



## Sudirman Street: Interaksi Budaya di Ruang Publik

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**Abstract:** This research examines the dynamics of cultural interaction between tourists and local communities in the culinary public space of Sudirman Street, Bandung, within the framework of intercultural communication. Sudirman Street has emerged as a new cultural space and serves as a symbol of a “melting pot,” where diverse cultural and religious backgrounds converge amidst the dominance of religious values in Bandung society. The aim of this research is to understand how social symbols construct meaning and relationships among individuals through public interactions. A qualitative approach grounded in the sociocultural tradition is employed, utilizing field observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that, despite religious norms concerning halal and non-halal practices, social behavior at Sudirman Street reveals a flexible negotiation of meaning among individuals, informed by personal understanding (mind) and self-identity (self), as conceptualized in George Herbert Mead’s theory of symbolic interactionism. The study reveals that tolerance, cultural compromise, and symbolic adaptation are essential for fostering social harmony within this public space. These findings suggest that culinary tourism is not merely an economic activity but also a site for cultural dialogue that reflects the level of tolerance within a city. Through Sudirman Street, Bandung demonstrates its potential to serve as a model of inclusive public space that accommodates cultural and religious diversity.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research originates from the cultural dialectics between tourists and local communities within a new cultural space called Sudirman Street, one of the tourism destinations in Bandung. Social interaction manifests through symbols that construct meaning and relationships among individuals within a broader cultural context. The field of Intercultural Communication serves as the theoretical framework for this research. According to Zhang (2022), key components of intercultural communication include language, cultural values, social norms, and communication contexts. When individuals understand these components during interactions, the effectiveness of communication practices can be enhanced.

The purpose of this research is to understand how social interactions at Sudirman Street create a new cultural space amidst the strong presence of religious values in Bandung city. Sudirman Street functions as a “melting pot” where cultures merge into one, and this

condition is unique to the culinary tourism area of Sudirman Street, which is one of the economic hubs of Bandung. Positive interactions in intercultural communication can build harmonious relationships and reduce conflicts between different cultures.

From the issues above, the researcher formulated a research question: how do symbols construct meaning and relationships among individuals within a cultural context? Therefore, this research is entitled “Sudirman Street: Cultural Interaction in Public Space.”

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The researcher employs the sociocultural tradition as the research framework. The sociocultural perspective in communication studies illustrates how meaning, norms, roles, and rules are understood interactively within communication (Yudhi & William, 2019). This research focuses on social interactions to interpret the symbols occurring in public spaces.

This research falls within the field of intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is a process of interaction involving individuals or groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. Such interaction occurs through the exchange of messages and meanings. According to Zhang (2022), essential components of intercultural communication include language, cultural values, social norms, and communication contexts. When individuals understand these components during interactions, it enhances the effectiveness of communication practices.

Sumiati and Girsang (2018) state that each region in Indonesia has its distinct culture. Cultural renewal does not necessarily imply destructiveness, as renewal happens when consensus is formed.

This research operates at the interpersonal communication level. Interpersonal communication is influenced by the situation, culture, and interrelated personal backgrounds (Kusumo & Jatmika, 2020). The theory applied in this research is symbolic interactionism. The core concepts in symbolic interactionism revolve around symbols, meaning, and social processes. Mead argues that social meaning is constructed through interaction. Individuals interpret the actions and reactions of others to develop an understanding of their self and social environment (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2020).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The focus of the qualitative research approach is to understand social reality through data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation (Creswell, 2018). The purpose of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of individuals' meanings, experiences, and perspectives within their social and cultural contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The researcher will conduct fieldwork to collect data directly. Primary data in this research consist of interview and observation results, while secondary data include documentation. This research employs data triangulation techniques to analyze the findings obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation in the field.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This research aims to uncover the forms of social interaction among individuals from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds in the Sudirman Street area of Bandung. This location was selected because it represents a complex multicultural public space where various symbols, values, and norms intersect intensively in daily activities, particularly within the context of culinary tourism. During data collection, the researcher employed

direct observation techniques, in-depth interviews with visitors and vendors, as well as visual documentation that captured the social interaction atmosphere at the site. The findings are presented narratively to illustrate the natural and situational social dynamics occurring within a diverse urban community.

Observations revealed the presence of an informal spatial structure that differentiates between halal and non-halal food vendors. Although there were no clear physical separations or explicit signage, a collective understanding emerged from practices and habitual arrangements. Non-halal foods, such as pork-based products, were generally located on the left side of the main entrance, while halal foods were distributed on the right side extending to the rear area adjoining Jalan Cibadak. However, the seating area did not observe any boundaries or segregation; visitors from various backgrounds freely chose any table to sit and enjoy their meals.

These findings demonstrate that spatial symbols, such as vendor placement and dining tables, do not necessarily create rigid social boundaries. Social interactions are fluid, allowing individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds to sit side by side without significant tension or discomfort. Dining tables, which could have symbolized separation, instead function as meeting points facilitating communication across identities. In this regard, public space plays a crucial role as a mediator between differing values and social practices within the community.

Another notable phenomenon is the use of disposable eating utensils by some non-halal food vendors. This practice serves as a form of compromise toward the majority social norm, namely Muslim visitors who avoid utensils potentially contaminated with haram substances. Non-halal vendors consciously adapt to this sensitivity to create a sense of safety for visitors and maintain the continuity of their businesses. The choice to use disposable utensils also highlights the power of non-verbal communication as a symbolic form that fosters mutual respect within a pluralistic public space.

During an interview with a non-halal food vendor, the researcher encountered limitations regarding publicly accessible information about certain ingredient practices, such as the use of pork fat. When the researcher attempted to explore further the interaction with Muslim customers who requested food without pork toppings, the vendor was initially willing to respond. However, shortly thereafter, another vendor intervened and requested that such information not be published in order to maintain “business comfort.” This action reveals a tension between the social realities in the field and communication strategies that are protective and strategic to ensure business continuity.

This phenomenon of silencing represents another form of symbolic interaction, where the act of not speaking carries its own meaning. In this case, vendors do not merely conceal information but are indirectly striving to maintain symbolic equilibrium so as not to provoke negative reactions from a public sensitive to halal issues. This strategy demonstrates that within multicultural public spaces, business actors must possess the ability to read social situations and negotiate existing symbols to safeguard their economic activities. Such actions become part of adaptive social practices within pluralistic societal contexts.

Meanwhile, interviews with two Muslim visitors who were visiting Sudirman Street for the first time provided in-depth insights into how individuals interpret social symbols in everyday life. Both stated that they were not disturbed by the presence of non-halal foods as long as they could ensure the food they consumed was halal. This attitude reflects flexibility in religious practice and the individual’s capacity for reflection on internalized

values. Their decision to remain in the area and enjoy the atmosphere illustrates that tolerance is not merely theoretical but lived through concrete social practice. Furthermore, the informants shared their views on the importance of understanding religious teachings not only textually but also contextually. One visitor explained that he came from a family that traditionally instilled religious values from childhood, yet he chose to explore deeper meanings of those teachings through direct experience and intercultural dialogue. This experience shaped his perspective that tolerance does not mean compromising one's beliefs but entails respecting diversity without losing personal identity. He also conveyed that within Islam there are different schools of thought, and he follows the Maliki school, which adopts a more moderate stance regarding non-halal food issues. This contrasts with the Shafi'i school's approach, which tends to be stricter concerning caution toward najis (impurities) and contamination by haram substances. This difference indicates that interpretations of religious symbols are not singular but are shaped by personal experiences, received teachings, and social dialogues encountered in various contexts. The attitudes demonstrated by these two visitors provide a tangible example of how religious identity can be dynamic and contextual. They choose to prioritize spirituality and gratitude for the blessings received without imposing moral standards on a heterogeneous social environment.

Both informants also provided positive responses regarding the general atmosphere at Sudirman Street. They stated that the lively, dynamic environment, combined with a diverse culinary offering, created an enjoyable experience worth repeating. Despite differences in food preferences, they felt that the area's management was adequate and did not cause significant discomfort for Muslim visitors. The presence of "no pork, no lard" signs at several stalls served as important symbolic markers that aided visitors in making consumption decisions. However, they also emphasized that clear information remains necessary to avoid ambiguity or misinterpretation.

In their interactions with vendors and other visitors, there was no impression of exclusivity or discrimination. On the contrary, the atmosphere reinforced the narrative of public space as a cultural meeting point where various identities coexist and engage in peaceful dialogue. The shared use of dining tables by visitors consuming halal and non-halal foods represented a concrete manifestation of tolerance practiced in everyday life. This demonstrates that public space is not only a site of consumption but also a venue for meaning-making and the formation of social identity.

Another finding is that social practices in this area contribute to the formation of new, situational norms. For example, Muslim visitors' decisions to sit at tables previously used by non-halal food consumers were not solely based on religious knowledge but also on situational interpretations of cleanliness and personal beliefs. In this context, the symbol of the "dining table" is no longer understood merely as a physical object but as a space for negotiating meaning influenced by values, experiences, and perceptions. Religious identity, previously considered the primary determinant of consumption patterns, proves to be flexible in practice, depending on the social context faced.

From the overall findings above, it can be concluded that Sudirman Street has formed a new cultural space that enables social interactions rich in symbols, negotiation, and adaptation. This space serves as a social laboratory where difference does not necessarily lead to conflict but rather creates dynamics of tolerance and meaning enrichment. Symbols such as food, utensils, halal/non-halal labels, and vendors' silent gestures all become part of a social language processed by each individual through their



own value frameworks and understandings. This reinforces the idea that in multicultural urban societies, the interpretation of symbols is dynamic and always open to dialogue. This research aims to understand how social interactions among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds unfold in the culinary public space of Sudirman Street, Bandung. Data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation indicate that this space is not only a consumption arena but also an important venue for social meaning-making, identity negotiation, and cultural tolerance articulation. The discussion in this chapter focuses on interpreting field findings through the lens of intercultural communication theory (Zhang, 2022), symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), and self-concept theory intertwined in the formation of values and meanings within social interactions. This elaboration seeks to explain how symbols, values, and interactions contribute to creating a distinctive and complex new cultural space.

A prominent key finding is how social symbols such as food, utensils, and seating arrangements carry profound meanings within the context of intercultural communication. These symbols are not merely physical objects but serve as mediums for communicating values and identities. Intercultural communication theory emphasizes that to achieve effective communication in cross-cultural settings, individuals need to understand four main elements: language, cultural values, social norms, and communication context (Zhang, 2022). In the context of Sudirman Street, cultural values rooted in the majority Muslim religious beliefs intersect directly with the cultural practices of the Chinese minority, whose culinary traditions include ingredients such as pork or alcohol. The interaction between these two value realms creates a communication field rich with negotiation and re-interpretation.

Symbols like the “No Pork, No Lard” label represent non-verbal communication imbued with ideological and social meanings. This label conveys the message that food producers strive to accommodate the needs of Muslim consumers without entirely abandoning their culinary identity. This action demonstrates the symbolic awareness of vendors in reading and responding to dominant cultural values. Within intercultural communication theory, such behavior can be categorized as “cultural convergence”—a form of symbolic adaptation aimed at facilitating harmonious communication and interaction amid diversity. In other words, business actors have shown cultural adaptation strategies to maintain economic sustainability without generating significant social friction.

Symbolic interactionism, as articulated by George Herbert Mead, views social symbols as acquiring meaning through interpersonal interactions. In this context, social action is understood not merely as instrumental activity but as a process of symbolic communication that shapes self-identity, social consciousness (mind), and social relationships (society). When Muslim visitors choose to sit at tables previously used by patrons consuming non-halal food, their actions carry complex symbolic meanings. On one hand, they negotiate boundaries between religious values and social realities; on the other hand, they construct a personal narrative of tolerance and openness. The meaning of such actions is not the product of static norms but is shaped through the interaction between individuals, symbols, and social situations.

Mead’s concept of the self emphasizes that individual identity is formed through a reflective process in which individuals perceive themselves from the perspective of others. In interviews, both informants expressed that they were not influenced by external views labeling them as “less Islamic” for dining in an environment mixed with non-halal food.

Instead, they asserted that their religious identity is not determined solely by external symbols but by internal convictions developed since childhood. This statement affirms Mead's proposition that the self-identity is dynamic and constructed through reflective interaction with society. Even in sensitive contexts such as the halal–non-halal food divide, religious identity can be maintained without adopting exclusivist or reactive attitudes toward the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, Mead's concept of the mind or social consciousness is also evident in how visitors interpret social realities at Sudirman Street. The mind is formed through the symbolic learning process and internalization of societal norms. When informants explain that they learn about religion not only from their family but also through social experiences and understanding of various Islamic schools of thought, they are processing religious symbols into a reflective and adaptive social consciousness. This aligns with the view that the mind does not arise naturally but is shaped progressively through continuous social interaction. The more complex the interactions experienced, the greater an individual's capacity to understand and navigate diverse social realities.

In a broader context, intercultural communication theory also states that successful interaction in multicultural spaces does not rely on value homogeneity but rather on the capacity for "cultural negotiation." At Sudirman Street, visitors not only adapt to the heterogeneous atmosphere but also participate in social practices requiring ethical and symbolic decision-making. The decision to continue dining in the area despite potential non-halal contamination results from a negotiation between internal values and external realities. This decision reflects the principle of "contextualized meaning" in intercultural communication, where meaning is not absolute but influenced by context, experience, and individual interpretation.

The practice of non-halal vendors who are reluctant to disclose facts related to the use of certain ingredients, such as pork fat, can also be understood through a symbolic approach. This silence does not indicate a lack of communication but rather conveys a powerful implicit message. In communication theory, such action can be categorized as "strategic silence," a deliberate form of communication intended to avoid potential conflict or harm. In societies with strong religious values, openness regarding sensitive information may provoke negative reactions, including the potential for boycott or social pressure. Therefore, vendors choose to censor these narratives to maintain social harmony and economic stability.

Sociologically, this action reflects pressure from the social system on individuals or minority groups to conform to majority norms. Mead refers to this as the force of society, a social structure that influences how individuals present themselves (self) and develop consciousness (mind). In public spaces like Sudirman Street, vendors are not only economic actors but also social agents who must read symbolic dynamics carefully to avoid friction with dominant communities. When vendors choose silence about sensitive facts, it is not due to unethical behavior but rather because they navigate a complex social space using symbolic strategies deemed safest.

The phenomenon of dining tables being shared by Muslim and non-Muslim visitors also reveals a complex symbolic dynamic. Conventionally regarded as neutral objects, in this context, dining tables become social symbols imbued with multiple meanings. For some, a table can symbolize impurity (*najis*) if it was previously used by someone consuming haram food. However, in interviews, Muslim visitors stated that as long as the table appears clean and the food consumed is halal, it poses no issue. This attitude reflects

Mead's principle that meaning is not inherent in objects but is formed through social interaction. The table is not intrinsically impure but is interpreted as such socially. This stance also illustrates how the self, shaped by particular religious schools of thought—in this case, the Maliki madhhab—influences how individuals interpret social symbols. Unlike the stricter Syafi'i approach toward impurity and potential contamination, the Maliki approach is more lenient and emphasizes intention and clarity regarding consumed ingredients. Thus, social symbols such as food and eating utensils are not monosemic but polysemic, possessing multiple meanings depending on the ideological and cultural backgrounds shaping them.

The visitors' comfort in occupying a space mixed with halal and non-halal elements further strengthens the assumption that tolerance in urban societies cannot be understood merely as passive acceptance of differences. The tolerance emerging at Sudirman Street is an active form of tolerance, whereby individuals consciously choose to remain present, participate, and interact within a plural social space. This exemplifies the practice of "cultural pluralism," which allows diversity to persist without negation. In modern societies, this represents an ideal form of social cohesion based not on homogeneity but on acceptance of diversity.

As Levyta and Hendra (2022) note, culinary tourism can function as a medium for intercultural education because food carries strong symbolic dimensions. Eating together is not merely a biological act of consumption but also a cultural interaction and identity negotiation. At Sudirman Street, the dining table becomes a space where social symbols converge and are collectively managed. Tolerance is not constructed through formal regulation but through direct experience and habituated interactions that mutually adjust. This demonstrates how public spaces can serve as social laboratories showcasing the potential for peaceful coexistence in culturally and religiously diverse societies. From the perspective of social policy and urban development, these findings offer important recommendations on how public spaces should be managed. The city of Bandung has successfully provided an inclusive social interaction space through culinary areas such as Sudirman Street. However, to strengthen this potential, it is necessary to develop communication strategies that are both transparent and sensitive to local values. Public education on symbolic pluralism and flexibility in interpreting differences will enhance the social resilience of urban communities. In this context, intercultural communication and symbolic interactionism serve not only as academic theories but also as practical tools for designing social policies that are more empathetic and responsive to social realities.

Thus, this discussion emphasizes that the meaning of symbols in public spaces is neither static nor uniform. Symbols gain their meaning through social interactions influenced by values, experiences, and cultural and religious contexts. Mead's theory of symbolic interactionism provides an appropriate conceptual framework to understand this dynamic, as it positions individuals not as passive entities but as active subjects in shaping and reconstructing meaning. Intercultural communication becomes the primary means of bridging these differences and creating social cohesion that is not homogeneous but pluralistic and mutually respectful.

## CONCLUSION

This research found that Sudirman Street in Bandung is not merely a culinary tourism site but also a social space that integrates various cultures and religions through dynamic interactions. Visitors from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds engage in interactions and negotiate the symbolic meanings that arise, such as food, dining tables, and halal/non-halal labels. Through the lens of intercultural communication theory and symbolic interactionism, it becomes evident that religious and cultural values are not rigid but are contextualized through social experiences, personal reflection, and social consciousness.

Sudirman Street demonstrates that tolerance in public spaces is not only a normative attitude but also a social practice lived in reality. In this regard, public space functions as a cultural learning arena where social symbols are negotiated, respected, and mutually accepted, thereby fostering stronger social cohesion within a pluralistic society. Thus, this space serves as an example of how diversity can be harmoniously managed through openness to differences. Furthermore, it is important to develop educational and cultural literacy policies that help the community become more open and understanding of differences in terms of religion, culture, and symbols. Moving forward, this research can be further developed to explore similar social interactions in other public spaces, enriching perspectives on the dynamics of pluralism in broader social contexts.

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