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EXTRA CAUSER AS A HIDDEN PERSUASIVE STRATEGY IN UMKM COPYWRITING

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Abstract

This study investigates the strategic deployment of extra causer—a recently theorized lexicogrammatical category in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)—as a hidden persuasive mechanism in the digital copywriting of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Ngringo Village, Indonesia. Drawing on a corpus of 68 WhatsApp promotional texts, 19 instances of extra causer were identified and classified into four subtypes: attributor (8 texts), assigner (6 texts), inducer (4 texts), and initiator (1 text). Through qualitative discourse analysis, the study reveals how MSMEs implicitly construct product value and social legitimacy without explicit self-promotion—aligning with local Javanese cultural values such as *andhap asor* (humility). Findings demonstrate that extra causer enables ethical persuasion by attributing moral qualities (e.g., “without preservatives” → “healthy”), assigning social identity (e.g., “PKK subscriber” → “trustworthy”), and inducing emotional responses (e.g., “salak e” → “delicious”). This research contributes theoretically by operationalizing Santosa’s (2003) extra causer as an analytical tool in marketing discourse and practically by offering a culturally grounded training template for MSME communication. The study positions extra causer as a critical bridge between SFL theory and community-based economic practice.

Keywords: Extra causer, Digital marketing, Hidden persuasion, Javanese cultural values, MSME copywriting, systemic functional linguistics.

1. Introduction

In contemporary digital marketing, overt promotional language is increasingly met with consumer skepticism [Fennis BM, Stroebe W; 2025]. As a result, subtle, implicit strategies have gained prominence—particularly in community-based economies where authenticity and trust outweigh commercial flair [Thananusak T, Suriyankietkaew S; 2023]. Yet, linguistic frameworks for analyzing such covert persuasion remain underdeveloped. While Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) offers robust tools for examining mood, transitivity, and theme [Halliday MAK, Matthiessen CMIM; 2014], one recently proposed category—extra causer—has been largely overlooked in applied discourse studies.

Introduced by Santosa [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025], extra causer refers to an implicit or explicit entity that assigns value, identity, or emotional response to a product or actor, functioning beyond the clause’s grammatical subject. Unlike traditional agents in transitivity, extra causer operates at the semantic-pragmatic interface, enabling speakers to persuade without claiming agency—a feature especially resonant in cultures that value humility and indirectness [Hefner RW; 2020].

This paper addresses this gap by examining how Indonesian MSMEs in Ngringo Village deploy extra causer across three marketing stages: pioneering, competitive, and retentive [Santosa R; 2003]. Guided by the question—How do attributor, assigner, inducer, and initiator function as hidden persuasive strategies in MSME copywriting?—this study demonstrates that extra causer is not merely a grammatical curiosity but a sophisticated rhetorical device that aligns linguistic form with cultural ethics.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Extra Causer in Systemic Functional Linguistics

Within SFL, meaning is realized through three metafunctions: ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (negotiating relationships), and textual (organizing discourse) [Halliday MAK, Matthiessen CMIM; 2014]. While transitivity typically handles ideational meaning via participants like Actor, Goal, and Carrier, Santosa [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025] argues that certain evaluative meanings cannot be captured within clause boundaries. Enter extra causer: a semantic role external to the clause that "causes" value attribution, identity assignment, or emotional induction.

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Santosa [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025] classifies extra causer into four subtypes:

- Attributor: assigns moral or functional attributes (e.g., “organic” → “healthy”);
- Assigner: confers social identity via third-party validation (e.g., “endorsed by doctors”);
- Inducer: triggers emotional or sensory responses (e.g., “aroma” → “nostalgic”);
- Initiator: sets conditions for value realization (e.g., “limited stock” → “exclusive”).

Critically, extra causer allows the speaker to remain absent from the evaluative act—thus avoiding self-praise, a key virtue in many non-Western contexts [Geertz C; 1960].

2.2. Extra Causer and Theories of Persuasion

This aligns with Cialdini’s principle of social proof [Cialdini RB; 2009], where people follow the lead of similar others. However, while Cialdini focuses on behavioral influence, extra causer operates linguistically—embedding proof within semantic structure. For instance, “Langganan PKK” (“PKK subscriber”) doesn’t just state a fact; it assigns trustworthiness through institutional affiliation. Similarly, “tanpa bahan pengawet” (“without preservatives”) functions as an attributor that silently constructs “health” as an inherent product quality—bypassing direct claims like “our product is healthy,” which would violate norms of modesty in Javanese culture [Keeler W; 1983]. Thus, extra causer offers a linguistically precise mechanism for what Goffman [Goffman E; 1967] called “face-saving” persuasion: influencing without imposing.

3. Methodology

This study employs qualitative discourse analysis of 68 promotional texts collected from the WhatsApp Group “UMKM Ngringo” (December 9–25, 2024). Texts were selected based on three criteria: (1) produced by Ngringo MSMEs, (2) promoting specific products, and (3) exhibiting clear marketing-stage alignment (pioneering, competitive, retentive) per Santosa [Santosa R; 2003] and Belch & Belch [Belch GE, Belch MA; 2020].

From this corpus, 19 texts containing extra causer were isolated and classified using Santosa’s typology [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025].

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4. Findings

4.1. Attributor: Constructing Moral Value Through Process Transparency

The most frequent subtype, attributor, appears primarily in pioneering and competitive stages. Phrases like “tanpa bahan kimia” (“without chemicals”, No. 1) or “tanpa bahan pengawet” (“without preservatives”, No. 29) do not describe the product directly; they attribute moral qualities—“safe,” “natural,” “authentic”—by referencing absence. This strategy avoids boastful claims while implying superiority through ethical production [Bhatia VK; 2004].

Notably, all attributors are process-based, never outcome-based (e.g., no “makes you healthy”), reflecting a cultural preference for demonstrable action over speculative benefit [Mulder N; 1992].

4.2. Assigner: Legitimizing Through Social Affiliation

Assigner dominates the retentive stage, where reputation matters more than product features. “Langganan PKK tiap minggu” (“Weekly subscriber of PKK”, No. 51) assigns the seller a social identity: “trusted by the village women’s association.” Similarly, “Dapur Asri sdh dilarisi” (“Dapur Asri has already purchased”, No. 67) uses peer validation as social proof.

Crucially, the assigner is always a third party—never the seller—thus embodying *andhap asor* (humility) by delegating authority to respected community entities [Keeler W; 1983].

4.3. Inducer: Triggering Emotional Responses Through Sensory Language

Inducer appears in competitive texts to differentiate through experience. “Salak e sangat mantull” (“This salak is so delicious”, No. 37) uses Javanese colloquialism (“e”, “mantull”) to position the product as the inducer of joy. The product itself becomes the emotional catalyst—no human agent needed.

This aligns with Petty & Cacioppo’s peripheral route persuasion [Petty RE, Cacioppo JT; 1986], where affective cues override rational evaluation—yet here, it’s culturally coded, not manipulative.

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4.4. Initiator: Creating Scarcity Without Pressure

Only one initiator was found: “Gratis... Makan ditempat sekilo gratis...” (“Free... eat one kilo free on-site”, No. 57). This frames generosity as conditional, creating perceived exclusivity without direct sales pressure—a rare but potent strategy in retentive communication.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that extra causer is not just a linguistic category but a cultural technology of persuasion. By externalizing the source of value, MSMEs avoid self-aggrandizement—a violation of *andhap asor*—while still constructing compelling product narratives [Keeler W; 1983]. This supports Martin & White’s view that appraisal is often delegated in collectivist cultures [Martin JR, White PRR; 2005].

Moreover, extra causer resolves a key tension in grassroots marketing: how to compete without conflict. In a *tepa selira* (empathetic) society, direct comparison is taboo. Instead, MSMEs use assigner (“PKK buys from us”) to imply superiority without naming rivals—a form of ethical differentiation.

Theoretically, this study validates Santosa’s extra causer [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025] as a viable extension of SFL’s semantic architecture, filling a gap left by traditional transitivity analysis. It also bridges SFL with consumer behavior theory, showing how linguistic form enacts Cialdini’s principles [Cialdini RB; 2009] without explicit tactics.

6. Practical Application

Based on these findings, a culturally responsive copywriting training template is proposed:

- Pioneering Stage: Use attributor to build trust through transparency.
→ Template: “Without [chemical/preservative] → safe/natural”
- Competitive Stage: Use inducer to create sensory differentiation.
→ Template: “[Product] + [colloquial praise] → emotional response”
- Retentive Stage: Use assigner to reinforce social legitimacy.
→ Template: “[Respected entity] subscribes/buys → trustworthy”

This approach empowers MSMEs to communicate effectively without abandoning cultural identity.

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7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that extra causer is a powerful, underutilized tool in marketing discourse analysis. In Ngringo MSME copywriting, it enables hidden persuasion that is both effective and ethically aligned with Javanese values. By operationalizing Santosa’s framework [Setyawati N, Santosa R, Sumarlam; 2025], this research contributes original empirical evidence to SFL and offers a model for culturally grounded digital literacy in the Global South. Future studies could test extra causer in other community-based economies, further validating its cross-cultural applicability.

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