulos emphasizes that cultural preservation does not only depend on the transmission of information from older to younger generations, but also requires the active involvement of all community members in the process of producing and reproducing cultural meaning. In the context of rituals, participation can be understood through several levels: passive participation (presence as an audience), consultative participation (providing input in ritual preparation), collaborative participation (involvement in ritual implementation), to empowering participation (taking initiative and ownership of the continuity of rituals). Active participation in ritual practices allows cultural meanings to be continuously reproduced and shared among community members, thereby strengthening social cohesion and cultural sustainability.

In Cirebon society, the tradition of Memayu Buyut Trusmi is an example of a cultural practice that has been preserved thanks to a mechanism of ritual communication that has been passed down from generation to generation. Although research on the communication aspect is still limited, studies on the cultural environment of Trusmi show that there are strong spiritual and historical ties within the community. [9] emphasizes that the Buyut Trusmi area has high symbolic value, so that every ritual activity contains meaning that reflects the identity of the community. In addition, [10] shows that the people of Cirebon have the ability to adapt to cultural changes without abandoning their traditional roots, as seen in the dynamics of tarling art. In this study, Carey's ritual communication perspective is used to understand rituals as symbolic practices that maintain shared cultural meanings, while Hymes' ethnography of communication provides an analytical framework for examining communication patterns within the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual. Based on these findings, the

Memayu Buyut Trusmi tradition can be viewed as a relevant arena of ritual communication for further study to understand how cultural values, collective identity, and social solidarity are reproduced in the context of local communities.



Figure 1. Community Participation in Trusmi
Sourcer: Researcher, 2025

3 Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the ethnography of communication method as proposed by Dell Hymes (1972), which views communication as a social practice that is always bound to a cultural context. This approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Trusmi community constructs, interprets, and preserves the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual through the communication practices that take place within it. The ethnography of communication approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to examine communicative events in their cultural context, including the interaction patterns, participant roles, and symbolic meanings that shape ritual practices within the community.

The research was conducted in Trusmi Wetan Village, Plered Subdistrict, Cirebon Regency, West Java, as the main location for the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual. The research focused on ritual communication patterns, including verbal and nonverbal communication, cultural symbols, the roles of the participants, and the social and cultural meanings attached to each stage of the ritual. Through this focus, the study seeks to understand how communication functions as a medium for transmitting cultural values and maintaining the continuity of the ritual tradition within the community.

As an analytical tool, this study uses Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model, which consists of the elements of Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. This model is used to map and interpret how communication in the Memayu ritual takes place in a systematic, meaningful manner, bound by the norms and cultural values of the Trusmi community. By applying these components, the study analyzes how ritual participants interact, how symbolic expressions are communicated, and how shared meanings are constructed and maintained throughout the ritual process.

4 Result and Discussion

4.1 The Ritual Process of Memayu Buyut Trusmi

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is a tradition passed down from generation to generation by the Trusmi community, carried out to replace the roof of the Kramat Buyut Trusmi building and welcome the arrival of the rainy season. Based on interviews with religious leaders, caretakers, and community members, this ritual consists of three main stages: preparation, implementation, and completion. The division of these stages not only indicates the technical sequence of activities, but also reflects how collective communication practices are gradually built to maintain the continuity of tradition. Each stage presents patterns of interaction, social roles, and symbolic meanings that are interrelated.

During the preparatory stage, the community of Trusmi Village, together with traditional leaders, began a series of rituals through regular deliberations every 1 Muharram, which in local tradition is known as 1 Suro night. This timing was chosen based on the shared view of the community and traditional leaders who interpret 1 Suro as a sacred moment at the beginning of the Hijri year, synonymous with renewal, purification, and the reorganization of social and spiritual life, making it the appropriate time to begin planning the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual. This practice is also intended as a form of respect for ancestors, as well as a collective effort to pray for safety and blessings. The local community's belief, which is also emphasized by traditional leaders, is that this night has greater blessings than any other time. This deliberation served as an initial forum for

communication to determine the timing, program, and division of tasks among the parties involved, such as the kyai, juru kunci (Caretakers), kemit, village officials, and community representatives. From a cultural communication perspective, this deliberation functioned as a consensus mechanism that affirmed collective involvement in preserving tradition. The role of the women in preparing food, the youth organization in coordinating the committee and the arts, and the village officials in managing security and the presence of outsiders shows that this ritual is built through cross-social group cooperation. Thus, the preparation stage is not only oriented towards technical needs, but also strengthens social relations and a sense of belonging to the Memayu ritual.

The implementation phase lasts for two days and forms the core of the ritual series. On Sunday, a procession around the village is held, carrying welit and heirloom symbols from the Kramat Buyut Trusmi site. Communicatively, this procession serves as a means of public notification and a sign of the start of the ritual. The welit carried in the procession is not merely a building material, but a symbol of renewal and respect for the sacred site. In the evening, the activities continue with tahlilan and communal prayers led by the DKM Kramat Mosque, demonstrating the connection between traditional customs and religious practices. The ritual culminates on Monday with the replacement of the welit in the sacred building, led by the kyai and the caretaker as descendants of Ki Buyut Trusmi, and assisted by the kemit. This process takes place in an orderly and cooperative manner, reflecting that cultural preservation is carried out through collective work bound by customary norms and authority.

The final stage is marked by a celebration after the installation of the welit is complete. Food donated by residents is then distributed back to the community as a form of gratitude and togetherness. From a cultural communication perspective, this practice of sharing has strong symbolic meaning because it emphasizes that the blessings from the ritual do not belong to certain individuals or groups, but rather belong to everyone. The celebration serves as a conclusion that strengthens social solidarity while ending the series of ritual communication that has been built since the preparation stage.

Overall, the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual process shows that tradition preservation doesn't only happen through physical actions like changing welit, but also through a series of structured, symbolic, and participatory communication. Through the stages of preparation, implementation, and conclusion, the Trusmi community collectively reproduces traditional values, strengthens cultural identity, and maintains the continuity of social relationships that form the main foundation for the sustainability of the Memayu Buyut Trusmi tradition.



Figure 2. Kemit Prepares the Thanksgiving Offerings
Source: Researcher's data, 2025

4.2 Components of Communication in Memayu Buyut Trusmi

In Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication, cultural interaction can be analyzed through speech events using the SPEAKING model, which consists of Setting, Participants, Ends, Act Sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genre. Each component in the model has a different function and meaning in explaining the elements of communication that arise in a cultural event.

4.2.1 Setting

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is held in the Kramat Buyut Trusmi area, a sacred space that is the center of traditional and religious activities for the community. The series of activities begins on Sunday with a parade

around the village, followed by a night of tahlilan led by the Kramat Mosque DKM, and culminates on Monday with a welit replacement procession at the sacred building. Monday was chosen for its symbolic meaning as it is understood to be the day of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad SAW and has been designated as the fixed time for the ritual's implementation for generations [11]. Each stage presents a different atmosphere, ranging from lively parades and solemn tahlilan prayers to the welit replacement process, which takes place in an atmosphere of mutual cooperation that upholds the sanctity of the space.

From an ethnographic perspective on communication, the arrangement of space and time is not neutral, but rather forms a cultural communication framework that allows traditional values to be passed down in a living way. Kramat Buyut Trusmi functions as a center of meaning that brings together the spiritual, historical, and collective identity dimensions of the community. Meanwhile, the designation of days and ritual stages creates a rhythm of communication that is understood by the community. Thus, the setting in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi Ritual is not only the backdrop for activities, but also acts as a medium of symbolic communication that maintains the continuity of tradition and strengthens the collective consciousness of the community in its efforts to preserve culture.

4.2.2 Participants

The implementation of the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual involves various parties with different roles and positions in accordance with the customary and social structure of the Trusmi community. The main actors in this procession are the kyai and juru kunci (Caretakers), who are direct descendants of Ki Buyut Trusmi. They hold customary authority to lead the ritual and ensure that the entire procession runs according to ancestral rules. In terms of technical implementation within the site, they are assisted by kemit, who are tasked with managing the ritual requirements. The DKM Kramat Mosque plays a role in leading prayers and tahlilan as the religious authority, while the village apparatus coordinates administrative and security aspects. The carnival committee, which is largely managed by Karang Taruna, is responsible for organizing the parade and the Babak Yaso dance performance as part of the cultural expression in the ritual.

From an ethnographic perspective on communication, the composition of participants shows that cultural preservation is carried out through mechanisms of communicative inheritance of roles and authority. Kyai and juru kunci (Caretakers) not only function as ritual leaders, but also as guardians of meaning and interpreters of tradition in the space of cultural communication. The involvement of the DKM, kemit, and the community shows that the Memayu Buyut Trusmi Ritual is not an exclusive practice, but is carried out collectively through a clear division of roles. The active participation of residents, whether in parades, providing food, or celebrations, strengthens the function of the ritual as a space for social communication that reproduces the solidarity and cultural identity of the Trusmi community.



Figure 3. The Memayu Buyut Trusmi procession as a collective ritual of the community
Source: Researcher's data, 2025

4.2.3 Ends

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual has the main purpose of preserving the sacred building, especially the welit roof, so that it remains sturdy and free from leaks ahead of the rainy season [12]. For the kyai and caretakers as descendants of Ki Buyut Trusmi, the replacement of the welit is also interpreted as a form of continuing the mandate of their ancestors in caring for the sacred site as a historical and spiritual heritage of the village. In addition to its physical function, the replacement of the welit is understood as a symbol of renewal and respect for Ki Buyut Trusmi, so that this activity has both a material and symbolic dimension in the cultural practices of the community.

From an ethnographic communication perspective, this objective also encompasses broader social and cultural aspects. The welit parade serves as a medium of public communication to inform residents that the welit will be installed [13], while also serving as a means of strengthening the sense of community and cultural identity among the people of Trusmi. Through the involvement of various community groups, this ritual becomes a space for collective communication that reproduces social solidarity and shared responsibility in preserving the cultural heritage of their ancestors, so that cultural preservation takes place not only through physical actions, but also through communication practices that are alive within the community.



Figure 4. The procession of the welit Memayu Buyut Trusmi
Source: Researcher's data, 2025

4.2.4 Act sequence

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is carried out through a series of actions that have been determined by custom and are carried out consistently every year. The series of processions begins on Sunday with a parade around the village coordinated by the carnival committee. In this parade, the new welit to be installed on the roof of the sacred building is paraded along with heirloom symbols in the form of spears left behind at the Buyut Trusmi site. This procession serves as a sign of the start of the ritual series as well as a means of informing the community that the welit will be used in the replacement of the roof of the sacred building.

The next stage took place on Monday evening through tahlilan and joint prayers led by the Kramat Mosque DKM as the religious authority. The following day, the peak procession in the form of a welit replacement was carried out at the Kramat Buyut Trusmi site and led by the kyai and key holders as descendants of Ki Buyut Trusmi, with the assistance of the kemit as technical implementers within the site. This sequence of actions shows that the Memayu Ritual is not only oriented towards the technical aspects of building maintenance, but also contains symbolic and spiritual meanings that are integrated into each stage. The consistency of the flow of activities from the parade, tahlilan, to the replacement of the welit forms a pattern of ritual communication that is recognized and understood by the community, thus playing an important role in preserving collective memory and the continuity of Trusmi cultural values amid social change.

4.2.5 Key

The tone of voice in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is situational and changes according to the context of the procession. During the parade, communication takes place in a more open and relaxed tone, marked by fluid verbal interaction between residents, while still maintaining mutual respect. Conversely, during the tahlilan night and the welit changeover, the tone of voice becomes slower, more orderly, and solemn. The instructions from the kyai and juru kunci (Caretakers), as well as the prayers led by the DKM of the Kramat Mosque, are delivered in a calm and careful tone, reflecting the sacred atmosphere that demands politeness and spiritual awareness from all participants in the ritual.

This difference in tone of communication shows that people are culturally aware of adjusting their speech to the sacredness of the event. Managing tone of speech isn't just a form of communication etiquette, but also a way to preserve culture, because through this practice, people, especially the younger generation, learn to distinguish between ordinary social spaces and sacred spaces in Trusmi cultural life.

4.2.6 Instrumentalities

Communication in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual takes place through a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal communication is manifested through prayers and tahlilan led by the DKM Kramat Mosque, as well as brief instructions given by the kyai and juru kunci (Caretakers) to the ritual participants. The language used is simple and easy for the community to understand, so that traditional and religious messages can be collectively accepted [14]. Prayers and tahlilan serve as the main medium for asking for smooth sailing while ensuring that the entire series of ceremonies proceed in accordance with traditional and religious values.



Figure 5. Procession of heirloom spears and traditional clothing
Source: Researcher's data, 2025

In addition, nonverbal communication is evident through the use of ritual symbols such as welit as a new roof to be installed, heirloom spears as historical relics of the site, and traditional white clothing symbolizing purity and cleanliness [12], [13]. The clerics, caretakers, and assistants wear distinctive clothing that signifies their roles and identities within the ritual structure. The use of these symbols shows that cultural preservation occurs not only through oral tradition, but also through visual representations that convey the historical significance, sacredness, and cultural identity of Trusmi in a sustainable manner.

4.2.7 Norms

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is governed by customary norms and religious ethics that must be obeyed by all participants. During the procession, the community maintains decorum in their speech and behavior and shows respect for the symbols being paraded. During the welit replacement stage at the Kramat Buyut Trusmi site, there are specific rules that emphasize the sacredness of the place, one of which is the prohibition of wearing footwear while on the sacred building. This rule is enforced as a form of respect for the sacred site as well as to ensure the safety of those performing the ritual [11].



Figure 6. The Process of Replacing Welit in Accordance with Customary Norms
Source: Researcher's data, 2025

Public compliance with these norms is evident in the orderly behavior and collective awareness during the procession, both among Trusmi descendants and other residents involved. The norms in the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual serve as guidelines for interaction that regulate the relationship between humans, sacred spaces, and ancestral traditions. Thus, compliance with customary rules not only ensures the technical smoothness of the ritual, but also serves as an important mechanism in preserving the cultural values and sacred meaning of the Memayu Buyut Trusmi tradition.

4.2.8 Genre

The Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is a cultural event that combines local traditions with Islamic religious practices. Through a series of prayers, tahlilan, processions, and welit exchanges, this ritual serves as a means of cultural communication that conveys values of respect for ancestors, adherence to customs, and spiritual strengthening of the Trusmi community. The procession is not only ceremonial in nature, but also serves as an important medium for the intergenerational transmission of cultural values and identity.

As a genre of ritual communication, Memayu Buyut Trusmi shows that cultural preservation takes place through repeated and meaningful symbolic practices. Through the continuous reproduction of rituals, the Trusmi community not only maintains traditional forms, but also strengthens social solidarity and a sense of belonging to their cultural heritage. Thus, this ritual genre has become one of the main mechanisms for maintaining the sustainability of Trusmi's local culture.

Through the SPEAKING framework, the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual reveals a structured pattern of ritual communication in which cultural meanings, social roles, and symbolic practices interact to sustain the collective identity of the Trusmi community.

5 Conclusion

This study shows that the Memayu Buyut Trusmi ritual is a cultural practice carried out through a structured and meaningful communication pattern. Through a communication ethnography approach, this ritual can be understood as a speech event that combines a sacred context, clear social roles, and symbols and norms that are collectively agreed upon by the Trusmi community. Analysis of the SPEAKING component shows that communication in the Memayu ritual does not take place spontaneously, but follows cultural patterns that have been inherited and preserved from generation to generation. Cultural preservation in this ritual is not only manifested through the continuation of physical practices, such as the replacement of welit on sacred buildings, but also through a process of communication that continues to be reproduced. The role of the kyai and juru kunci (Caretakers) as descendants of Ki Buyut Trusmi, the involvement of the DKM Kramat Mosque in leading prayers and tahlilan, and the active participation of the community make this ritual a space for collective communication that strengthens social solidarity and cultural identity. Thus, this study confirms that the preservation of local culture cannot be separated from the living, symbolic, and participatory ritual communication practices in the life of the Trusmi community.

This study also contributes to cultural communication studies by demonstrating how the ethnography of communication approach, particularly the SPEAKING framework, can be used to analyze ritual communication as a mechanism for maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion within traditional communities. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening community participation, encouraging cultural education among younger generations, and documenting traditional rituals as efforts to support the sustainability and preservation of local cultural heritage in Trusmi.

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