

Gawai Dayak as Communication Media of Dayak People in Borneo

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the high returning interest of Dayak people to their hometown when there is a gawai (a thanksgiving ritual). This research purposes of finding various reasons why gawai Dayak become communication media. Furthermore, the researcher also desires to dig out some ideas on the influence of gawai Dayak to Dayak people's lives. This research utilizes a qualitative method where the researcher derives data from observation, documentation, and interview. Additionally, the researcher meets with the interviewee(s) for the face to face interview and uses Whatsapp for a distance interview. The interactive model is applied as an analysis technique. The research reveals that gawai Dayak is a medium of communication with Jubata (God), as media to strengthen Dayak's cultural identity, and to enhance Dayak's networks and solidarity. Gawai Dayak becomes a medium of communication because it unveils forms of verbal and visual communication activities. Likewise, the forms of verbal and visual communication activities are predominantly known by Dayak people. It is also accepted, displayed, and performed by them to entertain, announce, explain, and educate Dayak's young generation. Gawai Dayak can instill and reinforce the cultural values, social norms, social philosophy of Dayak people.

Key Words : Gawai Dayak, Culture, Customary Ritual

INTRODUCTION

The gawai Dayak is a cultural event conducted across Kalimantan by the Dayak people (Herlan & Elyta, 2020). In the gawai Dayak, it presents the main event, namely nyanghathn (mantra recitation), but it also displays various traditional cultures, such as traditional ceremonies, traditional games, and traditional handicrafts. (Ivo, 2012). Furthermore, the gawai Dayak becomes the most annual awaited event in Pontianak, and there are also some exciting things in Dayak villages. In Malaysia, the gawai Dayak became an official holiday for the Dayak tribe, and it was first held on a large scale on 25 September 1964 (Ishak, 2010).

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The gawai Dayak in Pontianak is not a purely traditional cultural event, seen from both its implementation and its content. The gawai Dayak already becomes a means to express Dayak identity (Steckman, 2011). Linked with the statement as mentioned above, it is because of the Dayak art performance event, which was initially held by the Joint Secretariat of Dayak Arts (SEKBERKESDA) in 1986 (Ivo, 2012). Moreover, the spirit of building a cultural identity strongly influences its development to make it internationally renowned (Kristianus, 2011). The essence of this even is a thanksgiving ceremony to Jubata (God). Additionally, Dayak people hold this event annually after harvest. They name it differently, such as Gawai (in Hulu Kapuas), Maka' Dio (in Sambas and Bengkayang regency), and Dange (Mendalam village, Kapuas Hulu Regency) (Kristianus, 2017).

In its traditional form, the post-harvest ceremony's implementation is limited to the village area (Customary Territory). The program was limited to nyangahathn (Recitation of prayers/mantras). They also visit each other with main threats. There are salikat / Poe '(sticky rice cooked in bamboo), tumpi' (a traditional cake made from glutinous rice flour), bontokng (rice wrapped in forest leaf). Additionally, there are also other traditional foods made from the annual harvest and other food additives. The implementation of the conventional gawai takes three months, from April to June (Bahri, 2015).

In 1986, the Governor of West Kalimantan, Kadarusno, made a regulation for the thanksgiving ceremony due to political reasons. He ordered that thanksgiving would be annually held on 20 May (Ivo, 2012). Moreover, the thanksgiving ceremony is currently modified and made as a district event due to tourism reasons. The event also covers more Dayak tradition performances from the host and participated regions. At the provincial level, it is renowned as gawai Dayak Week or gawai Dayak Traditional Ceremony. The gawai Dayak was first held in Pontianak on 30 June 1986.

Theoretical Framework

Gawai Dayak as the peak of the cultural festival

The Dayak people are familiar with at least 18 stages of traditional farming ceremonies starting from Baburukng to the last stage, the gawai Naik Dango or Ka 'dango'. Before the day of the event, the Dayak people recited a mantra (nyangahathn) called matik. The aim is to inform and ask blessings to Jubata (God) that tomorrow will be a traditional party. On the D day, a traditional ceremony is held with nyangahathn in the living room (sami), calling the spirit (soul) of the rice that has not returned, nyangahathn in the rice barn (baluh or langko) to gather the spirit of the rice in its place. Nyangahathn in the rice jar (pandarengan) for the purpose bless rice to survive and not run out quickly (Wina & Triana Habsari, 2017).

The Dayak tribe has 400 sub-tribes that live on the entire island of Kalimantan (Darmadi, 2016). All of them have a Gawai culture. This gawai is a longhouse party (betang). Betang house residents who are not in homes will return at this time. Now, a single house replaces betang

house. The spirit of rumah betang is still alive, albeit it has changed villages. That is why returning to the hometown when there is a gawai (Ishak, 2010).

The rice for the Dayak people is the incarnation of Jubata (God). One of the important gods for the Dayak people, Nek Baruakng Kulup, brought the rice to the talino (human). In the Dayak's belief, albeit Jubata is unseeable, he always pays attention to humans. Moreover, jubata teaches the Dayak people to farm, treat illnesses, and give strength. There are even certain people who get a special gift. Then, the person teaches how to honor the ancestral spirits and many other things that Jubata teaches. The rice that is given by the jubata provides livelihood to humans. Consequently, humans make the gawai ceremony a form of gratefulness to jubata (König, 2016).

Finally, the gawai Dayak became a symbol that every Dayak person came from the same ancestor. Gawai has become a means to preserve the ancestral culture and foster a sense of solidarity amid Dayak people. Through gawai, Dayak people can now learn local wisdom and the values of life. Gawai links past generations and present generations (Darmadi, 2017).

Communication Theory and Media

In general, communication is a process of forming, conveying, receiving, and processing messages that occur within a person and or between two or more with a specific purpose. Moreover, this definition provides several primary meanings; namely, communication is a process of formation, delivery, reception, and processing of messages. Moreover, communication theory is a view and strategy that will form a tool and framework for a case to act out (Arifiannto, 2015).

Communicators will take four actions: forming, conveying, receiving, and processing messages. Furthermore, those four actions typically arise in sequence. Forming a message means creating an idea. It occurs in a person's mind through the nervous working system. Additionally, it is conveyed to others, either directly or indirectly. The process of conveying messages is in the form of ideas, emotions, skills, or other messages, either verbally or nonverbally. The messages that are received from the communicator to communicant through channels/media to get a response (McQuail, 2003).

Communication media is a means to convey messages from communicators to the public (Prasanti, 2016). By the same token, humans' natural communication media are the five human senses, such as ears and eyes. Communication media is a window to perceive a further environment. Practically, communication media can also be utilized as an interpretation that can help to comprehend experiences. Furthermore, it stands as a basis for delivering information; interactive communication. Undoubtedly, communication media have a pivotal role in people's lives.

Traditional communication media have a high value in communication systems due to its particular position in the system of a culture. The specific information signs conveyed in these

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traditional performances, make people from other cultural systems challenging to realize and understand verbal and material art expressions, or music performance. (Irianto, 2017).

Communication media is a means to convey messages. It makes communication subject to deliver messages to communication objects, albeit they are in different places, and have no chance to meet (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014). Accordingly, it can be concluded that communication media is a means of conveying the message from the subject of a communication to an object of communication.

Research Method

This research was done using the ethnography method (Jailani, 2013). The researcher involved himself in the event. Moreover, the researcher gained the data through observation and interview. He conducted a direct interview with people familiar with and involved themselves in the gawai Dayak ceremony. The researcher conducted a literature study to dig out the communication culture of Dayak people.

Regarding principles of qualitative research (Farida, 2010), this research covers principles such as natural background, inductive analysis, researchers as an instrument, and the existence of research boundaries.

The instrument is meant to gain data. Hence, the instrument is related to data collection techniques. There are 4 data collection techniques applied in this study (Lexy J. Moleong, 2019): (1) observation, (2) interview, and (3) documentation.

- (a) Observation: the researcher did the observation by living together with the subject to get the data needed. The researcher also joined the gawai for ten days in the research location.
- (b) In depth-interview: the researcher interviewed some key informants; Dayak cultural figures, Dayak figures, politician, religion, and tradition figures.
- (c) Documentation was done in the form of folk tales, pictures, recording, printed media available.

Data analysis used in this research was descriptive qualitative analysis and content analysis. Data that were gained from observation, interview, and documentation were meticulously analyzed and described. Moreover, the researcher made transcriptions from interview data and interpreted it. The researcher also did the same thing for the folk tales' data.

Result and Analysis

After analyzing the results of interviews from twenty (20) competent interviewees for the gawai Dayak cultural event, the researcher meticulously describes the findings of this study as follows:

- a. Gawai Dayak as a medium of communication for humans with ancestral spirits and Jubata (God).

Based on the researcher's experiences, gawai Dayak can be concluded as the main event of Dayak people's communication with Jubata (God). The communication occurs in Nyangahatn;

it is a series of prayers to thank God in the form of high-level and formal archaic literature. Moreover, they also invite holy spirits by adequately preparing *sesajian* (offerings). *Nyngahatn* is divided into four stages; 1) *matik*, 2) *ngalantekatn*, 3) *mibis*, 4) *ngadap mbuis*. *Matik* is the first stage of communication to *awa pama* (ancestral spirit) and *Jubata* about family celebration plans. *Ngalantekatn* is the second stage of communication to get protected by *awa pama* and *Jubata*. The third stage is *mibis*; it aims to dissolve everything the host family has to the air and buried as the sun sets to the west. Last, *ngadap buis* is the complete communication stage; this is the form of receiving offerings by *awa pama* and *Jubata*. It has a purpose to thank God due to sanctification and blessings from all bad things. It also summons all living souls who are lost and make them serene. Therefore, it has a similarity with Dayak Babalai's semiotic perspective, which has an identical meaning. (Ramadania & Arifin, 2019).

The Dayak Kanayatn people believe that there are two realms of life, namely real-life and unseen realm, compared to Maulana's opinion about Dayak cosmology (Maulana, 2020). In real life, there are plants, animals, and humans. While in the unseen realm, there are *Ibalis* (devil), *Suara'an* (an invisible human-like creature), *antu* (ghost), *sumangat urakng mati* (spirit), and *Jubata*. These two realms of life affect one another. For instance, there is a person who possesses a supernatural power. Furthermore, to maintain a stability between real life and unseen realm life, the ancestors of the Dayak Kanayatn people had local wisdom in the form of rules that must be obeyed and used as life control for all citizens. These rules are known as *adat* (tradition) (Henley & Davidson, 2008).

b. Gawai has a magical power to strengthen tradition and to invite people to return to their villages.

All interviewees agree that gawai has a magical power to compel Dayak people to return home. Notwithstanding there is no invitation and notification, they will return home when gawai is held. Commonly, they tend to go home when there is gawai in their village. Consequently, it is the factor that makes Dayak people desire to return home.

The researcher sees this passion using the Dayak community's social construction approach (Sulaiman, 2016). The steps of the Dayak community's social construction approach are mentioned in detail as follows: first, to describe the social construction that can be found in the present. Moreover, it still exists in most villages in the Landak Regency. It is seen when the researcher visited nine villages. Second, the researcher observed and identified the function of social construction in everyday life. In this case, the researcher applied a scientific methodology to analyze everyday life. Furthermore, it works with the hermeneutic principle. In everyday life, social interaction usually occurs because each actor that is involved in it interprets the meaning in each action (Randa et al., 2011).

This social construction is influenced by two essential components: rules and resources. Definite rules come from norms and values. In this way, we can ensure that if there are rules

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that people still refer to for acting, then there must be norms and values behind those rules. Whereas the sources in this context, in Dayak Kanayatn people's social structure, can be found in *parene'an* (patrilineal kinship unit), *radakng* (settlements unit), and *palasar-palaya* (jobseeker place unit). The unity amid those three units is utilized as a benchmark to see the social structure's necessary form (ideal type). It is also used to see the primary form of the social structure, which causes the high social cohesion of the Kanayatn Dayaks and has this magical power. The researcher reveals the basic framework chart of the Kanayatn Dayak social construction below:

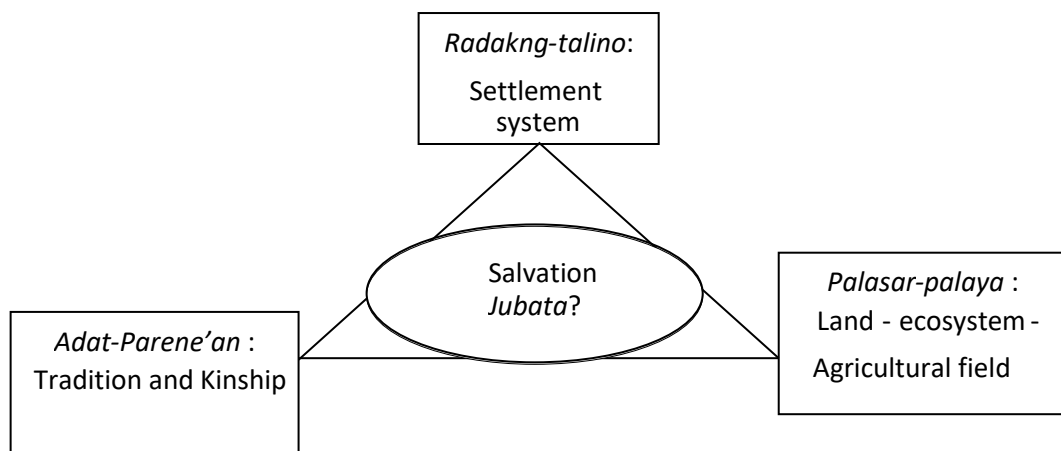


Chart: *Kanayatn* Dayak social construction

Source: Author

Chart explanation:

The core of the Dayak Kanayatn social construction is *radakng-talino* (in the past it was called a longhouse). Meanwhile, *Adat*, *parene'an* and *palasar-palaya* are the only support, albeit *talino* cannot survive without them. In the past, people could move their *palasar-palaya* in search of a better and safer one. In essence, *parene'an* and *palasar-palaya* must provide safety to *talino's* members as its function.

The *talino* sits at the apex of the triangle as the core of social construction. Likewise, it unveils that *talino* is pivotal, yet it cannot grow itself without those two supports/crutches. Moreover, those are also connected. Every *talino* has a *sumangat* (spirit) that cannot be precisely defined. The meaning refers to the origin of *talino*, which is spiritual, protect and always stands around their life.

Furthermore, there is a circle in the middle of the triangle filled with the concept of safety (salvation). It touches the relationship between those three structural components. Meanwhile, the word *Jubata* is deliberately given a question mark to depict the most potent magic location. It is because *parene'an* is a community unit of the *talino* family. *Parene'an* invites people who

wander back to their hometowns when there is gawai. The talino principle is patrilineal and seniority of the kinship structure.

Moreover, patrilineal leadership refers to men's authority. In the meantime, seniority leadership refers to the status of men in the kinship structure. Likewise, it is called brothers and sisters, which is not based on their age. Consequently, the talino leadership over the *parene'an* is in a group of brothers under seniority's principle: the father and younger brothers. Accordingly, the *parene'an*'s leader is not a single leader, but a collective leader with a *primus inter pares* appointment system.

c. The gawai Dayak led people to gather and bring out the spirit of self-expression.

Culture is a "certain way of life," formed by values, traditions, beliefs, material objects, and territories. Culture is a complex and dynamic ecology of people, objects, world views, activities, and settings that fundamentally stand for an extended period. However, it also changes in frequent communication and social interactions; culture is context. (Keesing, 2014) According to Keesing, culture is the way we talk and dress, the food we eat and the way we prepare and consume it, the gods we create and the way we adore them, the way we divide time and space, the way we dance, the values we share to our children and all the other details in everyday life. This perspective on culture implies; no culture is inherently superior to other cultures. Moreover, the cultural wealth does not correlate with economic status. Thus, culture as everyday life is an idea to make a harmonious life.

Due to the interviews and direct observation in the location, this gawai encourages Dayak people to live happily. All interviewees agreed that gawai had established various Dayak cultural activities to appear and perform. As previously found, a large number of people who came to the village caused a large crowd. Moreover, their attendance stimulated the host to depict various cultural attractions to entertain them. Various kinds of arts are depicted in several villages, including Pencak silat. Recently, gawai has been used as a village art performance. The researcher underlined that the length of the gawai event could cover many art performances. Additionally, there was a stage for the performance. It facilitates the performer/entertainer to display their performances every night, one of the performers is a local group, *jonggan*.

d. Gawai refreshed the relationship of Dayak people.

Humans are social creatures; therefore, humans need one another. It is to gain information about their environment, themselves and the people nearby. To get information, they need to communicate with others. Consequently, communication is pivotal for social life, culture, politics, and education because communication is a transactional process that affects certain behaviors as a consequence of social relationships.

Furthermore, interviewees admitted that gawai could strengthen brotherly / solidarity relations. Due to gawai, they could meet their old friends. Gawai makes the relationship strong. They can talk and eat together. Also, they can meet new friends from other Dayak when there

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is gawai. It is because their family also invites their friends to join them. They consider it as a fortune because they can have a new brother. From this gawai, they will visit each other to strengthen their relation. Accordingly, the respondents agree that gawai Dayak makes relations among the Dayak better. Moreover, some respondents said that they could get a contact number to have more communication with their friends.

The findings, as mentioned earlier, are actually in line with traditional communication media that exist across Indonesia. Moreover, traditional communication media depicts itself in various forms and characteristics. It is in line with the cultural variations that exist in these areas, such as tudung sipulung (sitting together), ma'bulu sibatang (gathered together in a bamboo hut) in South Sulawesi (Naing et al., 2009) and selapanan in Central Java (Sartini, 2009). They may be considered as examples of traditional media in Indonesia. Besides, there are also traditional instruments such as the kentongan, which is still used in Java (Rachman, 2017). This instrument can be utilized to send messages to all villagers. According to the rhythm, the instrument may contain different meanings, such as death, accident, fire, and theft. (Irianto, 2017).

Conclusions

According to the description, as mentioned earlier, it can be concluded that gawai Dayak has a magical power to make everyone interested in returning home. It can also grasp people's desire to gather and to meet with old friends. Additionally, gawai Dayak can also enliven and strengthen the Dayak people's relations. In a nutshell, gawai Dayak as a medium to entertain people, it can enhance the communication of people who involve themselves in the event.

Gawai Dayak can be concluded as a medium of communication. In further meaning, this medium is predominantly known as the Dayak Cultural Festival. Moreover, the traditional media of gawai Dayak has shown verbal, movement, oral, and visual forms familiar to Dayak people. Dayak people also admit and perform it with the intention of entertaining, announcing, explaining, teaching, and educating the young Dayak generation. In line with the above statement, gawai Dayak emerges in singing, dance, instrumental music, and drama. It also covers all Dayak arts in literary, visual, or performance products throughout the generation. It can ensue because the media also educates its audiences. Consequently, it can convey knowledge to audiences, reinforce cultural values, social norms, and philosophies.

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