

From Oral Tradition To Digital Media: The Recontextualization Of Betawi Culture From Lotman’s Semiotic Perspective In The Works Of Tadjuddin Nur

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ABSTRACT

This article examined the transformation of Betawi oral culture in the digital age through a semiotic analysis of the works of Tadjuddin Nur. Oral culture, which previously existed in the form of live performances, is now shifting to audio-visual digital platforms, such as YouTube. This study employed a semiotic approach by combining Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic theory of signs and Yuri Lotman’s cultural semiotics perspective to understand how meaning is produced, represented, and reinterpreted in a digital context. Research methods included netnography and multimodal analysis of verbal, visual, and performative elements in Tadjuddin Nur’s YouTube content. The findings revealed that digitization functions as a space for recontextualization, generating new, more interactive, and multimodal forms of oral tradition, where Tadjuddin Nur acts as a cultural mediator bridging oral traditions with digital technology within a dynamic semiosphere. In addition, the study shows that digital media make Betawi oral traditions more accessible to a wider audience. At the same time, these platforms allow the culture to adapt and remain relevant in today’s modern society.

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Betawi Orality, Cultural Semiotics, Digitalization, Tadjuddin Nur, Multimodality.

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1. Introduction

Orality is one of the essential foundations in cultural construction, particularly in societies with strong oral traditions as a medium for transmitting values, identity, and collective knowledge. From Walter Ong’s (1982) cognitive perspective, orality is not merely understood as the practice of speaking, but as a mechanism of meaning-making built through social memory, patterns of repetition, performativity, and the intense interconnectedness between the speaker and their community. Oral traditions enable a community to maintain the continuity of cultural values through a process of transmission based on direct interaction (Rahman & Letlora, 2018; Pratiwi et al., 2026; Suma et al., 2024; Sabila et al., 2025). In Indonesia, this tradition manifests itself in various forms, such as folktales, pantun, and verbal humor, which function as spaces for cross-generational cultural negotiation (Sugiyartati et al., 2020; Tahir et al., 2021; Salsabila et al., 2025; Rahman et al., 2019). However, its reliance on physical presence and collective memory makes the oral tradition vulnerable to the upheavals of changing times.

Betawi culture is one of the significant representations of the archipelago’s oral tradition heritage. Through expressions such as Betawi pantuns, *lenong*, *palang pintu*, and distinctive dialogic humor, the Betawi community builds a strong ethnolinguistic identity (Suhendar, 2018). These oral traditions not only showcase an aesthetic of spontaneity and improvisation but also fulfill a strategic social function as a medium for social critique and the preservation of collective memory within Jakarta’s urban society (Yuliana et al., 2026). However, Jakarta’s transformation into a dynamic megacity has placed immense pressure on the cultural living spaces of local traditions. Massive urbanization, changes in the function of public spaces, and the penetration of global culture have caused many forms of Betawi oral traditions to become fragmented and lose their traditional stages (Hefner, 2018; Somadi, 2020).

Over the past two decades, the wave of digitalization has emerged as a paradox for cultural preservation. On one hand, it is seen as threatening the depth of face-to-face interaction; on the other, platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram offer spaces for the recontextualization of oral traditions that were once marginalized. This phenomenon gives rise to what is termed “secondary orality,” where oral practices now intersect with the digital multimodality of sound, visuals,

text, and audience interactivity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Digitalization does not merely transfer oral texts to a new medium but creates a new “semiosphere”—a dynamic cultural space where traditional signs are reinterpreted to remain relevant to contemporary audiences.

Amid this sociocultural transition, Tadjuddin Nur’s role as a cultural figure becomes highly significant. Through various audio-visual documentation works, he seeks to bridge the gap between classical oral traditions and the digital ecosystem. Tadjuddin acts not only as an archivist but also as a cultural mediator who re-semantizes Betawi symbols—such as the Central Betawi dialect, the *sadariah* garment, and local historical narratives—into more adaptive formats. This effort serves as a crucial foundation in the revitalization process, ensuring that Betawi identity retains its vitality amidst the tide of information globalization.

To understand how the production of meaning and the transformation of cultural symbols occur in Tadjuddin Nur’s works, a sharp analytical approach is required. This study integrates Charles Sanders Peirce’s triadic theory of signs to dissect micro-elements (icons, indices, symbols) and Yuri Lotman’s perspective on cultural semiotics to examine how these contents move and interact within the digital cultural space (semiosphere). Through this study, it is hoped that the ways in which the recontextualization of Betawi culture in digital media shapes new collective memories while simultaneously reinforcing local identity in the modern era will be revealed.

1.1 Orality and Digitalization: The Transformation of the Communication Ecology

The transformation of media from the physical stage to the digital space is not merely understood as a shift in medium, but as a fundamental shift in the ecology of cultural communication. Walter Ong (1982) pioneered this understanding through the concept of “secondary orality,” in which orality in the electronic age retains its fundamental characteristics—such as an emphasis on community and the present moment—yet is produced and constructed with the aid of technology. In the context of Betawi culture, the digitization initiated by figures such as Tadjuddin Nur through the YouTube platform is a tangible manifestation of this evolution of orality.

a. Multimodality and the Logic of New Media

Lev Manovich (2001) in his work **The Language of New Media** asserts that digital media create an ecosystem that is interactive, manipulative, and data-driven. Whereas in conventional oral traditions meaning relies heavily on physical presence and the resonance of the voice, in digital formats, orality transforms into a multimodal phenomenon. Verbal elements (Betawi dialect speech) now synergize simultaneously with visual elements (clothing aesthetics), gestural elements (performative body movements), and technical elements such as video editing and background music.

In Tadjuddin Nur’s digital content, this multimodality serves to reinforce cultural messages that might be lost if conveyed solely through text. The use of close-ups on facial expressions while delivering Betawi humor, for example, provides emotional depth that bridges the physical distance between the speaker and the digital audience. This allows the oral tradition to no longer be linear but to become a cultural text rich in layers of meaning.

b. Convergence Culture and the Prosumer Phenomenon

In line with Manovich’s thinking, Henry Jenkins (2006), through his theory of Convergence Culture, explains that the digital era has broken down the boundaries between cultural producers and consumers. This phenomenon gives rise to what is known as the “prosumer” (producer-consumer), where the audience possesses active agency to reinterpret, redistribute, and even modify the cultural content they consume.

On Tadjuddin Nur’s YouTube channel, the process of recontextualizing Betawi culture does not end when the video is uploaded. Interactions in the comment section, the use of video clips for other educational content, and the dissemination of moral messages through other social media platforms demonstrate that Betawi oral traditions have entered a “participatory” space. The audience is no longer merely a passive listener, as in traditional performances, but has become part of the ever-evolving circulation of meaning within the digital ecosystem.

c. Living Archiving and Cultural Accessibility

One of the main challenges of oral traditions is their ephemeral nature—they are easily lost because they rely heavily on the presence of native speakers. Digitization offers a solution through what is known as living archiving. Tadjuddin Nur’s works function as a digital collective memory accessible across space and time. Giaccardi (2012) emphasizes that intangible cultural heritage in the digital age requires open access to remain relevant for future generations.

Through digitization, Betawi oral traditions—which were once confined to communal spaces (such as villages or community centers)—have now migrated to the global public sphere. The flexibility of new media allows this tradition to be revived in a more concise and adaptive format without losing its narrative essence. Thus, digital technology acts not merely as a storage medium, but as a catalyst that revives local identity within the vortex of modernity.

1.2 The Framework of Integrative Semiotics: The Perspectives of Peirce and Lotman

In an effort to analyze the phenomenon of cultural recontextualization, this study is grounded in two complementary theoretical pillars of semiotics: Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotics, which focuses on the micro-level of sign production, and Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics, which examines the macro-level of meaning circulation within the cultural sphere. The synergy of these two perspectives provides a solid foundation for understanding how a traditional identity transforms within a hybrid digital medium.

a. Charles Sanders Peirce's Triadic Semiotics

Charles Sanders Peirce (1955) offers a dynamic model of the sign process through the triadic relationship between the Representamen (sign), Object (referent), and Interpretant (meaning). Unlike static structuralist models, Peirce emphasizes the process of semiosis—an infinite process in which a sign triggers new signs in the mind of its recipient.

In a cultural context, Peirce classifies the relationship between a sign and its object into three fundamental categories that serve as analytical tools in this study, as follows: 1) Icon: A sign that represents its object through physical resemblance or likeness. Icons allow the audience to recognize a cultural entity through visual or auditory representations that resemble the original. 2) Index: A sign that has a causal, sequential, or existential connection to its object. The index functions as an identifier, where the sign's existence directly refers to the background or origin of the cultural object. 3) Symbol: A sign whose relationship with the object is based on social conventions, rules, or collective agreements. Symbolic meaning is arbitrary and highly dependent on shared cultural knowledge within a community.

b. Yuri Lotman's Semiosphere Theory

While Peirce focuses on the anatomy of the sign, Yuri Lotman (1990), through his Semiosphere theory, views culture as an organism or a structured semiotic space. The semiosphere is defined as the space where communication processes and the production of meaning can take place; outside the semiosphere, a sign loses its significance. There are two key concepts in Lotman's Semiosphere relevant to digital transformation, as follows: 1) Core and Periphery: Lotman explains that within a cultural space, there is a "Core" containing the most stable and institutionalized cultural texts, and a "Periphery" that is more dynamic, fluid, and open to external influences. Cultural transformation often involves the movement of texts from the core to the periphery, or vice versa. 2) Boundary: A boundary is not merely a dividing line, but a highly creative zone. Boundaries function as both a filter and a translator for foreign texts entering that semiosphere. It is within this boundary zone that the process of recontextualization occurs, where traditional cultural texts are translated into the language of new media so they can be understood within a different historical context.

c. Theoretical Synthesis in Cultural Recontextualization

The integration of these two theories yields a comprehensive framework. Peirce provides tools to identify the types of signs (iconic, indexical, or symbolic) used in a digital cultural narrative, while Lotman offers a perspective for understanding how digital space acts as a "boundary" that translates these signs from the center of tradition to a global audience.

Conceptually, cultural recontextualization is viewed as a process of semiosis in which traditional cultural representamen are reinterpreted within the digital semiosphere. This process not only preserves the original meaning but also opens the possibility of a "semiotic explosion"—a condition in which the encounter between tradition and technology generates new layers of meaning that enrich the vitality of that culture amidst the currents of modernity.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design, focusing on the exploration of the recontextualization of Betawi culture within digital spaces. The primary method applied is netnography, an ethnographic research procedure specifically adapted to examine the dynamics of interactions and content within online communities. The use of netnography enables the researcher to view videos not merely as static texts, but as part of a living cultural circulation on the YouTube platform. Through this method, the researcher observes how performative oral traditions transform into digital texts that can be accessed and reinterpreted globally.

The primary data source in this study was obtained through purposive sampling of video uploads on YouTube channels featuring the works of Tadjuddin Nur. The research corpus is classified into three main categories representing variations of language registers: the urban lingua franca narrative in the video “Bahasa Betawi Jantung Bahasa Indonesia Urban,” traditional performance in the documentation “Wayang Betawi,” and linguistic etiquette in the content “Ngomong Betawi Ngomong Sopan.” Supporting secondary data were gathered through literature review related to Betawi language typology, as well as observations of audience interactions in the comment section, which function as interpretants in the process of digital semiosis.

Data collection techniques were conducted through digital observation and multimodal documentation of the selected corpus. The researcher transcribed verbal data, including the use of pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and emphatic particles, while also identifying non-verbal data such as gestures, costumes, and visual symbols appearing in the videos. After the data were collected, the analysis process was carried out systematically based on integrative semiotic theory. The stages of analysis began with multimodal analysis to examine the interrelation among sensory elements, followed by the classification of signs based on Peirce’s perspective (Icon, Index, Symbol), and concluded with Lotman’s semiosphere analysis to investigate how the “boundary” mechanisms of digital media translate traditional values into modern contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Classification of Linguistic Data in the Works of Tadjuddin Nur

Based on observations of Tadjuddin Nur’s digital corpus, the linguistic data are categorized into three main registers representing Betawi sociolinguistic variations. The following is a tabulation of the data used as the object of semiotic analysis:

Table 1. Comparison of Betawi Vocabulary Registers in Digital Media

Category	Urban Betawi Language (Informal)	Betawi (Performative)	Wayang	Speaking Betawi (Polite)
Pronouns / Forms of Address	Gue, Lu, Ane, Ente, Nyokap, Bokap, Bro	Bang, Mpok, Babe, Tuan, Juragan	Enyak,	Saya/Aye, Bapak, Ibu, Saudara, Beliau, Nyonya
Verbs	Doyan, Pengen, Mager, Cabut, Nongkrong, Ngaret	Ngomong, Nyuruh, Ngelawan, Ngumpet, Sikat	Ngejar,	Mohon, Minta tolong, Silakan, Menunggu, Memberikan
Adjectives	Gile, Keren, Ribet, Bete, Pede, Lebay	Gagah, Sakti, Loyo, Berabe	Bonyok, Kuat,	Baik, Ramah, Halus, Santun, Bijak, Cepat
Particles & Adverbs	Nih, Tuh, Dong, Lah, Emang, Aje	Kagak, Udah, Ngilang, Saban	Nongol,	Ya, Lah, Deh, Sih, Maaf, Terima kasih, Permisi

Source: Processed by the Author, 2026

The table above illustrates how Tadjuddin Nur’s digital corpus reflects three distinct Betawi linguistic registers, each serving different social and communicative functions. Urban Betawi demonstrates casual, informal interactions, Betawi Wayang represents performative and cultural expressions, while Speaking Betawi reflects polite and respectful communication. This classification highlights the sociolinguistic richness of Betawi language and its adaptability across contexts.

3.2 Micro Analysis: Peirce’s Triadic Semiosis in Betawi Language Varieties

Referring to Table 1, the use of pronouns such as *gue*, *lu*, *ane*, and *ente* in the urban register functions as a strong Index of the speaker’s social identity. From the triadic perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce, these signs refer to the cultural object of Jakarta society, which is egalitarian and dynamic. In contrast, the emergence of the “Ngomong Sopan” register with diction such as *saya/aye* and *saudara* represents a form of resemantization of signs to project an image of Betawi society as highly mannered and polite. This semiosis process is further reinforced multimodally through Tadjuddin Nur’s calmer body gestures and softer speech intonation in the videos, allowing the audience (Interpretant) to perceive a broad and structured spectrum of Betawi ethics.

The use of verbs and adjectives in the research data also demonstrates Iconic and Symbolic characteristics. Urban verbs such as *mager* and *cabut* act as icons of fast-paced metropolitan realities. However, in the documentation of *Wayang Betawi*, heroic vocabulary such as *sakti*, *gagah*, and *jagoan* appears. Semiotically, these lexical choices function as

symbols referring to the cultural object of the “Jawara.” Through digital media, these signs are transformed into audio-visual representations that construct the audience’s collective memory of local cultural resilience amid modernity.

3.3 Macro Analysis: Circulation of Meaning and the Boundaries of the Digital Semiosphere (Lotman’s Perspective)

Within Yuri Lotman’s semiosphere framework, the transformation of Betawi language onto the YouTube platform represents a process of cultural translation within the Boundary zone. Data on emphatic particles such as *dong*, *deh*, *sih*, *lah*, as well as situational expressions like *nongol* and *saban*, illustrate how language functions to maintain the stability of the Betawi semiosphere in digital space. These particles act as filters that ensure that, despite the shift of communication into an impersonal digital screen, the distinctive sense of intimacy characteristic of oral communities is preserved.

Tadjuddin Nur utilizes digital media as a creative space to bring together the stable “Core” of tradition (such as the Wayang and Polite registers) with the fluid “Periphery” of modern culture (urban slang). The prominence of the “Ngomong Sopan” register in digital media represents an effort to shift the position of Betawi language from one often perceived as “rough” at the margins of the semiosphere toward the center of civilized Indonesian language discourse. In this context, digital media functions not merely as a distribution channel but as a catalyst for a “semiotic explosion,” where traditional Betawi values find new contexts of relevance for digital-generation audiences.

3.4 Discussion

The classification of linguistic data in Tadjuddin Nur’s works demonstrates that Betawi language is not a homogeneous system, but a dynamic sociolinguistic repertoire that shifts according to context, function, and audience. The three identified registers—Urban Betawi, Betawi Wayang, and Speaking Betawi—reflect different layers of social interaction, ranging from informal daily communication to performative cultural expression and polite discourse. This variation confirms that language in digital media is not merely used for communication, but also serves as a marker of identity and social positioning. In this sense, Tadjuddin Nur’s digital corpus becomes a rich site for observing how linguistic choices construct meaning within contemporary Betawi society.

From a micro-semiotic perspective, the use of pronouns such as *gue*, *lu*, *ane*, and *ente* functions indexically, pointing to the speaker’s social identity and the egalitarian nature of urban Betawi culture. These linguistic signs are not neutral; rather, they carry sociocultural meanings that are immediately recognized by the audience. In contrast, the use of more formal expressions such as *saya* and *saudara* reflects a conscious shift in register, signaling politeness and social distance. This shift illustrates Peirce’s concept of semiosis, where meaning is continuously produced through the interaction between sign, object, and interpretant, especially when reinforced by multimodal elements such as tone, gesture, and visual presentation in digital content.

Furthermore, the lexical choices found in verbs and adjectives highlight the interplay between iconic and symbolic signs. Urban expressions like *mager* and *cabut* iconically represent the fast-paced and flexible lifestyle of metropolitan society, while performative terms such as *gagah*, *sakti*, and *jagoan* symbolically evoke the cultural figure of the Betawi *jawara*. These symbolic constructions are not only linguistic but also cultural, as they contribute to shaping collective memory and reinforcing traditional values. Through digital representation, these signs are recontextualized into audiovisual forms, allowing audiences to engage with cultural meanings in a more immersive and accessible way.

At the macro level, the transformation of Betawi language into digital platforms can be understood through Lotman’s concept of the semiosphere, particularly in the boundary zone where cultural translation occurs. Linguistic elements such as particles (*dong*, *deh*, *sih*, *lah*) function as markers of intimacy and cultural continuity, even within the impersonal environment of digital media. These elements help maintain the emotional and social nuances of oral tradition, ensuring that the essence of Betawi communicative style is not lost in the process of digitization. Thus, language operates as a stabilizing force within the evolving digital semiosphere.

Finally, Tadjuddin Nur’s work illustrates how digital media can act as a space for negotiating cultural identity by integrating traditional and modern elements. The coexistence of formal, performative, and informal registers reflects a strategic effort to reposition Betawi language within a broader cultural discourse. Rather than being marginalized, Betawi is reintroduced as a flexible and adaptive linguistic system capable of engaging with contemporary audiences. In this context, digital platforms do not simply disseminate culture, but actively participate in reshaping and revitalizing it, enabling Betawi identity to remain relevant in the face of globalization.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the recontextualization of Betawi culture carried out by Tadjuddin Nur through digital platforms represents a complex and adaptive semiotic strategy. Through micro-level analysis based on the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, it is found that the use of various Betawi language registers—from urban to polite—functions as an effective triadic sign system. Informal pronouns and verbs act as Indices of egalitarian urban identity, while heroic vocabulary in *Wayang Betawi* and refined diction in the “Ngomong Sopan” register function as Symbols of local wisdom capable of deconstructing negative stereotypes associated with Betawi culture. The multimodality of digital media further strengthens this semiosis process, transforming oral texts that were once ephemeral into collective memory that can be permanently accessed.

At the macro level, from the perspective of Yuri Lotman’s semiosphere, this transformation demonstrates that digital media functions as a creative “boundary” that enables cultural translation. Tadjuddin Nur successfully brings elements of tradition from the “core” of the Betawi semiosphere to the “periphery” of dynamic modern culture. The integration of urban slang with traditional linguistic ethics creates a “semiotic explosion” that revitalizes the vitality of the Betawi language as the heart of urban Indonesian. Therefore, digitalization is not merely about transferring content, but about expanding the living space of Betawi culture so that it remains relevant, inclusive, and highly competitive amid the flow of global information.

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