



## INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION OF THE MANDAILING ETHNIC GROUP IN PRESERVING THE MANGAMBAT BORU TRADITION IN SIBORANGAN LABUHANBATU

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines how interpersonal communication sustains the Mangambat Boru tradition among the Mandailing ethnic community in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu, amid intergenerational and socio-cultural change. The study is novel in positioning interpersonal communication not merely as a medium of cultural transmission, but as a social mechanism through which kinship values, symbolic meaning, and customary legitimacy are continuously negotiated across generations. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving traditional leaders, parents, and young people. The findings show that the preservation of Mangambat Boru relies on three interconnected communication forms: verbal communication through advice and dialogue, nonverbal communication through symbolic gestures and customary etiquette, and participatory communication in family and customary forums. However, this process is constrained by generational differences, limited comprehension of traditional language, and the declining intensity of face-to-face interaction in the digital era. The study contributes theoretically by reinforcing the view that interpersonal communication in cultural contexts functions not only to convey messages, but also to mediate meaning, authority, and adaptation within living traditions. Practically, the findings suggest that the preservation of local tradition requires adaptive communication strategies that are dialogical, culturally grounded, and responsive to the communicative preferences of younger generations.*

**Keywords:** interpersonal communication, cultural preservation, Mangambat Boru, Mandailing ethnic group, intergenerational communication.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural society with a rich array of local traditions that serve as markers of social and cultural identity. Amidst the tide of modernization, tradition is understood not only as a symbolic legacy but also as a system of meaning that is

continually negotiated in social life. In this context, the sustainability of tradition depends heavily on the transmission of values among community members, particularly through direct communication within families and traditional communities. Intangible cultural heritage in Indonesia continues to face challenges from changing lifestyles, shifting orientations of the younger generation, and weakening community-based social interactions. Therefore, cultural preservation is no longer understood solely as the performance of rituals, but also as an active and ongoing process of social communication (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2023; BPS, 2022).

One community that still strongly maintains its customary system is the Mandailing people of North Sumatra. Within the Mandailing social structure, kinship relationships such as *mora*, *kahanggi*, and *anak boru* form a crucial foundation for customary practices, particularly in wedding ceremonies. One tradition that is still practiced is the *Mangambat Boru*, a traditional process that represents respect for women and strengthens the social legitimacy of marriage within the Mandailing customary framework. This tradition serves not only a ceremonial function but also carries ethical, cultural, and relational meanings that affirm the position of women, family, and collective honor within the Mandailing social order (Aulia et al., 2024; Harahap, 2024). Therefore, *Mangambat Boru* should be understood not merely as a traditional practice but as an arena for cultural communication that brings together symbols, values, and social relationships.

In its implementation, the sustainability of the *Mangambat Boru* tradition is closely linked to interpersonal communication between traditional leaders, elders, and the younger generation. Interpersonal communication serves as the primary medium for conveying values, explaining symbolic meanings, and building cross-generational understanding of the importance of the tradition. Theoretically, interpersonal communication is not simply an exchange of messages, but rather a transactional process involving relationships, emotions, feedback, and the formation of shared meaning (DeVito, 2021). In a cultural context, interpersonal communication also functions as a mechanism for transmitting identity and social norms within a community (Muin et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2023). Therefore, studies on the preservation of local traditions need to pay greater attention to how communication between cultural actors occurs, not just the ritual forms that appear on the surface.

However, contemporary social dynamics indicate that the communication process in preserving customs is not without obstacles. Differences in communication patterns between generations, the declining use of traditional languages, and changes in interaction preferences due to digital media have influenced how the younger generation understands traditions. Many young people are still familiar with *Mangambat Boru*, but not all understand its meaning, function, and philosophical values. Furthermore, the transmission of customary values, which still predominantly uses traditional methods, is often less effective in reaching the younger generation, who are more familiar with fast, practical, and visual communication. This situation indicates a more complex communication issue, not simply a decline in traditional practices, but a weakening of intergenerational cultural dialogue (Putri & Ramadhan, 2023; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2023; Polnaya et al., 2023).

Several previous studies have examined the *Mangambat Boru* tradition and Mandailing culture from various perspectives. Arif et al. (2024) highlight the socio-cultural

significance of the Mangambat Boru tradition, while Nasution (2023) discusses interpersonal communication within the general family context. Siregar and Harahap (2022) examine the role of traditional leaders in preserving Batak wedding traditions, and Lubis (2021) examines intergenerational communication patterns in Batak culture more broadly. While these studies make important contributions, significant research gaps remain. Previous studies have tended to position tradition as a cultural object or highlight communication in general, but have not specifically examined how interpersonal communication functions as a mechanism for preserving the Mangambat Boru tradition through interactions between traditional leaders, parents, and the younger generation. In other words, there is still limited research explaining the relationship between interpersonal communication, negotiation of cultural meaning, and the continuity of tradition in the context of social change.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the role of interpersonal communication in maintaining the Mangambat Boru tradition among the Mandailing ethnic group in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu, and to identify communication barriers that arise in this process. This research is important because it offers a more focused perspective on interpersonal communication as a social mechanism in preserving local culture. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the study of cultural communication by demonstrating that interpersonal communication not only functions to convey messages but also mediates meaning, customary authority, and the adaptation of traditions amidst changing times. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for families, traditional leaders, and local communities in formulating cultural communication strategies that are more dialogical, contextual, and relevant to the younger generation.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand how interpersonal communication plays a role in maintaining the Mangambat Boru tradition among the Mandailing ethnic group in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu. This approach was chosen because the research is not directed at uncovering the essence of life experiences, as in phenomenology, but rather to systematically describe the forms of interpersonal communication, communication barriers, and the dynamics of tradition preservation within the local socio-cultural context. Therefore, this method is more appropriate for the research objective, which emphasizes explaining the communication process that occurs between traditional leaders, elders, and the younger generation in the practice of the Mangambat Boru tradition. The research was conducted in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu, North Sumatra, because this region still actively maintains Mandailing traditional practices and is relevant to the research focus.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and experience in the Mangambat Boru tradition. Informants comprised three main groups: traditional leaders, elders, and the younger generation of the Mandailing ethnic group. Traditional leaders were selected because they possess cultural authority and a deep understanding of customary rules and meanings. Parents were chosen because they act as agents of cultural value transmission within the family; while the younger generation was chosen because they receive, interpret, and continue

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these traditions today. Data collection was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to directly observe the implementation of traditions and patterns of interaction between traditional actors. In-depth interviews were conducted semi-structured, using guided questions that focused on forms of interpersonal communication, communication barriers, the meaning of traditions, and changes in intergenerational communication patterns. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of activity photographs, field notes, and interview recordings was used to strengthen and verify the data obtained from the observations and interviews.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, data from interviews, observations, and documentation were selected, classified, and focused on themes relevant to the research objectives, namely forms of interpersonal communication and barriers to maintaining the Mangambat Boru tradition. Furthermore, the data was presented narratively and analytically to facilitate understanding of the relationships between findings. The final stage involved drawing conclusions gradually by continuously comparing field data and the research conceptual framework. To maintain data validity, this study employed source and technical triangulation, comparing information from traditional figures, elders, and the younger generation, and matching interview data with observations and documentation. Furthermore, the researcher double-checked the interview results with informants to ensure that the data interpretation remained consistent with the intended meaning. With these procedures, this research method is expected to produce findings that are credible, consistent, and in line with the focus of the study.

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The research findings indicate that interpersonal communication remains the primary mechanism for maintaining the Mangambat Boru tradition among the Mandailing people in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu. Interviews with traditional leaders revealed that this tradition is not merely interpreted as a formal ritual, but as a form of social communication imbued with respect and kinship. One traditional leader stated, "Mangambat Boru is not simply a gift, but a form of permission to the namboru child, so that the marriage is legally valid according to tradition and respected by the extended family" (H. Jafar Hasibuan, interview, April 1, 2026). This statement demonstrates that communication within the tradition does not occur formally, but rather through direct interactions that carry symbolic meaning.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that forms of interpersonal communication in this tradition include verbal, nonverbal, and participatory communication. Verbal communication is evident through advice, dialogue, and explanations from traditional leaders and elders to the younger generation. Meanwhile, nonverbal communication is evident in traditional symbols such as body posture, sitting posture, and gestures of respect during processions. Participatory communication occurs in family forums and customary deliberations involving various parties. Parents stated, "We usually explain to the children during traditional events, but sometimes they just participate without truly understanding" (Samsul Nasution, interview, April 1, 2026). This indicates that the

communication process is ongoing, but not yet fully effective in building a deep understanding.

From the perspective of the younger generation, findings indicate ambivalence in interpreting tradition. On the one hand, they still acknowledge the values contained in Mangambat Boru, particularly regarding respect for women and family. One informant stated, "I think this tradition is good because it shows that women are respected, but sometimes the process feels complicated and difficult to understand" (Ani Mardia Sagala, interview, April 1, 2026). However, on the other hand, the younger generation also faces difficulties in understanding traditional language and feels uncomfortable in formal and hierarchical communication situations. This situation indicates a gap in understanding influenced by differences in communication patterns between generations.

Other findings indicate significant barriers to interpersonal communication. These barriers include differences in communication styles between generations, limited understanding of traditional languages, and reduced face-to-face interaction due to the dominance of digital media. The younger generation tends to be more accustomed to fast and practical communication, while traditional communication remains symbolic and contextual. This results in cultural messages not being fully conveyed effectively. Thus, field findings indicate that although the Mangambat Boru tradition is still practiced, the communication process that accompanies it faces quite complex challenges in the context of social change.

These research findings reinforce the concept of interpersonal communication as a transactional process that involves not only the exchange of messages but also the formation of meaning, social relations, and cultural identity (DeVito, 2021). In the Mangambat Boru context, interpersonal communication serves not only to convey traditional information but also as a medium for affirming social legitimacy, strengthening kinship ties, and transmitting cultural values. This demonstrates that interpersonal communication has a strong symbolic dimension in a cultural context, as explained in cultural communication theory, which positions communication as a means of producing and reproducing social meaning (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

However, findings regarding the gap in understanding between generations can be explained through family communication theory, which emphasizes the importance of conversational orientation and open dialogue in building shared understanding (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). When communication within the family is more one-way and normative, the younger generation tends to be passive and less engaged cognitively and emotionally. In this study, traditional communication, which is still predominantly instructive and symbolic, makes it difficult for the younger generation to understand deeper meanings. Therefore, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication depends heavily on the ability of cultural actors to create a more inclusive and adaptive dialogue space.

The communication barriers identified in this study can also be analyzed through the perspective of social change and modernization. Advances in communication technology have shifted patterns of societal interaction, shifting from face-to-face communication to faster and more instant digital communication (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). This change has resulted in a reduced intensity of interpersonal communication within families and traditional communities, resulting in a less than optimal transmission of cultural values. Furthermore, the emerging linguistic barriers indicate that language, as a cultural symbol,

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is experiencing a shift in function, with the younger generation no longer fully mastering the traditional language as a medium for cultural communication (Gudykunst, 2003).

On the other hand, the finding that the younger generation still recognizes the value of tradition despite experiencing difficulties in understanding its practices can be explained through the theory of diffusion of innovation. Rogers (2003) states that a culture or innovation will survive if it can adapt to the needs and characteristics of the recipient. In this context, Mangambat Boru is not experiencing rejection, but rather requires a transformation in communication methods to make it more relevant to the younger generation. Thus, interpersonal communication serves not only as a tool for preserving tradition but also as a space for negotiation between traditional values and modern realities, allowing traditions to remain dynamically alive in society.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that interpersonal communication still plays a crucial role in maintaining the Mangambat Boru tradition among the Mandailing people in Siborangan, Labuhanbatu. The communication process not only involves conveying information but also serves as a means of instilling traditional values, strengthening kinship ties, and maintaining social balance within the Dalihan Na Tolu structure. Interactions between traditional leaders, elders, and the younger generation demonstrate that this tradition remains alive through direct communication within the family context and traditional activities.

However, in practice, this interpersonal communication is not without its challenges. Differences in communication patterns between generations are a significant factor. The younger generation tends to be more familiar with quick and practical communication, while traditional communication is often perceived as overly formal and difficult to understand. The increasingly rare use of traditional languages also hinders understanding the meaning of tradition. Furthermore, limitations on direct interaction due to lifestyle changes and the influence of technology narrow the space for intergenerational communication.

Interestingly, the younger generation does not completely reject the Mangambat Boru tradition. They still see the value of respect, especially for women and family relationships. However, they need a method of communication that's easier to understand and more relevant to their current lives. This demonstrates that the sustainability of traditions depends not only on their practice but also on how relevant these values are communicated across generations.

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