

Connecting Words and Waves: Communication Practices for Fisherfolk Communities

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Abstract— This qualitative study explored the communication practices of fisherfolk communities, emphasizing the role of dialogue in sustaining livelihoods, fostering social cohesion, and preserving cultural identity. Anchored in socio-cultural theory, the research investigated how verbal and non-verbal communication shaped daily routines, market interactions, and community decision-making among fisherfolk in coastal areas. Using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke’s method, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected fisherfolk to uncover patterns and meanings behind their communication strategies. Findings revealed that respectful and trust-based conversations not only facilitated economic exchanges, such as selling fish on credit or negotiating prices, but also reinforced communal bonds, transmitted traditional knowledge, and provided emotional support in times of hardship. The study highlighted that communication was not merely a tool for information exchange but a vital element in navigating the waves of both livelihood and life. It recommended the integration of culturally rooted communication practices into community development and extension programs to better support fisherfolk resilience and sustainability.

Keywords— Communication Practices, Fisherfolk, Socio-Cultural Theory, Community Livelihood, Thematic Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a vital element in human interaction, essential not only for conveying information but also for building relationships, fostering cooperation, and sustaining livelihoods. Among fisherfolk communities, where daily survival depends on timely coordination, social trust, and economic exchange, communication serves as more than just a tool, it becomes a lifeline. Whether negotiating with buyers, sharing fishing updates, or maintaining relationships with fellow fishers and customers, the way fisherfolk communicate reflects both cultural values and practical needs.

In many coastal communities, particularly those engaged in small-scale or traditional fishing, communication practices are shaped by oral traditions, local dialects, and informal systems of knowledge-sharing. These practices often blend indigenous ways of speaking with modern forms of transaction and negotiation. Despite their significance, such communication patterns remain underexplored, especially in relation to how fisherfolk sell and promote their products. Understanding these practices can reveal not only how economic exchanges occur

but also how cultural identity, social structure, and livelihood resilience are maintained.

This study aimed to explore and understand the communication practices of fisherfolk communities in relation to the selling and promotion of their catch.

Specifically, the study aimed to: (1) identify the themes that emerge from the responses; (2) identify the common communication strategies used by fisherfolk when interacting with customers and buyers; (3) examine the cultural and social meanings embedded in their communication practices; (4) describe the challenges fisherfolk face in communicating their products and prices; (5) analyze how traditional or indigenous forms of communication influence selling and negotiation.; and (6) assess the role of communication in sustaining livelihood, building customer relationships, and supporting community cooperation.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, descriptive-interpretive design utilizing Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach enabled the researchers

to explore patterns, meanings, and experiences in the communication practices of fisherfolk.

The study was conducted in selected coastal communities in Iloilo, where fishing was a primary livelihood. The sites included barangays or fish landing areas where fisherfolk commonly interacted with buyers.

The participants included fisherfolk, particularly those who were actively involved in selling and promoting their catch. To ensure relevance, purposive sampling was used to select participants with firsthand experience in communication during selling and trading. Ultimately, 15 participants were chosen to represent various age groups, genders, and levels of experience.

The primary data collection methods for this study included in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to explore the fisherfolk's personal communication strategies, the cultural and social meanings behind their interactions, and the challenges they faced when promoting and selling their products.

These interviews provided the flexibility to probe deeper into participants' responses while still following a guided set of questions aligned with the study objectives. In addition, participant observation was conducted to directly observe and document actual interactions between fisherfolk and their customers in natural settings such as markets or coastal landing areas.

This method enabled the researchers to capture non-verbal cues, informal negotiation techniques, and traditional communication behaviors that may not have emerged through interviews alone.

The data in this study were analyzed using Thematic Analysis, following the six-phase method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

This analytical approach began with familiarization, where the researchers thoroughly read and re-read the interview transcripts and field notes to immerse

themselves in the data. The second phase involved generating initial codes by systematically identifying significant features and labeling meaningful data segments. In the third phase, the researchers searched for potential themes by clustering related codes and examining patterns across the dataset. Once potential themes were identified, the fourth phase, reviewing themes, entailed checking if these themes accurately represented the data both within individual responses and across all participants. The fifth phase focused on defining and naming themes, where each theme was clearly articulated in terms of its scope, essence, and relevance to the research questions.

Finally, the sixth phase involved producing the report, where a coherent narrative was crafted, supported by data extracts, to present findings that meaningfully reflected the fisherfolk's communication practices.

This study upheld strict ethical standards throughout its conduct. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to any data collection, ensuring that they fully understood the purpose of the study, their role, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained by assigning codes or pseudonyms to participants, and no identifying information was included in the final report or any related publications.

All collected data, interview transcripts, notes, and recordings were securely stored and used solely for academic and research purposes.

These measures aimed to protect the dignity, rights, and privacy of all individuals involved in the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the responses gathered from participants, five themes using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis (2006) emerged: (1) Respectful and Relationship-Based Communication, (2) Cultural and Indigenous Communication Norms, (3) Challenges in Communication, (4) Traditional and Non-Verbal Strategies, and (5) Communication as a Tool for Livelihood and Unity.

Common Communication Strategies Used by Fisherfolk When Interacting with Customers and Buyers.

The common communication strategies used by fisherfolk when interacting with customers and buyers reflect a combination of warmth, practicality, and cultural familiarity. They speak politely, use soft tones, smiles, and greetings to create a welcoming atmosphere, and rely on the local dialect to connect more easily. They emphasize clarity by stating prices and quantities directly, use persuasive techniques like storytelling and catchy calls, and maintain clean displays to attract attention. Hand signals are also used in noisy settings, showing adaptability. Trust and loyalty are built through special treatment of regular customers, offering discounts, and even allowing delayed payments. These strategies not only help boost sales but also strengthen relationships, build customer loyalty, and sustain their livelihood within a culturally rooted and community-centered approach.

Cultural and Social Meanings Embedded in Their Communication Practices.

The communication practices of fisherfolk are rich with cultural and social meanings that reflect their values, identity, and way of life. Their respectful and sincere manner of speaking shows a deep-rooted commitment to harmony, humility, and trust. Communication is not just about selling, it embodies their compassion, integrity, and dignity, even in the face of poverty. It is shaped by ancestral wisdom, passed down through generations, and reflects pride in their place, their hard work, and their resilience. These practices affirm that, for fisherfolk, communication is a meaningful expression of who they are as individuals and as a community.

Challenges Fisherfolk Face in Communicating Their Products and Prices.

Fisherfolk face various challenges in communicating their products and prices, including language barriers, limited education, and lack of marketing skills, which make it difficult to explain product value. They are often overpowered by middlemen, looked down upon due to poverty, and afraid to state prices for fear of losing customers. Time pressure, distrust from new buyers, and constant price comparisons add to the

difficulty, especially when the freshness of fish is questioned. Some buyers demand more for less, and women's voices are often ignored in the marketplace. Limited literacy also makes it hard to label or share written information. These issues weaken their ability to sell effectively and contribute to their economic and social disadvantage.

Traditional or Indigenous Forms of Communication Influence Selling and Negotiation.

Traditional or indigenous forms of communication strongly influence how fisherfolk engage in selling and negotiation. Their approach is rooted in personal connection, trust, and cultural sensitivity rather than formal procedures. Transactions are often carried out through casual and friendly conversations, where indirect speech, tone of voice, and non-verbal signals play crucial roles in reaching agreements without offending. Familiarity with regular buyers allows for flexible arrangements such as delayed payments or special pricing, highlighting the importance of long-standing relationships over written contracts. These practices, passed down through generations, reflect a deep cultural reliance on oral agreements and mutual understanding. Even superstitions and customary expressions shape how deals are made, showing that for fisherfolk, selling is not just a business transaction but a social interaction deeply woven into their cultural identity.

Role of Communication in Sustaining Livelihood, Building Customer Relationships, and Supporting Community Cooperation.

Communication plays a crucial role in sustaining the livelihood of fisherfolk, building lasting customer relationships, and supporting community cooperation. Trust-based and respectful conversations encourage buyers to return, prevent exploitation, and enable flexible arrangements such as credit, even without formal contracts. Open and honest dialogue fosters mutual understanding, resolves market issues, and strengthens both economic and social ties.

Communication also serves as a tool for expressing care within the community—whether by warning others of bad weather, passing down knowledge to

younger generations, or maintaining harmony despite occasional disagreements.

Ultimately, through sincere and respectful communication, fisherfolk are able to uphold dignity, nurture unity, and ensure the continued well-being of their community.

IV. CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the following conclusions were drawn:

The findings reveal that fisherfolk communication is deeply rooted in respect, culture, and community relationships, as shown in the five emergent themes: respectful and relationship-based communication; cultural and indigenous norms; communication challenges; traditional and non-verbal strategies; and communication as a tool for livelihood and unity. Their communication practices combine politeness, local language use, non-verbal cues, and trust-building strategies that strengthen customer relationships and sustain livelihood. However, these practices are also challenged by language barriers, limited education, market pressure, and social inequality. Despite these difficulties, indigenous and relational forms of communication remain central to selling, negotiation, and community cooperation. Lastly, communication is not only an economic tool for fisherfolk but also a cultural practice that preserves identity, fosters unity, and supports their community's resilience.

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn:

Implement community-based training programs that strengthen their existing skills while honoring cultural practices. These programs should focus on effective customer interaction, basic marketing techniques, and financial literacy, while promoting the use of local dialects, storytelling, and respectful communication. Additionally, practical support—such as providing clean display materials and simple tools to manage customer transactions—can help fisherfolk maintain trust-based relationships and improve sales. By building on their culturally familiar approaches, these efforts can help sustain livelihoods, foster customer loyalty, and strengthen community ties.

To preserve and strengthen the culturally rich communication practices of fisherfolk, it is recommended to integrate cultural heritage programs that document and promote their traditional ways of interacting. This can include storytelling workshops, community dialogues, and intergenerational learning activities that celebrate their ancestral wisdom and communication values. Local governments and organizations should recognize these practices as part of intangible cultural heritage and provide platforms for fisherfolk to share their experiences. By doing so, their respectful, sincere, and dignity-driven communication style can be preserved, passed on to younger generations, and reinforced as a valuable asset in both community life and local economic activities.

To address the communication challenges faced by fisherfolk in selling their products, it is recommended to implement inclusive capacity-building programs focused on basic business communication, pricing strategies, and local marketing skills. These programs should be delivered in local languages and designed to be accessible to those with limited formal education. Support systems, such as visual-based pricing tools, simplified signage, and community translation assistance, can help overcome literacy and language barriers. Efforts should also be made to empower women by creating safe spaces for their voices in marketplaces and decision-making. Additionally, policies should be introduced to regulate fair pricing practices and reduce the dominance of middlemen, ensuring fisherfolk have a stronger voice and greater confidence in negotiating their product's value.

To support and preserve the traditional communication practices of fisherfolk in selling and negotiation, it is recommended to develop culturally responsive programs that recognize and build upon their indigenous ways of interacting. Local government units, NGOs, and cooperatives should provide training that respects oral traditions while gently introducing complementary skills like basic record-keeping or visual labeling tools that do not disrupt established trust-based systems. Documentation of these indigenous practices through community storytelling or local media can also help validate their value. Moreover, marketplace policies should accommodate

informal but culturally meaningful practices—such as verbal agreements and personalized interactions—ensuring that modern interventions enhance rather than replace the social fabric that defines their livelihood.

To enhance the role of communication in sustaining fisherfolk livelihoods and community cooperation, it is recommended to establish community-based communication support initiatives. These may include regular forums or "tabuan" (local gatherings) where fisherfolk can openly share market updates, discuss concerns, and exchange knowledge. Training sessions that strengthen interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and community leadership—delivered in local dialects—can further empower them. Efforts should also focus on preserving and promoting intergenerational dialogue to ensure traditional wisdom and values are passed down. By institutionalizing respectful, trust-based communication within the community, fisherfolk can strengthen customer relationships, resolve challenges collaboratively, and maintain unity in the face of economic and environmental pressures.

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