

## Let's talk in coffee shop: 'maota di lapau' culture and declining trend

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**Abstract** In West Sumatra, the Minangkabau community has a tradition known as *Maota di Lapau* (abbreviated as M.d.L), which involves conversational gatherings in coffee shops. However, this tradition is now eroding and being abandoned. The decline in the prestige of M.d.L has reduced the intensity of sharing thoughts and experiences, as well as creative and critical thinking. Furthermore, it has diminished the quality of social interaction and weakened the community's ability to unify its social potential to solve collective problems. This inductive research sought to provide a comprehensive explanation for why M.d.L is becoming less popular and declining in intensity, and to explore its implications for social capital, creativity, and the community's capacity for collaboration, particularly in the economic sphere. The study was conducted in four villages in West Sumatra using a qualitative method and a dual approach (case study and phenomenology). Analysis of the findings revealed that the primary cause is the discontinued use of the traditional communication protocol, *Kato Nan Ampek*, in daily conversation.

**Keywords:** coffee shop; communication; job opportunity; social capital

### INTRODUCTION

*Maota di lapau* is Lapau according to the Minangkabau language means stalls or canteens that are used by the community as a means of buying and selling (Ayu & Hasmira, 2020), Maota activities at Lapau are communication and socialisation activities for Minangkabau men. Anyone can participate in these activities regardless of age or profession (Warahmat, 2024) a habit of Minangkabau men (Effendi, 2014) in West Sumatra province, Indonesia. *Maota* means talking to each other or chatting, *lapau* means stall - usually a coffee shop. *Maota di lapau* (hereinafter abbreviated as M.d.L) is synonymous with the concept of coffee shop conversation. M.d.L activities are usually carried out in the morning from 06.00 to 08.00 or in the evening until the evening from 07.00 to 10.00 pm or later (Mardoni, 2017). This temporal division demonstrates a general regularity, although its application is not uniform across the entire region of West Sumatra.

Morning session of M.d.L commonly occurs after the congregational Fajr prayer, whereas the afternoon and evening sessions are linked to post-Maghrib (Sunset) prayer conversations held in the mosque or *surau* (tiny mosque). In some areas, it can start earlier and end later. M.d.L's association with prayer stems from a cultural perception that the time after Fajr and Maghrib prayers is socially designated for gathering, chatting, and sharing narratives. For Minangkabau people, M.d.L has important social and cultural meanings.

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With this M.d.L, they learn democracy, learn to respect freedom of expression, learn to debate, learn to express their thoughts, and learn to solve problems. M.d.L's atmosphere is not always harmonious but also conflictual, accompanied by debate and competition for a position as a person who is considered great among his fellow *palapau* (people who like making conversation in *lapau*). (Chatra, 2018), M.d.L is an activity that anyone in the lapau room can hear, so it does not become a secret conversation. As an open activity, there are no rules that prohibit people from continuing the issues discussed in a *maota* activity to other public spaces (*lapau*) or closed communication spaces.

Building up on this, the public sphere creating social visibility and facilitating the formation of public opinion, on the one hand, provides a foundation of knowledge about the shared social world, and, on the other, serves as a key driver of social change through critical self-reflection (Trenz, 2024). The communication activities in the lapau qualify it as a public space, albeit one that differs significantly from Habermas's concept. While Habermas (1974) defines the public sphere as a distinctively European phenomenon mediating between the state and capitalist interests, the lapau of the Minangkabau emerges from a separate, indigenous historical trajectory. It does not function as a bridge between the government and the economic elite. Furthermore, as (Tampubolon, 2018) notes, the lapau constitutes an imperfect public space, as it is predominantly dominated by men.

In his thesis on coffee shops, Pozos-Brewer (2015) does not consider coffee shops to be public spaces, but rather to be between the dichotomy between public and private spaces. This space is called the third place. That's why sometimes conversations in coffee shops tend to graze into private issues. The roles of coffee shops in five cities in England are explored in order to consider how they can be understood not only as spaces of consumption, but spaces which facilitate connection in increasingly isolated urban lives and generate the potential for communities to develop. By understanding the varied ways in which businesses and consumers co-create these spaces, it may be possible to increase their potential as 'spaces of community'(Ferreira et al., 2021).

The public nature of this space exerts social pressure, ensuring that discourse remains focused on public issues and avoids delving into private ones. This norm is deeply aligned with the Minangkabau cultural principle of *babiliak gadang babiliak ketek* (public space and private space), which clearly demarcates the boundaries between what is appropriate for public discussion and what is to be kept private. Consequently, discussing private matters in a public arena is considered culturally inappropriate and out of sync with these values. Private issues, such as husband-wife or *mamak-kamanakan* (uncle, -son-in-law) relationships should be discussed in *biliak ketek* (private space), not in *biliak gadang* (public space). Therefore, one of the important norms of activity is not to talk about people's private affairs and prioritise public affairs. Contextual meaning and individually generated meaning explain the nature and structure of public conversation and the potential for public relations practitioners to play a more active and positive role in realising open dialogue (Capizzo, 2018).

Coffee shops play an important role in fostering inclusive public spaces, stimulating cultural exchange, and promoting economic growth (Noaime et al., 2025). The M.d.L's focus on public affairs fosters a heightened awareness of issues impacting the common good. This encompasses a wide range of topics, from local politics—such as the elections of jorong and nagari heads—to national matters like the presidential election. This culture of discussing the common good cultivates a keen sensitivity within the *lapau* patrons to their surrounding neighbourhood. Without a deep understanding of these issues, an individual cannot be an active participant in the *maota*; they risk being perceived merely as a quiet listener, which can also be interpreted as a lack of intelligence.

The tradition of M.d.L, particularly in the rural areas of West Sumatra that are undergoing urbanisation, is now on the verge of extinction. Based on observation, this activity is no longer considered a social obligation for men, as it once was in the Minangkabau community. It can be hypothesised that the decline in M.d.L activity is linked to a reduced sensitivity to neighbourhood conditions, a decrease in social capital, and diminished participation in *nagari* community affairs, including local politics.

Cultural communication activities hold the potential to strengthen social relations and facilitate the exchange of messages and ideas among citizens. Such an exchange of ideas is

essential for building mutual understanding and fostering various commitments that encourage cooperation within the community.

Social communication has several functions, according to scholars, for example, it has at least implies that communication helps each individual in forming self-concept, self-actualisation, for survival, to obtain happiness, avoid pressure and tension and foster relationships with others (Floyd, 2010)(Floyd, 2024), (Wood, 2020), (Deddy Mulyana, 2005) (Deddy, 2001), (D. Mulyana, 2004). The principle is how communication can help individuals work together with community members to achieve common goals.

In such an understanding, implicitly the function of social communication is the function of cultural communication. Social scientists recognise that culture and communication have a reciprocal relationship. Culture becomes part of communication behaviour and in turn communication also determines, maintains, develops or inherits culture. Hall (D. Mulyana, 2004) states that 'culture is communication' and communication is culture. This is very appropriate when viewed from the point of view of the interpretive paradigm in viewing the object of communication studies.

Communication science pays attention to the interactions that occur between humans in creating meaning through symbols. As stated by Clifford Geertz, culture is a learned behaviour and mental phenomenon. Medium communication is a tool for learning and mental realisation in the form of symbols (Purwasito, 2003).

On the other hand, communication is a mechanism for disseminating the cultural norms of society, either horizontally, from one society to another, or vertically, from one generation to the next. Likewise, culture establishes norms (communication) that are considered appropriate for a particular group, which according to (D. Mulyana, 2004) is called a 'time binder' referring to the ability of humans to pass knowledge from generation to generation.

Williams (1960) of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, England defines culture as including the organisation of production, family structure, institutional structure that expresses or regulates social relations, forms of communication typical of members of society. Psychological communication is an interaction aimed at conveying something in a way that is more easily understood by the mind (Amin, 2022). Meanwhile, according to (Geertz, 1973), culture occurs through the traces of meaning left by individuals when communicating as a form of social interaction. Social interaction runs because of social communication, namely the exchange of messages in the association between individuals, individuals with groups and groups with groups to achieve certain degrees of goals.

Communication is always embedded in it a belief system, value system and social norms that develop in society as a manifestation of the results of material culture. While the immaterial cultural products can be in the form of work tools, transportation, household appliances, and housing or settlements. For this reason, communication is an interactional activity, which according to Samovar and Porter (Purwasito, 2003) has several characteristics, one of which is that communication always takes place in a physical context and a social context. The context of the physical environment often coexists with the context of the social environment. Both are mutually supportive and decisive in the act of communication. The context or physical environment, however, comes from the local culture which contributes greatly and determines the norms, values for the behaviour of communication participants, namely how social relations should and should not be carried out. This physical environment can be in the form of a home territory, public territory or informal territory that allows communication to take place specifically. This physical environment can include certain physical objects such as windows, the beach, rooms, including housing/settlement models.

Interactional approaches relate to ways of understanding, meaning, norms, roles and rules work interactively in communication. In this thinking, it is understood that people communicate to interpret events and share those interpretations with others, and reality is socially constructed (social construction of reality) through communication. Social construction theory in communication has several basic assumptions as summarised by (Penman, 2000) that: a) Communicative action is voluntary, where the communicator is seen as a decision maker, and he has free choice. b) Knowledge is a social product. Knowledge is not something that is found objectively but is derived from interactions within social groups through acts of communication between individuals or groups. c) Knowledge is contextual. A person's understanding of events

is always a product of interaction at a certain place and time, in a certain social environment. A person's understanding will change over time.

From the several studies above, and in relation to the topic of this research, it can be understood that social communication takes place in the context or physical environment where a person lives which gives birth to a certain understanding of culture and knowledge. Furthermore, a person's knowledge or understanding of certain events, including one of them, is about how they interpret the interactions and communications that take place in the community, especially in M.d.L activities, which are a form of social communication in Minangkabau culture.

The Minangkabau community in rural communities using *lapau* as one of the contexts has been studied by Errington (1984). Through this place, all forms of behaviour and various expressions ranging from spontaneous to very careful. Errington's position as a researcher is present without having to disrupt the social rhythms that take place in the *lapau*. All manifestations of behaviour, speech, and social dynamics that can be found and seen in the *lapau* are considered as representations of the cultural world of the community in the local context.

The study of M.d.L is a study that can be carried out using various perspectives such as group communication, communication culture, contestation of local culture versus global culture, social change, and local politics. The collection of various perspectives will produce a comprehensive picture of the M.d.L tradition in Minangkabau. However, in this study, we prioritize aspects of communication, more specifically, communication in the context of culture, social capital, and community economic opportunities.

According to Chatra (2018), the M.d.L tradition in Minangkabau is actually a communication tradition that can maintain sensitivity to the social and political environment. M.d.L is also like an informal school that provides a variety of knowledge to the community, especially men, although not all this knowledge has been verified. On the other hand, tradition sets the stage for a number of men to gain political legitimacy at the *orong* (Small neighbourhood Community) and even *nagari* levels.

In his research report, Effendi (2014) explains that M.d.L among the people of Padang City, which can be an instrument to reduce conflict in the 2013 regional head election (*pilkada*). The facts revealed by Effendi (2014) in outline are similar to those written by Brown A. R. (2012) in his dissertation about coffee shops at the University of Michigan. Brown's conclusion is that coffee shops have a role that cannot be ignored in the political process.

Meanwhile, research by Pozos-Brewer (2015) in New York revealed that the role of coffee shops is not just for drinking, not just for political purposes, but for multipurpose. The coffee shop is more of a socialisation tool for urban men and women; in coffee shops, they can go on dates, interview people, relax with friends, use the internet, read books, write papers, have lunch, use the bathroom, meet new friends, etc. In addition, coffee shops also function as a place to spread gossip about alliance organisations among overseas Chinese (Pozos-Brewer, 2015).

For a cultural communication perspective, this research can refer to the article by Nelson, T. and Coxhead (1997), which discusses increasing the achievement of cultural change through effective internal communication. Other articles include Bennett, W. L., & Pfetsch, (2018), entitled *Rethinking Political Communication in a Time of Disrupted Public Spheres and Grossberg (1979), Interpreting the "Crisis" of Culture in Communication Theory.*

In Sari, P. L., Zetra, A., & Valentina (2021) research regarding *Lapau* as a public space, it can be a reference for analysts about the influence of mass media and social media on the dynamics of M.d.L especially on local political discourses. The influx of mass media, especially television and social media into the *lapau* environment, encourages changes in M.d.L themes from being limited to local environmental issues to being broader. However, Bennett, W. L., & Pfetsch (2018), do not draw their analysis to the cultural changes that occur as a result of media intervention.

On the other hand, Nelson, T. and Coxhead (1997) do not pay much attention to external factors in cultural change. Cultural characteristics such as lack of patience, scepticism, openness, control, rigidity or flexibility form a mental model. To initiate cultural change, according to Nelson, T. and Coxhead (1997) it is necessary to first understand the power of mental models. By emphasising the mental model, internal factors are considered more important in driving the movement of cultural change than external factors such as the media. The media may provide

input into the M.d.L. but mental models ultimately determine whether there will be a cultural change. In this study, internal factors, such as mental models, are emphasised more than the influence of the media, although the influence of the media cannot be ruled out. At least the presence of the media in the *lapau* will create a new atmosphere that can influence the topics of conversation.

Theoretically, social capital is the ability of individuals to manage scarce resources based on their membership in a wider social network or structure. Expertise in using social capital can provide many opportunities. When the founders of the social relationship network have mutual trust, one party can provide capital to the other party. Network of religious, socio-cultural and political relations in wandering In Pierre Bourdieu's scheme, internal social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) describes the actual and potential resources possessed by a person who come from social networks so that they are institutionalised and ongoing in the form of mutual recognition and introduction (or in other words; membership in a group) that benefits its members in various forms of collective support. While Putnam (2000) defines social capital as a value of mutual trust (trust) between community members.

Social capital is a social institution that involves networks, norms, and social trust that encourages social collaboration (coordination and corporations) for the common good. This also implies that there is a need for social networks or social ties and networks that exist in society and norms that encourage community productivity. In contrast to Bourdieu and Putnam, Coleman tends to simplify the notion of social capital by saying that social capital is not limited to those who are strong, but also has real benefits for the poor and marginalised communities (Kilpatrick, S. U. E., Field, J., & Falk, 2003). Coleman defines a single capital, but there are several types of entities that have two characteristics in common. Social capital consists of various aspects of a social structure that facilitate certain actions for individuals within it. Thus, it is distinct from personal forms of capital, such as cultural or political capital.

Coleman distinguishes the type of social capital from the aspect of relationships that are based on mutual trust and authority. These two aspects form the basis for forming family networks and social organisations. After Bourdieu put forward several types of capital other than economic capital, which were put forward in his work titled *The Forms of Capital* and coupled with Coleman's theory of social capital, which is also very close to economic activity. It is often perceived that the concept of capital refers to a limited economic reference, namely that there has been no attempt to consider the concept of capital from non-economic references, such as sociological references or social science references in general. Capital in non-economic reference has an important function in the production process. This is in line with the view of Putnam (2000) who argues that non-economic factors also determine the course of the production process and its final result. With this development, in turn, the concept of capital produces concepts regarding other forms of capital which are also considered in economic activities. This capital includes

This research is motivated by the reality that the challenges faced by the Minangkabau community amidst cultural changes are impacting trends in social capital, which is vital for collective self-sustaining activities. Conversely, the social capital possessed by the community also influences the trajectory of cultural change. M.d.L, as a form of social communication in the public sphere, is an important phenomenon to observe for its role as an indicator of the quality of social interactions, the depth of social intimacy, and the dynamics of social capital. Based on the above, the central research question is: a) why is the popularity of M.d.L. decreasing, and b) what are the implications for social life?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employs a qualitative methodology, guided by a constructivist paradigm and a dual approach combining phenomenology and case study. The constructivist paradigm primarily emphasises interpretation, meaning-making practices, and the role of social structures such as norms and identity (Bertucci, M.E.; Hayes, J.; James, 2018). Qualitative research is a method for investigating the meaning individuals ascribe to their lives within real-world contexts, capturing diverse societal views and perspectives (Yin, 2011). This methodological choice provides the researcher with the necessary scope to describe and interpret the reality of M.d.L. as it evolves historically.

The phenomenological approach addresses the issue of perspective, highlighting the fluid and relative nature of truth. It involves obtaining a description of what appears before one's consciousness, rather than making claims about its objective existence (Sadala, M.L.A and Adorno, 2002). To achieve this, researchers must be fully open to experiencing the phenomenon as a whole (a Gestalt), unhindered by personal judgments. This requires setting aside all preconceived ideas, concepts, and biases—a process known as epoché. This allows the researcher to concentrate on describing the phenomenon to uncover its essence: the most fundamental and consistent aspects of the experience within its specific context. In short, the essence is the core nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

The case study approach is employed to answer the 'how' and 'why' questions surrounding the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). In this research context, it was used to understand how the M.d.L. phenomenon changed over time and what factors drove these changes.

Data was collected primarily through in-depth interviews. This was supplemented by a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and direct observation of daily life in the lapau to understand the typical activities of the *palapau* (a person/role, consider 'the *palapau*' or '*palapau* activities'). By applying multiple data collection techniques, the researcher gained a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding. All data from these sessions were transcribed and subsequently analysed using coding techniques (Miles, M.B., Huberman, A. M., Saldaña, 2014).

Secondary data was obtained from documentary sources, particularly news articles published in online and print media. To ensure validity, the research employed triangulation and reflexivity techniques. The research subjects (informants) consisted of community leaders, traditional elders, and local religious leaders from the research sites. Additional data was also gathered from *lapau* owners, who typically also manage their own establishments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### M.d.L and its changes

Until now, we have not found any historical records of lapau used for social gatherings and *maota* in West Sumatra. Dutch colonial writers may have taken notes, but that's just our guess. However, if it is related to the context of the market economy system, it is possible that *lapau* had just begun to become part of the life of the Minangkabau people in the mid-19th century (Dobbin, C, 1983).

Dobbin, C (1983) explained that initially the lapau was a small building intended for a Sufi congregation or *tarekat* (Naksyabandiyah, Syattariyah and Kadiriyah) *surau*, but the building was like a stall, not like a *surau* in general. After all, the small *surau* also sells bananas and other fruits. The building combines two congregational activities, namely economics and recitation. In the small *surau* or *lapau*, the students of the congregation organise learning activities as well as organise economic activities in the form of making handicrafts such as weaving. In their daily life, the students also help the *tarekat* teacher (*sheikh* or *sheikh*) in working on the fields, raising livestock and farming.

Dobbin's explanation makes sense because until now the Minangkabau people still associate the *surau* with the *lapau*. Research informants said that there are three places that are considered important in the life of the Minangkabau people, namely *surau*, *lapau* and *rantau*. *Surau* is a place to recite the Koran or get knowledge of religion, customs and self-defense (*silek*). While *lapau* is a place for discussion (*maulang kaji* or *maota*) as well as carrying out economic activities. *Rantau* or areas outside the nagari are places to deepen knowledge - especially religious knowledge - as well as expand the scale of economic activity.

The connection between the *lapau* and the *surau* then provides a moral-spiritual foundation for the congregation in carrying out economic activities, both in trade and agriculture. Thus, the ethical statement popular among Minangkabau traders that 'trade must be honest' did not arise from mere rational calculations, but also because of the Islamic teachings they received when studying at the *surau*. Research informants we met in Nagari Sikucua, Padang Pariaman, where the majority of the population adhered to the teachings of the Syattariyah order, said that being honest in trading was the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad SAW who also traded when he was young. These teachings are passed on by the *tarekat* teachers to their students. (Asyari, 2016) relates the value of honesty with the expression of the *Basandi Syarak Adat, Syarak Basandi ka Kitabullah* (ABS-SBK) - tradition founded upon Islamic law, and Islamic

law founded upon the Qur'an (the Minangkabau Pious and traditional way of life after Padri-Pagarruyung Massacre) which is a way of life for the Minangkabau people.

The very close relationship between the *surau* and the *lapau* encourages the emergence of social classifications, namely *palapau* (people who like to come to *lapau*) and *urang indak palapau* (people who don't like to come to *lapau*). *Palapau* are identified with followers of Sufi orders, while *urang indak palapau* are considered as people from outgroups who tend to be viewed negatively in the nagari whose fanaticism for the teachings of the tradition is quite high.

However, this classification is somewhat problematic. In Nagari III Koto Aua Malintang, the *urang indak palapau* are still considered less sociable, even though the strong influence of Sufi orders has been much reduced compared to Fifty years ago. Meanwhile, in Nagari Sikucua, it can be said that such negative perceptions no longer exist, even though the teachings of the *tarekat* still have a strong enough influence among its citizens compared to those in the previous *nagari*. This difference shows that the negative assessment of the *urang indak palapau* is not solely due to strong ties to the teachings of the *tarekat*, but for reasons other than that. We conclude that the more prominent reason is economic necessity. Another reason tends to be ideological (the contradiction between *tarekat* supporters versus anti-*tarekat* or modern schools) which has started since the 1930s but seems insignificant. The issue of economic needs behind the visit to the *lapau* will be described in the third part of this report.

### **Lapau and Coffee**

There are no research informants who can explain why coffee is a mandatory and favourite drink in *lapau* next to tea and *teh talua*. Although inadequate, historians' writings on the history of coffee seem to be quite clear. Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner (2011) explains that the history of drinking coffee began among the followers of the Sufi order in Yemen in the early 15th century. A record shows coffee was drunk in Aden in 1438 and became a drink in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in the late 15th century.

For the Sufis, coffee drinks are used in religious rituals (remembrance) as a deterrent to drowsiness. The activity of remembrance can last throughout the night; therefore drinking coffee is very important. But when drinking coffee spread beyond Yemen the drinkers were no longer just followers of the Sufi order, and drinking coffee was no longer closely associated with remembrance.

The author suspect that the habit of drinking coffee among followers of the Yemeni Sufi orders spread to Sufi circles in Minangkabau through the Naqshabandiyah tradition. The argument is that the Syattariyah order did not originate from Yemen. According to Aziz (2011) the sects that existed in Yemen in the 15th century were Qādriyah, Rifā'iyah, Shādhiliyah, Suhrawardiyah, Naqshabandiyah, Yāfi'iyah, 'Alawiyah and a little Ahmadiyah. Tariqa Syattariyah itself comes from India, developed by Syaik Abdullah al-Syattar (Fanani, 2012). It seems that the members of the Syattariyah followed the tradition of the Naqshabandiyah congregation of becoming coffee connoisseurs.

The Naqshabandiyah tradition began to develop in Minangkabau in 1850 (Albab, 2022) or when the Dutch colonial government under the governor general Jan Jacob Rochussen had just started a period of forced cultivation (*Cultuurstelsel*) in the Minangkabau region (1847). Cultivation, which had begun in Java since 1830, only took place in Minangkabau 17 years later because it was hindered by war. During the forced cultivation period, the coffee plant was a high-value export crop that could not be enjoyed by the community. People can only drink boiled water from the leaves, which is called *kawa* or *kawa daun* (Rusli, 2021). So where do people get coffee beans from?

Arabica coffee cultivation began in the Dutch East Indies in 1696. The beans were brought by the VOC from Madras, India, not from Yemen (Bremner, 2015) (Clarence-Smith W. G. & Topik, 2003). At that time, coffee had been cultivated by many Muslim Indian communities who returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca. They get coffee seeds from Arab lands. But (Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, 2011) has evidence that the coffee beans were smuggled by the VOC from Arab Felix (Yemen). Because coffee was grown in the Dutch East Indies, including western Sumatra, more than 100 years before forced cultivation was carried out, the Minangkabau people had planted coffee in forest areas that were not included in plantation areas controlled by the Dutch Thus (Rusli, 2021) , it made sense that when the Dutch forced

people to sell coffee for export, people in remote villages still had alternatives to get coffee beans. Secretly they can still enjoy drinks from coffee beans, not only *kawa daun*.

### **M.d.L and public space**

The allegation that *lapau* undergoes a spiritual transformation from a sacred building because it is identical with a *surau* to a purely profane building is a necessity. Traces of that change can be seen now. We did not find any *lapau* that still functions as a place for religious learning. *Lapau* is only a place to meet (generally) men, then they *maota* while drinking coffee or *teh talua*, smoking, eating fried foods, sticky rice, bubua samba (lontong), boiled noodles and other snacks. They also use *lapau* to play *koa*, domino or chess, some even make it a gambling arena. When fieldwork was carried out, we found *lapaus* used by young people to play online gambling, known as 'play chips'. Indeed, when we collected research data, it coincided with the rise of online gambling in rural West Sumatra.

The transformation from a sacred place to a fully profane place at the same time changing the power relations in the *lapau*; there is no longer a teacher (*sheikh*) who gives knowledge to the students in that place. *Lapau* has turned into an arena for free discussion, where people talk about whatever they want to convey to others. *Lapau* can be a place for discussion about what is hotly discussed at the national and even international level, starting from football tournaments, badminton matches, changing officials in strategic agencies, corruption, presidential candidates, political party behavior, etc. Usually, the discussion ends without a conclusion, ending with an agreement to play *koa* or dominoes or the discussion participants leave the *lapau* for a specific purpose. From time to time there may be debates but mature debaters can turn a heated debate into a joke or shift the focus of the conversation to a more cool topic.

Generally, *lapau* is a free arena that anyone can enter, free from certain political interests, even though there the men discuss political issues. But certain *lapaus* in Nagari Situjuah Batua, Limapuluh Kota Regency, are considered 'hots of opposition' for the *nagari* government. *Lapau* is a gathering place for critics of the *wali nagari* (head of *nagari*) and his apparatus, community leaders who have ambitions to become the next *wali nagari*, but there are also those who come just to understand the political map at the *nagari* level.

*Lapau* does have a number of public sphere characters, but it is not a public space as intended by Habermas, J.; Lennox, S.; Lennox (1974). Formally and in general, *lapaus* do not carry out the function of mediating between the people and the authorities or the state, but certain *lapaus* can perform such functions. There are no formal rules made by the *nagari* government in the form of *pernag* (*nagari* regulations) to regulate M.d.L. activities. In general, *lapaus* are not intended to produce public opinion which must be accommodated by the *nagari* rulers, even though the opinions of *palapau* which have a public dimension often appear in conversations.

The *wali nagari* in our research sites are all part of the M.d.L. because he often comes to the *lapau* and communicates with the *palapau*. The presence of the *wali nagari* is quite intensive, ranging from every night to once a week. Thus, the rulers were not absent from the conversations of the *palapau* which were very diverse in topics, even though the presence of the *wali nagari* was not a representation of the state but their personal representation as 'children of the *nagari*' who considered M.d.L. as part of the community's traditions. However, the content of the conversation in the *lapau* is quite capable of reflecting the relationship between the people and the authorities because it contains narratives that both support and criticize the performance of the *nagari* government. When we tested the informants consisting of community leaders whether it was true that the community's assumption that '*lapau* is a people's parliament', none of the informants said that this assumption was wrong. In other words, the discussion in *lapau* has an impact - though not always - on the management of the *nagari* government.

### **Essence of M.d.L**

To get the essence of M.d.L. We collected qualitative data in the form of experiences of the *palapau* in the four *nagari* where the research was located. The experience data was then analysed using a phenomenological approach. We use three phenomenological reductions proposed by Husserl (Moran, 2013), (Moustakas, 1994), namely epoch, eidetic and transcendental. We then used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to process and

interpret the data. With three reductions from Husserl, we were able to get the essence of the subject experience in M.d.L (Smith, J.A., Flowers, P., Larkin, 2009).

Phenomenological analysis of the experiences of individual *palapau* get the essence that *lapau* is a place for gathering, making friends, relaxing after work (relaxing), looking for job information, economic space, discussing, discussing nagari and political issues. Communication created from this essence is very warm and serious. The result is high solidarity (social capital) which has an impact on obtaining job opportunities. The analysis shows that the *lapau* is fully profane, apart from its initial function as a *surau*, which is a place to learn Islamic religious knowledge.

*Palapau* are generally adult men who are married. This tendency is related to the cultural division of labour in Minangkabau society which places men as dominant actors in the public sphere, and women as dominant actors in the private sphere. The essence of the outside: a place to play chips. The communication created from this essence is very banal and pragmatic for playing games and making money. The result remains solidarity but is mechanical.

### **Reflection of social capital on community economy**

Almost all the *lapaus* we visited in the four nagari where the research was located were used as places to obtain job information. Job information is not disseminated through posters or bulletin boards, but through face-to-face conversations between job seekers and employers. We quote the following short dialogue from the explanation of an interviewed *palapau*:

Employer: *Apo karajo bisuak? Lai sanggang?* (What are you working on tomorrow? Do you have free time?)

Job seeker: *Lai bana. Sadang ndak ado karajo bana kini.* (Yes. Right now, I'm out of work)

Employer: *Kalau baitu pai jo den bisuak.* (Then work for me tomorrow).

Both the seeker and the employer understand that the *lapau* is a place where they meet their interests. Job seekers need jobs to earn money, and employers need people who can be paid or invited to work together to do certain jobs such as hoeing rice fields, transporting crops, dredging residential land, carpentry, harvesting crops, repairing waterways, etc. Employers prefer to come to the *lapau* because they already know that job seekers will wait for opportunities at the *lapau* until midnight or until the *lapau* is closed. Job seekers also like the *lapau* because they already know that employers usually come to look for labor to the *lapau*, not to their home.

The habit of looking for workers and finding employers in the *lapau* causes freelancers who do not come to the farm to have difficulty in finding work. For those who are not used to coming to the *lapau*, the opportunity to get a job offer is narrower than for job seekers who regularly come to the *lapau*, even though when the employer comes to one *lapau*, the worker being sought is not in the *lapau*. Maybe he is in another *lapau*, at the mosque, at home or somewhere else.

In order to be met, the employer will call on a cell phone and ask the person they are looking for to meet him or her immediately. But direct contact is not always easy because not all freelancers have cell phones. Technical issues such as poor cellular networks can also create difficulties. In such conditions, assistance from other *palapau* to pick up the wanted person is very valuable. The ease of getting assistance is not the same from one village to another, it really depends on the character of mutual assistance among its citizens. In the *lapaus* in Kabupaten Padang Pariaman it was a little easier to get assistance than in the *lapaus* in Kabupaten Limapuluh Kota.

Meeting employers and job seekers in *lapau* is a social fact that appears every day in all the villages studied. This fact refutes the general assumption that *lapau* is only for drinking coffee, *teh talua*, chatting, joking, wasting time, playing dominoes or playing *koa*. *Lapau* also functions to directly drive the economy of the community, especially the economy of casual workers (laborers) and farmers who need interlude work when their rice or other crops are in the process of being harvested.

The ability of *lapau* to function as an economic driver of the community shows the existence of social capital and *lapau* is a social organisation. (Leenders, 2014) asserts that social capital refers to the characteristics of social organisations that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual or individual gain. Leenders' opinion has more or less the same essence as Loury's opinion (Coleman, 1994) that social capital is a set of resources inherent in family relationships and in the social organisation of society and which is useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or adolescent. This study found that *lapau* has a function as a facilitator of cooperation for mutual or individual (economic) benefits, but it does not appear to be useful for the cognitive or social development of adolescents. Unlike cafe or canteen visitors who are mostly teenagers without gender restrictions, *palapau* are generally adult men and most of them are married. Thus, *lapau* can be said as a social organisation that is informal, simple, open and has no structure because it does not have the concept of power sharing. In the *lapau* there are only sellers (owners who are also servants of the *lapau*) and buyers (*palapau*) who are bound in a buying and selling relationship, not a power relationship. Social capital itself is a resource that is inherent and grows from the function of *lapau* as a social organisation that facilitates cooperation.

In the context of economic relations, M.d.L. is a social communication practice that generates the social capital resources of the *palapau*. As a communication activity, M.d.L. itself is a resource that encourages moments of self-expression, mutual need, mutual trust and goodwill among *palapau*. Social capital is the result of the performance of communication resources which in turn become a resource for cooperation in economic activities. It means M.d.L. or communication does not have a direct impact on economic cooperation but must be successful first to give birth to social capital.

### **Social capital depends on the quality of communication**

No guarantee M.d.L. will always be able to generate social capital because strong social capital can only be born from M.d.L. quality ones. Quality M.d.L. determined by adherence to normative rules in communication, especially the rules of *Kato nan Ampek*. Furthermore, it depends on the choice of *ota* (talk) topic, duration, and choice of diction in opinion. Research informants said:

If the problem being discussed is not interesting, it won't take long. But if it's interesting, it can drag on, even to the point of arguing. There's nothing wrong with arguing, but if it's too hot the words that come out are sometimes offensive. What should not be called, is called. It is not good.

*Kato nan Ampek* - the free translation of The Fourth Word, although the actual scope does not only concern words - is a typical communication rule in Minangkabau culture. Research informants explained:

*Kato nan Ampek* consists of *Kato Mandaki* (climbing word), *Kato Manurun* (descending word), *Kato Mandata* (horizontal word) and *Kato Malereng* (slope word). *Kato Mandaki* is the rule to talk to the older one, *Kato Manurun* is to talk to the younger one, *Kato Mandata* is to talk to the same age, and *Kato Malereng* is the one to talk to *sumando* (sister's husband).

The most substantial value of *Kato nan Ampek* is treating the other person with respect. According to the informant, in using *Kato Mandaki*, younger people must show respect for older people, such as listening more than talking, voice should not be loud and show arrogance (*kacak langan bak langan, kakak batih bak batih*), not mentioning names but the status of the interlocutor (such as *mak, tuan, uda, uni*, etc.), more often shows an attitude of agreement (with a nod of the head or the word 'yes...yes') rather than responding without expression, let alone showing an attitude of disapproval and resistance.

Some Minangkabau people interpret *Kato Manurun* as a norm that allows older people to speak harshly to younger ones because the older ones are of a higher rank. The informant explained that such an understanding is wrong and very contrary to the true understanding of *Kato Manurun*, which requires the older ones to show their morals to the younger ones. The way to communicate that shows the nobility of morality is to speak gently, not to rebuke with angry

expressions, not to use profane words (such as mentioning genitals), and not to use communication to give wrong directions.

Minangkabau culture places an obligation on older people to teach the younger ones, an obligation that seems to have been adopted from the tradition of Sufi orders. This obligation must be carried out using sentences that do not tend to think that the younger is more stupid. By treating the young people well, the young ones have no reason to be negative and throw sentences that violate the norms of decency to the older ones. Communication can also continue because both young and old alike have fun in the conversation.

The *Kato Mandata* rule is used to talk to people of the same age, like childhood playmates. With people like jokes that are a bit harsh, mentioning names even accompanied by nicknames that shouldn't be used for older people can be used, as long as it's not considered demeaning or insulting.

*Kato Malereng* is used to communicate with the husband of a sister called *sumando*. This rule is unique and probably only known in Minangkabau. To convey messages containing advice, one should not use a straightforward communication model (low context communication) with direct sentences to the point. Sentences must be accompanied by metaphors and satire whose meanings are understood by every member of the community. The use of metaphors and satire is considered as part of an attitude of respect, even though the substance of the message conveyed is very strongly felt by *sumando*.

In M.d.L. everyone should pay attention to who he is talking to. To talk to older people, they must use *Kato Nan Ampek's* rules well. If the rules are violated, the dialogue can stop because the other person feels disrespected. Violation of the *Kato Nan Ampek's* rules can cause one to lose M.d.L. friends. even he can be ostracised by other *palapau*. No *palapau* likes to talk to him. When such a situation is experienced by a person, he is no longer able to gain sympathy and trust from others. The bad effect of losing the sympathy and trust of others is the loss of job offers.

*Kato Nan Ampek's* communication rules will have a very positive impact if everyone obeys, as stated by a research informant:

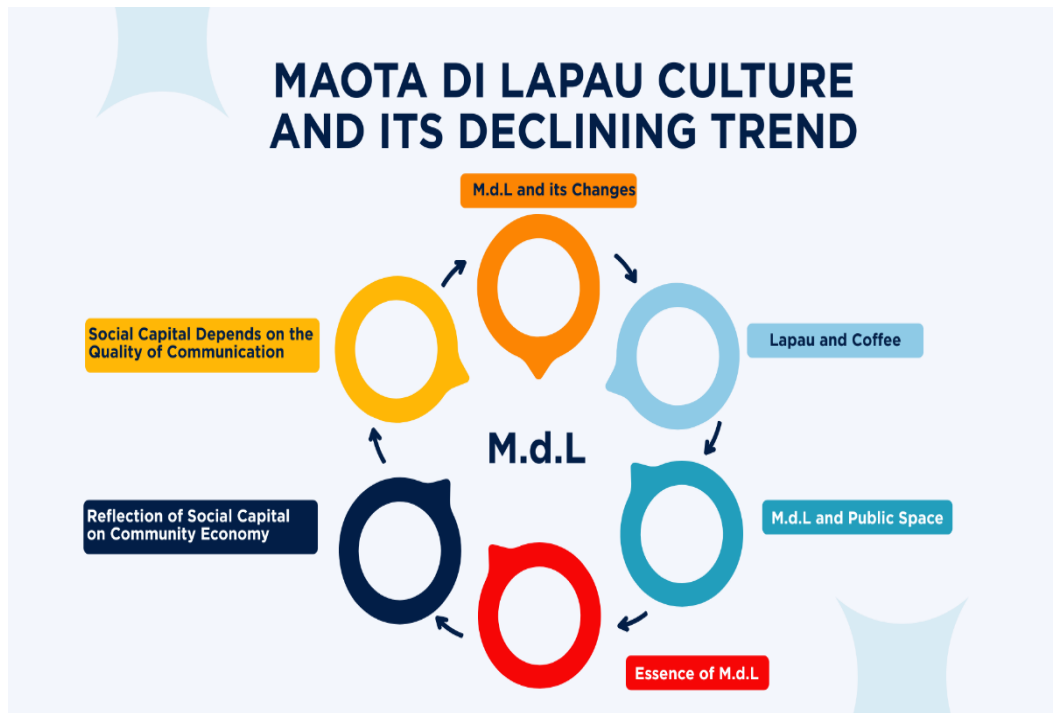
If everyone obeys the rules of *Kato Nan Ampek*, life is comfortable, far from conflict. But now many have disobeyed, many even do not know the rules of *Kato Nan Ampek*. Especially the young ones. They like to talk as they please, it doesn't matter whether their words hurt people's hearts or not.

According to the informant, people's enthusiasm for M.d.L. is decreasing. This can be attributed to the increasing disobedience of *Kato Nan Ampek's* rules. Many people are afraid of being offended and offending people, so they choose not to speak. They finally chose games such as playing *koa* or dominoes as activities in the *lapau* because it would not cause conflict.

Chatting is only good when we meet people who are good friends to chat with. This means that the person knows the rules and a lot of knowledge. If you talk to people who don't know the rules, there are more disadvantages than advantages. His words can make our hearts so hot and can cause fights. Instead of having conflicts with people, it's better if we just keep quiet, or just play *koa*.

Our two-month field data collection revealed that many *lapau* are primarily used for playing cards or dominoes. The practice of M.d.L. was observed in only a few specific *lapau* and was predominantly attended by older men. On several occasions, we waited from afternoon until 9:00 PM to observe M.d.L. sessions, often with disappointing results: the patrons frequently preferred solitary activities like using their gadgets, watching television, or playing games. While media articles often portray M.d.L. as a 'school' for public speaking, democratic practice, and critical debate for the Minangkabau community, our observations suggest a decline in its prevalence (See Figure 1).

This study cannot definitively conclude whether the decreased frequency and participation in M.d.L. leads to a reduction in the social capital traditionally generated within *lapau*. Instead, we delineate the factual and historical relationships between M.d.L., social capital, and economic opportunity.



**Figure 1.** M.d.L findings research  
Source: Author (2025)

From author's perspective, the relationship between M.d.L. and social capital is not linear or causal but rather mutually constitutive. M.d.L. is a social activity that generates and activates communicative potential, a process that pools resources to build consensus, mutual understanding, and commitment, ultimately fostering cooperation in other social endeavours. Conversely, enlarged social capital induces further communication by opening a wider discursive space where individuals feel free to express thoughts, debate creative ideas, and formulate action plans. When social capital is distributed equitably within the community, differences of opinion become safer, creating a collective force that is both sustained by and reliant upon vibrant communication activities like M.d.L.

## CONCLUSION

M.d.L. is a social tradition and activity of the Minangkabau people that impacts community social capital and economic activity. M.d.L. is also a process that transforms the potential energy of human communication into a resource that induces social capital. When conducted in adherence to the rules of *Kato Nan Ampek* (The Four Speech Rules), M.d.L. not only facilitates a sustainable process of generating communicative resources but also ensures that this process occurs with minimal misunderstandings and instances of offence that could trigger conflict.

However, the Minangkabau people, particularly the younger generation, no longer understand the rules of *Kato Nan Ampek* and prefer to communicate based on principles of freedom which they perceive as superior. In reality, this uninhibited communication, lacking the depth of thought inherent in *Kato Nan Ampek*, often leads to disputes and discomfort. Consequently, many individuals choose to remain silent and avoid communication when visiting a *lapau*, leading to the increasingly infrequent practice of M.d.L.. Thus, the process of exchanging ideas, and practicing debate and argumentation has become rare among *lapau* patrons. Playing cards (*koa*) or dominoes has become more appealing than engaging in discussion.

The shift of M.d.L. activities towards recreational play is only one form of change identified in this study. A more significant change is the transformation of the *lapau*'s role into a meeting point for job seekers (workers) and employers (users). Unemployed job seekers utilise the *lapau* to find work—typically short-term—from employers seeking labour for projects in

construction, agriculture, transportation, etc. Therefore, residents who come to the lapau no longer intend to *maota*, but rather to connect with potential employers.

M.d.L. is a tradition and a social activity of the Minangkabau people in lapau that has an impact on the social capital and economic activities of the community. M.d.L. is also a process that generates the potential energy of human communication into a resource that induces social capital. M.d.L. implemented by complying with the Kato Nan Ampek rules, it not only causes the process of generating communication resources to occur sustainably, but also occurs with a few misunderstandings, offenses that trigger conflicts. But now the Minangkabau people, especially the younger generation are no longer understand the rules of *Kato Nan Ampek* and prefer to communicate with the principle of freedom which they think is better. In fact, the freedom of communication that is not based on deep thought as it is in Kato Nan Ampek causes a lot of disputes and discomfort. As a result, many people choose to remain silent and avoid communication when it comes to lapau, so M.d.L. is rarely implemented. Thus the process of exchanging ideas, introducing creative ideas, practicing debate and arguing is now rare among *palapau*. Playing *koa* or dominoes is more interesting than discussing. Is there a decrease in interest of the Minangkabau community in our research location towards M.d.L. causes a decrease in the strength of social capital is not answered comprehensively through this research. Thus, further research is needed to provide a definite answer. If further research can provide certainty about the negative consequences of reduced M.d.L. of social capital, of course, community leaders and the government need to think about how to make the M.d.L. can be reclaimed by the community.

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