

Family Communication Orientation In The Shift Of Urban Wedding Traditions: An Analysis Of Message Accommodation In Intimate Weddings In Medan City

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ABSTRACT

The shift in wedding concepts from large-scale communal parties to intimate weddings triggers distinct discourse dynamics within urban family communication. This study aims to dissect the intergenerational communication asymmetry between young couples (Millennials/Gen Z) and parents through the lenses of Family Communication Patterns Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study method, primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with eight wedding organizer practitioners in Medan City during the 2012–2024 operational period. The results show that proposing the intimate wedding concept tests the relationship between conversation orientation and conformity orientation within the family. To bridge cultural tensions and parents' face management needs, young couples and wedding organizers implement message accommodation tactics through convergent linguistic reframing and spatial-temporal structural compromises in a hybrid model. This study formulates the concept of Negotiated Ritual Modernity, wherein modernity does not eliminate collective traditions but rather reconstructs them spatially and temporally through a professional communication mediation process.

Keywords: *Communication Accommodation, Family Communication Patterns, Intimate Wedding, Negotiated Ritual Modernity.*

INTRODUCTION

Weddings in Indonesia's collectivistic culture, particularly in multi-ethnic urban areas like Medan City, are traditionally constructed as a meeting space for communal and customary social networks. This process is not merely the personal domain of two individuals, but rather an instrument for asserting clan dignity, family social status, and preserving strong traditional kinship structures (such as the *Dalihan Na Tolu* principle in the Toba Batak ethnic group). However, post-COVID-19 social and economic dynamics have driven the penetration of the intimate wedding trend among the urban youth, fundamentally challenging these established ritual communication norms. From a Communication Science perspective, the interest of Millennials and Generation Z in intimate weddings is a manifestation of adopting message patterns that are low-context, individualistic, and oriented toward future economic rationality. The younger generation views marriage as experience-

oriented—a sacred, meaningful, and private emotional experience. Conversely, the parent generation positions large-scale receptions as a form of social face management, fulfillment of customary obligations, and a mechanism for paying off "social debts" accrued from past relationships. These contrasting values trigger intergenerational communication asymmetry within the family institution. Previous studies on intimate weddings typically placed this subject solely within the domains of business management, creative industries, or popular lifestyle trends. On the other hand, family communication research is often limited to discussions around parenting or domestic conflicts. This research fills that gap by focusing on the dynamics of verbal and non-verbal message accommodation and the shift in family communication orientation when facing clashes over the concept of wedding ritual sacredness. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of the concept of Negotiated Ritual Modernity, which dissects how third-party agency—namely the Wedding Organizer (WO)—acts beyond its technical functions to become a cultural mediator bridging these inter-value communication barriers.

Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCPT)

The Family Communication Patterns Theory by Koerner and Fitzpatrick (Schrodt, 2023) explains how family members build a shared social reality through interaction. FCPT rests on two orientations: conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Families with high conformity orientation demand uniformity of attitudes, obedience to parental decisions, and absolute respect for communal norms. Meanwhile, high conversation orientation provides freedom for children to discuss issues openly without age-hierarchy barriers. This study examines the dynamic transition between these two orientations when tested by the proposal of an intimate wedding concept.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) by Howard Giles (Galvin et al., 2024) examines how communicators adjust their verbal and non-verbal behaviors to manage social and emotional distance. Convergence tactics occur when individuals align their language style and communication symbols to match their conversational partner to minimize conflict resistance. In the context of this research, CAT is used to dissect how young couples reformulate messages so that the intimate wedding concept can be negotiated with the parent generation without triggering defensiveness.

Face Management (Face-Negotiation Theory) in Collective Culture

According to Stella Ting-Toomey (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2023), social reputation or "face" is a crucial cultural commodity in collectivistic societies. Parents experience high levels of anxiety regarding the "loss of face" in the public eye if they are unable to host a large-scale reception. A large party is viewed as an instrument of maintaining dignity (*other-face concern*), meaning that proposing an intimate wedding triggers an intensive need for face negotiation.

METHOD

This qualitative research adopts a descriptive case study method to dissect the complexities of intergenerational interaction and message negotiation processes. The research focus is set in Medan City with data collection spanning May–June 2026, targeting a heterogeneous urban area that still holds fast to communal kinship cultural identities.

Research Informants: Informants were determined through a purposive sampling method, involving eight professional practitioners from leading wedding organizers in Medan City who have a track record of handling the dynamics of intergenerational wedding concept mediation:

- **Efye Wedding & Event Organizer** (Yukhi Septiyanti, operating since 2013)
- **HOME Event Planner** (M. Akim Danish Atmajaya, operating since 2019)
- **Simar Organizer** (Ammar Syams, operating since 2020)
- **Dermagaproject.id** (Ridho Alfiansyah, operating since 2022)
- **Dyastarra – Weddingeventplanner** (Zulfan Arrahmah, operating since 2023)
- **Mr. Qosim Organizergrup** (Muhammad Rizki, operating since 2023)
- **A Class Organizer** (Naufal Pratama, operating since 2024)
- **The Signature Event Planner** (Syawilda Febriani Bey, operating since 2012)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Clash of Conversation vs. Conformity Orientations

Field findings indicate that the discourse on utilizing the intimate wedding concept triggers a shift in family communication orientation from a protective/absolute conformity model to a consensual/open conversation model. The young couple generation (Millennials/Gen Z) produces arguments based on individualistic-rational values, positioning future financial efficiency as a new form of household responsibility. As stated by Ammar (Simar Organizer) and Naufal (A Class Organizer), young couples choose to save on celebration expenses for the sake of domestic investments (such as home down payments or honeymoon funds). They push for the birth of a free conversation orientation to build relational intimacy with selected guests. This is reinforced by Yukhi (Efye Wedding) and Zulfan (Dyastarra), who noted the couples' desire to avoid physical formality fatigue in order to deeply experience the sacredness of the moment. On the other hand, the parent generation consistently maintains the dominance of conformity orientation, which demands the preservation of the family's communal dignity. Ridho (Dermagaproject) and Rizki (Mr. Qosim Organizer) explain that parents perceive massive-scale receptions as a symbol of the family's sociological success and a form of social face management against negative stigma from the surrounding community. In the socio-cultural reality of Medan City, especially within the Toba Batak culture, this demand for conformity is manifested through the absolute obligation to present a complete traditional kinship structure (*Dalihan Na Tolu*). Parents carry a cultural burden of responsibility to pay back "social debts" for the previous events of colleagues (Yukhi from Efye Wedding) alongside the urge to secure material capital through giving traditions (Zulfan from Dyastarra).

Linguistic Reframing as a Message Convergence Tactic

Facing the parents' high conformity orientation, young couples are forced to implement communication accommodation tactics through language convergence so that their alternative message is not viewed as undermining the authority of tradition. This step is carried out through linguistic reframing mechanisms (repackaging message terms). Akim (HOME Event Planner) illustrated that using words with restrictive-modernist connotations like "small-scale party" or "minimalist wedding" immediately triggers resistance and verbal rejection from parents. Instead, the language code is changed (converged) to dictions with a sacred-communal nuance, such as "a warmer, more solemn, and blessed immediate family event," to validate the parents' emotional position. Supporting verbal strategies are also applied by Naufal (A Class Organizer) by adopting close cultural greetings (such as calling the client's parents "Mama" or "Ayah") and inserting polite words (Please, Sorry, Thank You) to break down intergenerational defensive barriers.

Spatial-Temporal Compromise: The Construction of Hybrid Rituals

When verbal negotiations reach an initial consensus, message accommodation is realized in the form of ritual structural engineering, classified as Spatial-Temporal Compromise. The most dominant solution emerging in Medan City is the Hybrid Wedding model. Informants Syawilda (The Signature), Ridho (Dermagaproject), and Ammar (Simar Organizer) described a rigid event session partitioning pattern. The first spatial-temporal dimension is allocated to facilitate the young couple's needs: the solemnization (*akad nikah*) or blessing ceremony is conceptualized as private, limited, and intimate. Subsequently, in a separate space and time (the next session or a different day), a broad-scale general reception or traditional communal ceremony is held to accommodate social obligations and the assertion of the parents' social face. Technological accommodation is also used as a form of modern compromise; the integration of premium live streaming systems (Akim from HOME) and limiting the speech duration of traditional leaders through persuasive timekeeper management (Naufal from A Class) are utilized to maintain ritual harmony without violating ancestral etiquette.

Wedding Organizers as Professional Communication Mediators

The primary theoretical contribution of this research is the repositioning of the WO's role from a mere technical logistics executor to a third-party mediation agent that intervenes in family communication breakdowns. As emphasized by Ammar (Simar Organizer), WOs operate simultaneously at three levels: technical, relationship mediator, and cultural negotiator. WOs act to cut the chain of intergenerational emotional conflict by rationalizing messages. The subjective aspects of both parties are redirected by the WO into objective-rational arguments through the presentation of concrete visualizations (mood boards), venue capacity compliance, transparent cost-per-head calculations, and event timeline efficiency (Syawilda from The Signature; Naufal from A Class). With this neutral position, the WO is able to translate the child's modern vision into a respectful customary language framework for the parents.

CONCEPTUAL FORMULATION: NEGOTIATED RITUAL MODERNITY

As a theoretical development distinguishing this study from previous research, this article formulates the concept of **Negotiated Ritual Modernity**. This concept defines the phenomenon of intimate weddings in urban-collectivistic societies not as a form of radical cultural disruption that leads to fragmentation or the total erasure of local customary values. Instead, ritual modernity operates in an evolutionary and dialogic manner. Through professional communication mediation, traditional symbolic webs are not discarded but undergo a process of structural compression and spatial-temporal segmentation. Essential elements of custom are maintained but executed with the efficiency of modern logic, proving that the flexibility of urban collective culture is capable of adopting global changes without losing its cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the intimate wedding trend in Medan City triggers a clash of family communication orientations, where the rational-economic conversation orientation of the younger generation collides with the high conformity orientation for the preservation of social face from the parent generation. Conflict resolution is achieved not through confrontation, but through message accommodation tactics in the form of linguistic reframing and hybrid spatial-temporal compromises. Wedding organizers play a vital role as professional communication mediators who transform emotional messages into rational arguments. The academic implications of this research enrich the study of urban family communication; it is recommended for future researchers to use a quantitative survey approach to measure the level of parental acceptance of this negotiated ritual modernity model on a broader population scale.

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