Study on semiotica in urban vernacular: A case study of shop houses

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Abstract. Historical development of Shop Houses closely related to the cultural transformation of the society as can be clearly seen in historical civilization. Domination of Western Civilization cannot be denied as reflected in global culture in nearly every country. The shop houses, that originated in China has carried out the adaptation and transformation of China, Western and local architecture as well which lead to the change of its facade. This transformation is widely believed, has dispersed through the intense communication (semiotics) which has influenced the local population, who later accept this shop houses, especially in urban areas. This research applied the descriptive method which stressed the role of semiotic with a number of variables and indicators in order to find the main reason for accepting the shop houses culturally. In line with the theory frame work and preceding researches, there are some significant variables which consist of independent variables, in this case is social media, while dependent variables are the aspects of local culture namely religious aspect, affinities, economic. The results of this research can be used as guide lines for urban semiotics studies and society participatory development.

1. Introduce
By developing of the house form in this day and the future, making people have a new pattern of life. This is a big question about how change occurs. Shop houses are one type of building that comes from the word home and shop functionate for commercial buiding or store. House means a place to live while a store means space for business activities. Therefore, the shop house can be approved as a building that activates occupancy and business functions in one place. This causes the development of shop houses to be very fast now. Apart from being practical and inexpensive, the shop’s function is also able to accommodated various small-scale economic activities.

Kesawan is one of the areas in the city of Medan with uniqueness/distinctiveness which is a historical heritage. But over time, this place is very uncomfortable in preserving the heritage which is the original identity of the Kesawan area. Many old buildings left in bad conditions and have become damaged and destroyed and many new buildings are not in harmony with the old buildings associated with them in the neighbordood.
Kesawan is also one among the public spaces in the city of Medan. Where public space itself has a particular meaning. Public space in the center of the city can be termed in English as "place" which comes from Latin word "platea" which means open space or widening paths such as "plaza" in Spain or "piazza" in Italy or other words like the “square”. A square is a gathering place for socializing, freeing from the pressure of busyness and protecting from the hustle and bustle of traffic [1]. The square is a microcosm of life, offering an attraction and a place to meet and spend time [2]. In addition, there are also those who argue that a city must have space for the placement of public buildings, meeting places, places for celebrations or ceremonies, places, restaurants and cafes [3]. This is the case for a square that will be discussed further and deeper for a current, past, even future architecture.

2. Literatures Review

Shopping street as space has an important role in the social and economic life of the community. Shopping street as public spaces and meeting places were created for social activities. Public spaces including pedestrians, street markets, shopping centers, community centers, parks, playgrounds, and neighborhoods in residential areas make an important role in the social life of the community [7]. Public space acts as a self-regulating service, a place where providing experience and value [4]. Therefore a successful public space can create the impression of a place that has an historical atmosphere.

In this case, Lapangan Merdeka (urban space) that used to be called esplanade had been studied with its environment, especially shopping street. Kesawan, due to, the historical background, therefore, the form urban space and shopping street will be discussed interchangeable in their study. Activities which occur in public spaces basically have a pattern [5]. Based on the characters and activities that occur in public space can be divided into two, there are: (a) Spontaneous activities that are part of daily activities or recreational activities, such as walking, sitting enjoying historical the atmosphere, exercising, waiting, playing and selling. (b) Organized activities are hidden activities behind real activities, where activities are unexpected or not included in space planning. This activity is planned as an event. While some activities that can be used by users of public spaces include: (a) Daily activities by walking in public spaces, whether walking from/to and through public spaces. (b) Daily recreational activities as a place to rest and unwind. (c) Recreational activities as a tourist area or playground that is not carried out in daily activities. (d) Plan of activities that carried out if there are events such as concerts, new year events or other social activities [6] [8].

Cities are characterized by a diversity of social class: race, class, religion, gender, education, age, and political ideology. So sociality in urban public spaces can occur among people with different backgrounds [9] [10]. People who have similarities will find it easier to get involved with each other [11]. As a place of social interaction, the comfort factor in space can connect all members of society regardless of social, economic and cultural background.

2.1. Semiotics

The issue is approach through semiotic in order clarify the role of the object for its user. Semiotic is a theory that has been considered to highlight the issue. Semiotic originated from the Greek word semeion which means "sign". Semeion seems to originate from hypocratic or ascepiadic drugs with attention to symptomatology and inferential diagnostics [12]. At that time, signs mean something that refers to something else. In modern times, semiotics is a branch of science that deals with the assessment of signs and all related to signs, such as sign systems and processes that apply to signs [13]. In other words, semiotics is a relatively new branch of science, using signs and everything related to which studied systematically, and used as the basis of communication.

2.2. Urban Vernacular

Vernacular Architecture is a building designed by someone without receiving formal design education or can be called an architect without an architect. These skills are obtained locally through conventions
with little regard to what it is called popular culture. The dominant factor is the function of the building with minimal aesthetic considerations in modern sense but selection of local building materials. The feature of vernacular architecture is anonymous, spontaneous, original, local material, predominantly mainly seen in the countryside [20] [21]. Although the definition of vernacular is rarely found in the urban context, according to Rudolfsky views vernacular generally in rural areas [21]. In the context of Medan city, it is clearly found that architects do not have an important role in development of shop houses so we can hypothesize that vernacular architecture can also be realized in urban areas, more over the definition above is still in line with urban vernacular.

2.3. Kesawan Shopping Street, The City of Medan
The history of Kesawan is inseparable from the Dutch colonialists and the Deli Sultanate, even the ethnic Chinese. In 1886, Kesawan is still a Malay ethnic village, in 1886, it turned out to be a commercial area especially after 1899. The linkages with Chinese ethnic can be seen from historical records that this area has been handed over to Tjong A Fie, a Chinese trader which appointed as China mayor, Tjong A Fie has developed this area into a commercial district to meet the needs of the Dutch colonial.

Initially, physical development in the Kesawan area took the form of a two-story semi-permanent shop house but after a major fire in 1899, the area was rebuilt with a type of permanent structure used concrete and brick material. Initially, Ahmad Yani street used to be an urban commercial corridor connecting the Deli Sultanate with the Dutch Colonial government. Alongside the road, there is a row of arched two storied shop houses. The space in the arcade functions as a pedestrian and also as a protection from the weather particularly rain and the glaring sun for people which using the shopping street [22].

![Figure 1. Kesawan, 1918 (source: tropenmuseum).](image1)

![Figure 2. Kesawan, 1932 (source: tropenmuseum).](image2)

2.4. Hyperreality
In semiotics and postmodernism, hyperreality is the inability of individual consciousness to distinguish reality from simulation of reality, especially in a technologically advanced postmodern society. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction is mixed together so that there is no clear difference between where one ends and the other begins. Technologically it is possible to combine physical reality with virtual or human intelligence with artificial intelligence. For different reasons, individuals can find existence and match or engage in the artificial world which actually reduces contact with the real physical world [26].
According to Baudrillard hyperreality is a generation with a real model without origin or reality. Hyperreality is a representation or sign without original references or does not really exist like Santa Clause [25]. Baudrillard borrowed the thoughts of Jorge Luis Borges and Lewis Carroll by exemplifying a group of people mapping a empire in great detail including the design of the region. When imperial power declined, the map remained in use while what was on the map did not exist in the real world [27]. In his essay, Baudrillard also stated that at the time of making maps of imperial territory, in an area recorded with lots of trees, but after the empire began to dim the map was still used but the reality on the ground had turned into a desert [29].

Hyperreality according to Umberto Eco is the hyperreality action is the desire for reality so that to make it happen it is fabricated false reality that is consumed in real terms [28]. In this case the example is a hoax. The spread of hoaxes generally occurs on social media, for example Facebook, Twitter, et cetera.

3. Method
This research applied descriptive method, that intended to describe an event, symptoms, and events that occur at that time [14]. Qualitative methods are intended to collect in-depth data about specific research, focusing on gaining new insights to the current situation. It first phase starts with collecting, classifying and analyzing data, and producing conclusions and reports, that have the main purpose of getting an overview of the objectives of the situation.

4. Result and Discussion
As a result of this case study showing the influence of social media in the formation of new images by shophouses located on one of the street in the city of Medan. The observed location was Jalan Jenderal Ahmad Yani. Therefore, it is best to identify first the location to get more information needed about the situation required by study.

4.1. Shopping at the Shopping Street, Jalan Jendral Ahmad Yani
Kesawan shopping street located on Jalan Ahmad Yani, Medan Barat, Medan City in the form of a commercial corridored store for commercial purpose, residence and office corridor. Kesawan shopping street is surrounded by the center of economic activities in the city such as the shop is in Masjid street, Merdeka Square and office is in Katamso street. Kesawan is part of the old city areas which is quite famous as the Central Business District. This is a strategic area in the structure of the Medan City as a part of Merdeka Square, and located on the edge of the Esplanade in the center of Medan. It makes Kesawan special in Medan. This is due to the historical aspects as a strong character which found this region. The house of the historical figure will be presented further and deeper to see the role possessed by these objects to influence the region.

Figure 3. The map of Kesawan, Jendral Ahmad Yani street, The City of Medan.
The exterior is designed to provide pedestrian protected paths. This road is full of shops. Kesawan square is located in the center of Medan that is Kesawan Subdistrict and was chosen as a field of research because this area originated from the Dutch colonial period and still exist until the present, an area accommodated trade activities in the city of Medan.

![Figure 4. Shop Houses, Jendral Ahmad Yani street, The City of Medan.](image)

There is an office building on the street corner having arches on both sides of the road. This part of the area cordially invites many social activities for the people of Medan city.

![Figure 5. Corner Building in Kesawan Square, Jendral Ahmad Yani, Medan.](image)

4.2. Activities on Kesawan, Jendral Ahmad Yani
A number of historical buildings occupy the Kesawan on Jendral Ahmad Yani street, among them are restaurants that have been in this area for a long time, namely TipTop and Tjong A Fie’s house.

![Figure 6. Tjong A Fie’s house, Jendral Ahmad Yani street, The City of Medan.](image)

This is the house of a prominence figure called Tjong A Fie. The Building has a historical aspects as can be seen the characters of the building. This house give some new color for this region.
Recently, activities that occur in this region are not only mentioned as above, but also have shifted to current activities which are perform and loved by many young people, namely taking selfies and taking pictures with their friends or often called as wefie. This is closely related to current technological developments, namely social media. There are many young people use it intensively.

4.3. Social Media
In the current era, social media networks try to facilitate some of the requirement interacting with others person in public. This service uses mobile technology to exchange information among users instead of face-to-face interactions. Mobile technology has changed urban structure by accelerating information exchange [15].

The baby boomer generation is a materialistic and speed-oriented generation [16]. Generation X is the generation born in the development of technology and information began such as the use of computers, video games, cable TV and the Internet [17].

Generation Y which is often called the millennium generation uses many instant communication technologies such as e-mail, SMS, instant messaging and social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Generation Y is the generation that grew up in the booming era of the internet [18].

In 1995-2000 the generation of Z was born with similarities to Generation Y, but generation Z was able to implement all activities at since, for example, running social media through cellphones, browsing using computers, and listening to music through a headset. Whatever is done is mostly related to cyberspace because since childhood this has been familiar with technology and is familiar with devices [19].
These are some activities that can be described according to its intensity that occurs. Many users of social media are young people. They use this area to be a place to gather and takes pictures. In general, they take pictures of the region with a perception as a historical place they obtained the information for. Kesawan is as a historical place they receive from social media, blogs, and other online media.

Social media is a computer-mediated interactive technology that facilitates creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression through community and virtual networks [23].

4.4. Urban Vernacular at Kesawan

As described in the section of Literatures Review, the Kesawan Area was built since 1886 by communication in the form of the Chinese. It is not recorded in the history before. In the beginning buildings in this area were planned by architects, while urban planning was indeed designed by urban related disciplines however the next shop houses were built.

Today, there are many buildings that have changed from what used to be, two floors to three floors. Besides that the arcade that used to run along the Ahmad Yani road is now no longer connected each other, shop houses corridor also changed to a place for merchandise for shop owners, motorcycle parking and so on. Even the famous historical restaurant named Tiptop closes its corridor of public access to pedestrians in order to increase the space for visitors. Generally, the change in function of space in the arcade is solely for commercial or economic purpose. Commercialism is a product of capitalism, in reverse, commercial supported capitalism and in further supported each other [24]. Commercialism and capitalism are also the basis of Modern Architecture which encourages the production of mass duplication, the cost of production becomes cheap and gets the maximum benefit from building modern architecture that requires the same building materials.
Figure 10. Tiptop Restaurant, 2019. Pedestrian was cut off to get space for the restaurant (source: survey).

Figure 11. Pedestrian is used for motorcycle parking and peddle. (source: survey 2019).

5. Result
The role of social media in digital today may have a big impact on a place. Rapid technological developments make people more likely to use social media to get and search information through social media. The social media presence also affects someone in choosing a place. Most visitors come to places that can support social media activities. The selection of places that have WiFi facilities especially for young people is included in the group from the Media Y generation. Social media can also help marketing the economic activities that are established in Kesawan, especially for shop houses there. Besides Medan society, most tourists know it from social media. Now, authenticity has become one of the tourist destinations in Medan City. Almost all webs, blogs and other social media accounts that tell about historical building tourism in Medan City certainly review the existence of Kesawan as one of the historical areas or business centers in Medan City.

In the case of the Kesawan historical area, the perception that developed and encouraged some people to come to the area was due to historic buildings or memory, but the reality faced was the historical atmosphere and the character of the region which is slowly disappearing because of commercialism and selfish private shophouses ownership. The paradox is in the choice of not making changes and not selling or making changes but the atmosphere and historical character change. The change of facade and arcade functions in used to be protected areas generally occur without the involvement of architect and city government experts, in fact shop owners directly in contact with the contractor without an architect.

As mentioned above, this can be said to be urban vernacular while historic area is increasingly disappearing. It can be concluded that urban vernacular based on commercialism slowly destroys itself, namely the historical building that was formed on the basis of capitalism's commercialism is slowly being destroyed by commercialism itself.

Indeed, there are local government efforts with non-governmental organizations such as the Sumatra Heritage Agency to maintain historical buildings in the Kesawan area, but private ownership of buildings, old building structures that are becoming obsolete so that more often maintenance of buildings with higher costs, function space requirements and increasingly rising land prices that are comparable to the increase in tax value are slowly finally the atmosphere and character of the historic area faded and could be lost.
The front facade coated with polycarbonate material so that cheap maintenance finally eliminates the character of history (source: survey, 2019).

Figure 12. The front facade coated with polycarbonate material so that cheap maintenance finally eliminates the character of history (source: survey, 2019).

Figure 13. Renovation of buildings by maintaining front facades but destroying structures in buildings (source: survey, 2019).

The relationship between the Kesawan region and social media related to urban vernacular has been showed above. Social media considers this area to be a historical area, but the behavior of shop house owners tends to be commercial, which destroys the historical area slowly, or semiotics that take the form of memory only. In figure 13, it is seen that the building was renovated without destroying the front facade and when interviewed they involved an architect and paid attention to city government regulations.

For the record, commercialism and capitalism are not a phenomenon of Indonesian locality but were brought in by the Dutch colonial and assisted by ethnic Chinese and facilitated by the Deli Sultanate in the days before independence. Dutch colonial ignored the reality of the Kesawan square as a Malay village in the 1880s. The originality has been neglected and built an area with the image of capitalist commercial representation which eventually slowly destroys itself today which is reflected in changes in buildings vernacularly.

Finally, and paradoxically, the present generation understands it (through social media) can be regarded as a hyperreality, which is understood as a historical area without knowing it was built without the basis of the originality of the Deli Malay region. This is exactly the same as Jean Baudrillard's essay for defined hyperreality.

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