

A Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has transformed the way societies construct, represent and negotiate political culture, including within Sundanese society, which possesses strong local cultural values. This study aims to construct a model of Sundanese cultural political anthropology in the digital age through a qualitative approach based on the interpretivist paradigm. The study views political culture as the result of a construction of meaning shaped through the interaction between cultural values, identity, symbols, power relations and digital technology. Data were collected through digital observation, content analysis, documentary studies, and an examination of various representations of Sundanese culture in the digital sphere, and were subsequently analysed inductively through a process of data reduction, data presentation, and meaning extraction. The findings indicate that the transformation of the Sundanese community's political culture is not interpreted as the loss of local culture due to digitalisation, but rather as a process of reinterpretation and reproduction of cultural values within the digital sphere. The values of mutual care (*silih asih*), mutual encouragement (*silih asah*), mutual nurturing (*silih asuh*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), politeness (*kesantunan*) and religiosity remain the foundation for the formation of cultural identity, symbolic representation and legitimacy within power relations. Based on an interpretation of the research findings, a Conceptual Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age has been developed, which explains the dynamic relationship between cultural values, identity construction, cultural symbolic representation, the reconstruction of power relations, and the practice of political anthropology within digital society.

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Conceptual Model, Digital Transformation, Political Anthropology, Sundanese Culture.

1. Introduction

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed patterns of social interaction, political communication and the construction of cultural identity amongst communities across the globe. Digitalisation is no longer understood merely as an advancement in information technology; rather, it has shaped new social spaces that enable individuals and groups to build communication networks, produce knowledge and forge collective identities through various digital platforms. These changes have led to a transformation in the relationship between culture, power and politics, shifting from conventional spaces towards digital spaces that are open, interactive and borderless. From the perspective of the network society, power no longer resides solely within formal institutions, but is also shaped through digital communication networks capable of influencing public opinion, political legitimacy and civic participation (Sugihartati, 2014).

This phenomenon has become increasingly evident in Indonesia as the use of the internet and social media in people's daily lives has grown. Internet penetration in Indonesia has continued to rise, reaching around 79.5 per cent of the total population by 2024. This



situation indicates that the majority of people's social activities are now connected to the digital sphere, including activities relating to the dissemination of information, the formation of public opinion, the expression of cultural identity, and political participation. This digitalisation means that social media functions not only as a means of communication, but also as an arena for the production of meaning, the negotiation of identity, and the formation of symbolic power within society.

Among the various ethnic groups in Indonesia, the Sundanese people constitute a cultural community with a strong system of local values that remains alive in their daily practices. Values such as *silih asih* (mutual love), *silih asah* (mutual development of knowledge), and *silih asuh* (mutual guidance) have become the foundation of social ethics whilst also influencing practices of leadership, deliberation, and the relationship between the community and its leaders. In a political context, Sundanese culture places social harmony, respect for leaders, and the resolution of conflicts through deliberation at the heart of the community's political culture. Research by Herdiansah and Al-Banjari (2023) indicate that the voting behaviour of the Sundanese people remains influenced by local cultural values that emphasise politeness, harmony, religiosity and authoritative leadership; consequently, Sundanese political culture cannot be separated from the underlying cultural value system.

Digital transformation has subsequently introduced new dynamics to the continuity of this political culture. Sundanese cultural values, which were previously passed down through face-to-face interaction, are now reproduced via various digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. Digital media has not only become a means of communication, but also a space for cultural representation, the formation of political identity, and the dissemination of local symbols to a wider audience (Fatikh, 2025; Tumanggor & Azhar, 2025). Under these circumstances, Sundanese culture has not disappeared, but has instead undergone a process of adaptation, negotiation and reconstruction in line with the characteristics of the digital space.

In line with this, the research Sjoraida et al. (2025) research on the political communication of the Sundanese indigenous community in West Java indicates that the political decision-making process remains influenced by traditional leadership, deliberation, and the use of Sundanese cultural symbols, even though political communication takes place via digital media, particularly WhatsApp. The study confirms that digitalisation does not eliminate local political cultural practices, but rather introduces new forms of political legitimisation, symbolic communication and indigenous community participation.

Nevertheless, the majority of previous research has continued to focus separately on digital political communication, digital democracy, voting behaviour or cultural preservation (Ihsan, 2025; Rayhan et al., 2025; Syabana & Suyono, 2023). Studies on Sundanese political culture generally still examine the characteristics of cultural values within the context of electoral politics (Althafa & Pramesti, 2025; Herdiansah & Al-Banjari, 2023; Parhan, 2021), whereas research on digital transformation tends to focus more on aspects of communication technology and social media (Srg & Usiono, 2024). To date, there has been very limited research integrating a political anthropology perspective with digital transformation to explain how Sundanese cultural identity is constructed, negotiated and represented in the digital sphere.

This limitation highlights a research gap: the lack of a conceptual model capable of explaining the relationship between Sundanese cultural values, political practices, cultural symbols, social actors and digital technology within a comprehensive political anthropological framework. Yet, the development of networked societies has transformed the ways in which

communities build political legitimacy, shape collective identities and reproduce local culture through digital media.

Given these circumstances, this research is vital for developing a Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age capable of explaining the dynamics of the relationship between local culture, political identity, power, cultural symbols and digital technology. It is hoped that this model will enrich the development of political anthropology whilst contributing to an understanding of the transformation of local culture within contemporary digital societies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Ontological Perspective

The ontological perspective within the interpretivist paradigm views social reality as a social construction shaped through the experiences, interactions and interpretations of individuals and groups. Reality is not singular and objective, but rather multifaceted (multiple realities) depending on the social and cultural context and the experiences of the community (Burrell & Morgan, 2019). In the study of political anthropology, political practice is understood as part of a culture that reflects relations of power, leadership, symbols, values and the social systems that develop within a society. Culture is understood as a system of meaning passed down through symbols and social practices; consequently, political behaviour cannot be separated from the cultural context that gives rise to it (Geertz, 1973). This perspective aligns with the concept of culture as the totality of ideas, actions, and human creations studied within social life (Koentjaraningrat, 2015), as well as social systems theory, which explains that values, norms, and institutions mutually shape social order (Parsons, 1951).

In this study, the reality under examination is the anthropological construction of Sundanese political culture in the digital age. Sundanese culture is understood as a system of values that has developed through history, tradition and the identity of a society that is constantly changing in line with social dynamics (Ekadjati, 2014; Lubis et al., 2018; Rosidi, 1984). These values shape the political character of Sundanese society, such as deliberation, moral leadership and social harmony—which form the basis of local political practices (Bekti et al., 2025). The development of digital technology has subsequently created new social spaces that transform patterns of social interaction without erasing these cultural values. People now interact within digital networks that enable culture and political practices to be produced, disseminated and negotiated through digital media as part of a ‘network society’ (Hall, 1998). Thus, the reality of Sundanese cultural political anthropology is viewed as the result of a dynamic interaction between local culture, power relations and the development of digital technology.

2.2. Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological perspective of interpretivism regards knowledge as the result of an understanding of the meanings constructed by individuals within social life. Knowledge is acquired through the process of interpreting experiences, actions, symbols and social interactions; thus, researchers endeavour to understand phenomena from the perspective of social actors (Schutz, 1967). In the context of communication, the process of meaning-making takes place through symbolic interaction, which enables individuals to construct identities, social relationships, and an understanding of reality (Littlejohn et al., 1999).

In this study, knowledge regarding the Sundanese cultural political anthropology model is constructed through the interpretation of the meanings attributed by Sundanese society to

culture, power, identity, and political communication practices in the digital sphere. Social life no longer takes place solely in physical spaces but also in virtual spaces that have become part of everyday life. Consequently, the internet is understood as a cultural space that generates new social practices and shapes people's experiences in interpreting political life (Hine, 2020). This perspective is reinforced by the concept of virtual ethnography, which explains that digital activities form part of social reality and are worthy of study as contemporary cultural practices (Nasrullah, 2022). Consequently, this research does not aim to produce universal generalisations, but rather to provide a contextual understanding of the transformation of Sundanese cultural political anthropology in the digital age.

2.3. Methodological Perspective

The interpretivist paradigm implies the use of a qualitative research approach aimed at understanding social phenomena based on their natural context and the experiences of social actors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach was chosen because the relationship between Sundanese culture, political practices and the development of digital technology is a complex, dynamic and meaningful phenomenon that cannot be explained through quantitative measurement alone. Qualitative research enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of meaning, values and social experiences through the interpretation of various forms of data collected in the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moleong, 2016).

Operationally, the research utilises a digital ethnography approach to observe the cultural practices and political communication of the Sundanese community in virtual spaces. This approach enables the researcher to understand how cultural symbols, local identities, and power relations are reproduced through digital media (Hine, 2020; Nasrullah, 2022). The relevance of this approach is further supported by the findings of (Sjoraida et al., 2025), which indicate that the Sundanese indigenous community utilises digital media as a space for communication, cultural preservation and political participation. Consequently, the interpretative and digital ethnographic approaches are regarded as capable of comprehensively explaining the dynamics of the relationship between Sundanese culture, power, and digital transformation, thereby providing the basis for the development of a model of Sundanese cultural political anthropology in the digital age.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach within the interpretivist paradigm to understand how the values, symbols, cultural identities and power relations of Sundanese society are constructed and interpreted in the context of digital transformation. The interpretivist paradigm views social reality as the result of the construction of meaning shaped through social interaction; thus, the practice of political anthropology is understood on the basis of experiences, symbols and cultural representations that develop within the life of society. The research approach employed is digital ethnography, as outlined by Hine (2020), which views the internet and digital media as social spaces where cultural practices take place, are produced, and are negotiated in everyday life. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the political cultural practices of the Sundanese community as represented through digital spaces, thereby enabling the researcher to understand the dynamics of the relationship between local culture, identity, digital communication and political practices in a contextual manner.

The units of analysis in this research encompass various representations of the Sundanese community's political culture that emerge in digital spaces, such as social media posts, videos, comments, cultural symbols, narratives of leadership, the use of the Sundanese

language, and various forms of digital communication relating to the cultural values and political practices of the Sundanese community. Data was collected through digital observation, content analysis of various social media platforms, and a review of documentation including books, academic articles, cultural archives, research reports, policy documents, and other publications relevant to the research focus. Data selection was carried out purposively based on its relevance to the theme of Sundanese political culture in the digital age; consequently, only data representing cultural values, identity, symbols, power relations, and political communication practices were analysed in this study.

Data analysis was carried out inductively using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which encompasses data condensation, data presentation, and the drawing and verification of conclusions. At each stage of the analysis, the researcher undertook the processes of coding, thematic grouping, interpretation of meaning, and inter-thematic synthesis to identify conceptual relationships between cultural values, identity constructions, representations of cultural symbols, power relations, and digital technology. The results of this synthesis were subsequently used to construct the Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age as a conceptual representation explaining the dynamics of Sundanese communities' political anthropological practices within the digital space. The credibility of the research was maintained through methodological triangulation, triangulation of documentary sources, meticulous observation of digital data, and an audit trail to ensure the consistency of the analytical process. The entire research process also adhered to the principles of research ethics, particularly in the use of digital data available in the public domain, whilst safeguarding privacy, anonymity, and respect for the cultural values of Sundanese society.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Transformasi Antropologi Politik Budaya Sunda Di Era Digital

The transformation of Sundanese cultural political anthropology in the digital age is understood not merely as a change in the use of communication technology, but as a process of changing meanings constructed by society in the practice of its political culture. Within the interpretivist paradigm, social change is not viewed as a linear cause-and-effect relationship, but as the result of interactions between individuals, groups, cultural values and an ever-evolving social context. Consequently, the development of the digital sphere has become a new arena in which Sundanese society constructs, interprets and reproduces both its cultural identity and its political practices. Consequently, the transformation taking place is more accurately understood as a process of negotiating meaning between local cultural values and the dynamics of digital technology, rather than as the loss of traditional culture due to modernisation.

Based on the various cultural practices represented in the digital space, core Sundanese cultural values such as *silih asih*, *silih asah* and *silih asuh* continue to function as a normative foundation for building social relations and political practices within the community. These values are not merely understood as a cultural heritage passed down historically, but also as ethical guidelines that are continually reproduced through various forms of digital communication. The use of the Sundanese language, local expressions, cultural narratives, and traditional symbols across various social media platforms demonstrates that the community is actively preserving its cultural identity whilst adapting it to the characteristics of the digital space. From this perspective, social media functions not only as a medium of communication but is also interpreted as a cultural space where identity negotiations take

place, social solidarity is strengthened, and Sundanese cultural values are represented to a wider audience (Fatikh, 2025; Mulyani et al., 2024; Styawan et al., 2025).

The findings of this study reinforce the results of research by Herdiansah and Al-Banjari (2023), which confirm that the political orientation of Sundanese society remains influenced by values of social harmony, religiosity, leadership ethics, and respect for leaders, even amidst the context of digital transformation. Within the interpretivist paradigm, these findings are not understood as fixed cultural characteristics, but rather as constructions of meaning that are continually maintained through the community's social practices. Harmony, deliberation, and respect for leaders are interpreted as cultural symbols that lend legitimacy to political practices; consequently, the community's political choices are based not only on rational considerations but also on assessments of a leader's moral character and their alignment with Sundanese cultural values. Thus, Sundanese political culture is the result of the community's collective interpretation of the values deemed ideal for building communal life.

The advent of digital technology has subsequently created a new social space that has transformed the way society reproduces these values. Prior to the development of digital media, the transmission of political culture took place primarily through the family, traditional institutions, religious figures, and direct interaction within the community. In the context of a digital society, this process has shifted towards a virtual space that enables every individual to act as both a producer and a disseminator of cultural meaning. This shift indicates that cultural authority is no longer monopolised by traditional social institutions, but is also shaped through interactions within digital networks involving content creators, virtual communities, social media administrators, and community figures actively engaged in digital communication. This situation demonstrates that cultural and political legitimacy are increasingly constructed through the ability of social actors to construct narratives, utilise cultural symbols, and gain recognition from digital communities (Hasan et al., 2023; Peranginangin et al., 2025).

From a political anthropology perspective, these changes also indicate that the meaning of power relations is undergoing a transformation. Power is no longer understood solely as the formal authority held by traditional leaders or government officials, but also as the capacity of social actors to exert influence through the production of symbols, the dissemination of information, and the shaping of public opinion in the digital sphere. Social media has become a symbolic arena where various actors represent Sundanese cultural identity whilst simultaneously building political legitimacy through the use of the regional language, local values, historical narratives, and cultural symbols that are easily recognisable to the public. Thus, power in digital society is understood as a process that is continually negotiated through symbolic communication, rather than being determined solely by institutional structures.

Research findings indicate that the transformation of Sundanese political culture in the digital age is a process of adaptation to developments in technology and digital media, without eroding the local cultural values that are deeply rooted in community life. Cultural values remain the primary source in shaping the community's political identity and practices, but the ways in which these values are understood, communicated and represented are changing in line with the characteristics of the digital space. Sundanese culture has not lost its relevance; rather, it has gained a new space in which to be reproduced through various forms of digital communication that are more open, participatory and interactive. Consequently, the transformation of the political anthropology of Sundanese culture can be understood as an ongoing process of meaning reconstruction that takes place through the interaction between cultural values, social identity, power relations, and digital technology (Rantona et al., 2024; Sjoraida et al., 2025).

4.2. The Construction of Meaning, Values, Symbols and Sundanese Cultural Identity in the Digital Realms

Within the interpretivist paradigm, cultural identity is understood as a social construct that is continually shaped through interactions between communities. Identity is neither fixed nor mechanically passed down from one generation to the next, but rather acquires meaning through social experiences, cultural practices and the processes of communication that take place in everyday life. The development of digital technology has created new spaces for interaction, enabling the Sundanese community to reconstruct their cultural identity through various forms of digital communication. Consequently, the digital space is understood not merely as a medium for disseminating information, but also as a cultural space where communities reinterpret local values in accordance with an ever-changing social context.

Research findings indicate that various representations of Sundanese culture in the digital space continue to uphold the values of *silih asih*, *silih asah* and *silih asuh* as the foundation for building social relationships and political communication within the community. These values are not merely preserved as cultural heritage, but are interpreted as ethical guidelines relevant to life in a digital society. The use of the Sundanese language in social media posts, the conveyance of cultural messages through short videos, the documentation of local traditions, and various forms of online communication demonstrate that communities are actively reproducing their cultural identity through digital media. From this perspective, technology is not viewed as a threat to local culture, but rather as a new space that enables cultural values to take on different forms of representation without losing their fundamental meaning (Fatikh, 2025; Mulyani et al., 2024; Styawan et al., 2025).

This cultural meaning is also represented through the use of cultural symbols that have evolved within digital communication. The Sundanese language, traditional expressions, traditional dress, regional arts, and various other cultural expressions not only serve as markers of ethnic identity but also become symbols that foster a sense of belonging to a cultural community. From an interpretivist perspective, symbols acquire meaning through social interaction, meaning that their interpretation can change according to the context of the communication taking place. In the digital sphere, Sundanese cultural symbols are continually produced, reinterpreted and disseminated by the community; thus, cultural identity is the result of an ongoing process of meaning negotiation, rather than merely the passive inheritance of tradition (Alfian et al., 2025; Kartika & Kartikasari, 2025).

The research findings indicate that Sundanese cultural identity in the digital age is a dynamic identity, continually shaped through the interaction between local cultural values and developments in digital technology. The community not only preserves inherited cultural values but also adapts them to the characteristics of the digital communication space, which is more open, participatory and interactive. This process demonstrates that cultural identity is not being eroded by technological developments, but is instead being reconstructed through various digital communication practices. Identity emerges as the result of the interaction between local cultural values, the social experiences of the community, and the use of technology that enables every individual to participate in collectively constructing cultural representations.

In the context of political anthropology, the construction of cultural identity has a broader significance than mere cultural preservation. Cultural identity serves as a source of social legitimacy that influences how communities understand leadership, build trust, and evaluate political practices emerging in the digital sphere. Consequently, Sundanese cultural identity can be understood as a symbolic resource that is continually constructed through digital communication and forms the basis for communities in forging both social and political

relationships. Consequently, the transformation of Sundanese political culture in the digital age not only reflects changes in communication media but also demonstrates how communities actively construct, maintain and reinterpret their cultural identity through various digital communication practices (Sjoraida et al., 2025).

4.3. Reconstructing Power Relations in the Practice of Political Anthropology amongst the Sundanese People in the Digital Age

The development of digital technology has not only transformed the way people communicate, but has also transformed the way they construct, understand and legitimise power. Within the interpretivist paradigm, power is understood not merely as the formal authority held by an individual by virtue of their office or social status, but as a construction of meaning shaped through social interaction, cultural symbols and the processes of communication that take place within society. Consequently, changes in the political cultural practices of Sundanese society in the digital age cannot be understood merely as changes in the structure of power, but also as changes in the way society interprets authority, leadership, and the relationship between leaders and the community.

Despite various digital communication practices, the legitimacy of leadership within Sundanese society is still built upon cultural values that have long served as guidelines for social life, such as mutual care (*silih asih*), mutual encouragement (*silih asah*), mutual support (*silih asuh*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), politeness, religiosity, and respect for individuals regarded as possessing moral integrity. These values serve as the community's evaluative framework for assessing leaders, whether they are present in the physical social sphere or in the digital sphere. Consequently, legitimacy is not solely derived through formal political mechanisms, but also through the ability of political actors to demonstrate that their behaviour aligns with the cultural values understood and valued by Sundanese society (Herdiansah & Al-Banjari, 2023).

Digital transformation has subsequently created a new space that broadens the process of establishing such legitimacy. Social media enables various actors to build a leadership image through the dissemination of narratives, the use of cultural symbols, and communication that demonstrates closeness to the community. From an interpretivist perspective, the use of the Sundanese language, local expressions, traditional dress, and other cultural symbols is understood not only as a communication strategy but also as a representation of identity that gives meaning to the relationship between leaders and the community. Cultural symbols acquire meaning because the community recognises them as representations of the values they hold dear. Consequently, political legitimacy in the digital sphere is the result of a collective interpretative process that takes place through symbolic communication across various social media platforms (Sjoraida et al., 2025; Fatikh, 2025).

The development of digital technology has broadened the configuration of actors in the practice of political anthropology amongst the Sundanese people through the involvement of various parties in the digital sphere. Whilst in traditional societies cultural authority largely resided with traditional leaders, religious figures, or formal leaders, in digital society content creators, influencers, online community administrators, and community figures active on social media have emerged as actors who help shape public opinion. The presence of these actors does not automatically replace the role of traditional figures, but demonstrates that social legitimacy is now constructed through a more open, participatory process of interaction that takes place within digital communication networks. Consequently, power is understood as something that is continually negotiated through relationships between social actors, rather than as something fixed and possessed by a particular group (Hasan et al., 2023).

The power relations that develop in the digital sphere also reveal that the public do not merely act as recipients of information, but as subjects who actively ascribe meaning to the various political narratives they encounter. Through comments, discussions, the sharing of information, and the production of digital content, the public helps to shape the process of legitimising various cultural symbols and political practices. From an interpretivist perspective, this process demonstrates that the meanings of leadership and power are not unilaterally determined by political actors, but are constructed through ongoing interactions between leaders, the public, and digital communication spaces. Consequently, social media serves not only as a means of disseminating political information, but also as a social space where the negotiation of meanings concerning authority, trust and cultural representation takes place.

Overall, the research findings indicate that power relations within the political culture of Sundanese society in the digital age are undergoing a process of reconstruction influenced by changes in patterns of communication, participation and the distribution of authority within the digital sphere. This reconstruction does not eliminate local cultural values as the basis of social legitimacy, but demonstrates how these values take on new forms of representation through digital communication. Power is no longer understood merely as a relationship between leaders and the community within formal structures, but as a social process constructed through symbolic interaction, collective recognition, and the reproduction of cultural values in the digital sphere. Thus, the practice of political anthropology amongst the Sundanese people in the digital age is the result of a construction of meaning that brings together local culture, collective identity, digital communication, and power relations into a single dynamic whole.

4.4. The Construction of a Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Ages

The research findings indicate that the practice of Sundanese cultural political anthropology in the digital age is a social construction formed through the dynamic interaction between cultural values, collective identity, cultural symbols, power relations, and the development of digital technology. Within the interpretivist paradigm, social reality is viewed as the result of meanings that are continuously constructed through people's experiences and interactions. Therefore, the model of political anthropology developed in this study is not intended to be a universal model, but rather a conceptual representation of how Sundanese society constructs, maintains and reinterprets its cultural-political practices within the context of digital transformation. This model stems from an interpretative synthesis of various cultural practices, digital communication and the dynamics of power relations developing within Sundanese society.

The research findings indicate that Sundanese cultural values form the primary foundation shaping the community's political anthropological practices. Values such as *silih asih*, *silih asah*, *silih asuh*, *musyawarah*, politeness, religiosity, and respect for leaders are not merely positioned as cultural heritage, but also function as a normative framework guiding the community in assessing social behaviour and political practices. These values form the basis for building social relationships, shaping the criteria for ideal leadership, and providing legitimacy for various political actions. Thus, culture is not merely a social context, but acts as a value system that shapes the way society understands, practises, and interprets political practices in everyday life (Herdiansah & Al-Banjari, 2023; Mulyani et al., 2024).

Building upon this foundation of cultural values, cultural identity is formed and continually reproduced through social communication practices, both in physical and digital spaces. Various cultural representations demonstrate that Sundanese identity is not static but

is constantly constructed through the use of the Sundanese language, cultural symbols, local historical narratives, artistic expressions, and various forms of communication in digital media. This identity derives its meaning through processes of social interaction amongst communities, and is therefore always open to reinterpretation and adaptation in line with social developments. Consequently, cultural identity can be understood as a dynamic social process that serves as a link between cultural values and the political practices of society (Kartika & Kartikasari, 2025; Alfian et al., 2025).

This process of identity construction subsequently gives rise to cultural symbols that communities use to establish communication and social legitimacy. Cultural symbols—such as the use of the Sundanese language, traditional attire, traditional expressions, and various other forms of cultural representation—derive their meaning through social interactions taking place in the digital space. From an interpretivist perspective, symbols do not possess a fixed meaning but are continually interpreted by communities in accordance with the communicative contexts they encounter. Consequently, the digital space serves as an arena for the reproduction, negotiation and reinterpretation of cultural symbols, which ultimately influence the way communities understand political practices and power relations (Fatikh, 2025; Sjoraida et al., 2025).

Research findings indicate that power relations within Sundanese society are undergoing a reconstruction in the context of digitalisation. Political legitimacy no longer rests solely on formal structures or traditional authority, but is also determined by the capacity of social actors to build public trust, construct cultural narratives, and gain recognition through digital spaces. The presence of community figures, informal leaders, content creators, and digital communities demonstrates that power is produced through participatory processes of symbolic communication. Consequently, power relations are understood as the result of an ongoing negotiation of meaning through the interaction between society, culture, and digital technology (Miller, 2021).

In this model, digital technology is not positioned as a factor that supplants local culture, but rather as a social space that enables the process of meaning construction to take place. Digital media provide a space for communities to represent their cultural identities, preserve local values, build social relationships, and expand participation in political practices. Consequently, digital technology is understood as a medium that accelerates the process of cultural reproduction whilst simultaneously opening up opportunities for the emergence of various new interpretations of Sundanese cultural identity and symbols. The relationship between culture and technology in this study is dialogical, as both mutually shape and influence one another in the practical lives of communities.

Based on the overall results of the analysis, this study constructs a Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age, which illustrates that the Sundanese people's cultural political practices are the result of a reciprocal relationship between cultural values, identity construction, the representation of cultural symbols, the reconstruction of power relations, and digital technology. These five elements do not operate in isolation or in a linear fashion, but rather form a dynamic social process through community interactions in everyday life. This model demonstrates that political-cultural transformation does not signify the loss of local culture as a consequence of digitalisation, but rather constitutes a process of reconstructing meaning that enables Sundanese cultural values to be preserved whilst simultaneously taking on new forms of representation within the digital sphere.

4.5. A Conceptual Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age

The Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age demonstrates that the political cultural practices of Sundanese society are the result of a dynamic construction of meaning that occurs through the interaction between cultural values, cultural identity, cultural symbols, power relations, and digital technology. Within the interpretivist paradigm, these five components are not understood as variables with linear cause-and-effect relationships, but rather as social elements that mutually shape one another through a continuous process of interpretation within community life. Consequently, this model illustrates how Sundanese society actively reinterprets cultural values in response to social changes brought about by the development of digital technology.

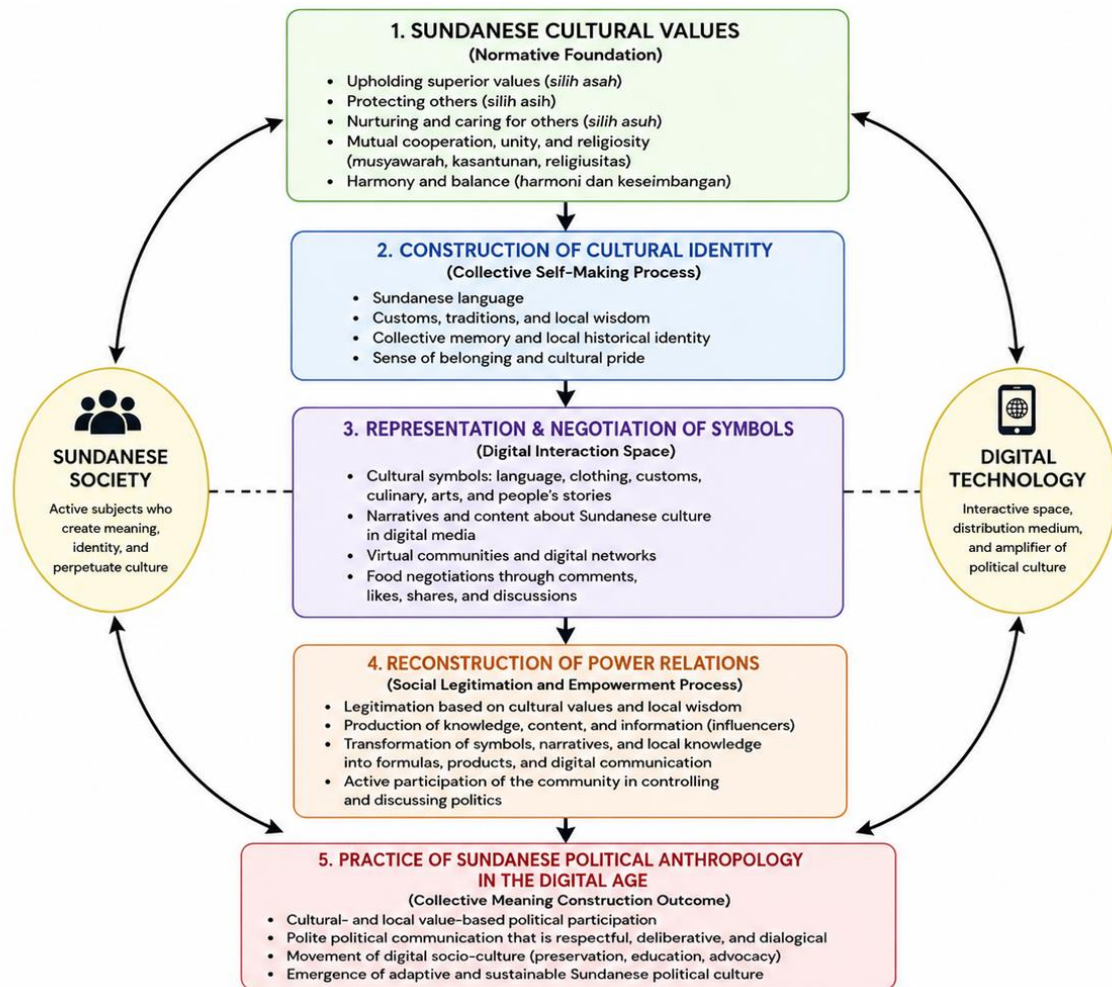


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age

As shown in Figure 1, the first component, Sundanese cultural values, forms the primary foundation in the process of shaping the community's political culture. Values such as *silih asih*, *silih asah*, *silih asuh*, *musyawarah*, politeness and religiosity are understood as moral guidelines that shape the way the community understands social relationships and political practices. These values not only function as a cultural heritage but also serve as an interpretative framework used by the community when legitimising leadership, building social

trust, and assessing political practices in everyday life. This demonstrates that culture serves as a source of meaning that is continually reproduced through various social practices.

These cultural values subsequently shape the construction of cultural identity, which, in this model, is understood as an ever-evolving social process. Cultural identity is not positioned as a fixed attribute, but rather as the result of society's interaction with its social environment and the digital sphere. The use of the Sundanese language, cultural symbols, local traditions and collective memory demonstrates that cultural identity is continually constructed through everyday communication and the various cultural representations that emerge in digital media. Thus, cultural identity acts as a link between cultural values and the political cultural practices that develop within society.

The next stage involves the representation and negotiation of cultural symbols in the digital sphere. This model demonstrates that digital technology provides a new space for communities to represent their cultural identity whilst simultaneously constructing collective meaning through various cultural symbols. The use of the Sundanese language on social media, the dissemination of cultural narratives, the documentation of local traditions, and digital community activities all demonstrate that cultural symbols acquire meaning through an ongoing process of interaction. From an interpretivist perspective, symbols do not possess a fixed meaning, but are constantly reinterpreted in accordance with social experiences and the communicative context of society.

This process of symbolic representation subsequently results in the reconstruction of power relations. In this model, power is not understood solely as the formal authority held by the government or traditional leaders, but as the result of social recognition built through symbolic communication. The legitimacy of leadership is shaped by an actor's ability to represent the cultural values understood by the community. The presence of community leaders, digital communities, content creators and influencers demonstrates that the digital sphere has expanded the range of actors playing a role in shaping public opinion and the political cultural practices of Sundanese society.

This entire process culminates in the practice of Sundanese political anthropology in the digital age. Political cultural practices are understood as the result of a construction of meaning arising from the interaction between local culture and developments in digital technology. These practices are reflected in the increasing public participation in culture-based political communication, the use of local symbols in the digital sphere, the development of virtual cultural communities, and the emergence of forms of leadership that derive their legitimacy from public recognition. This demonstrates that digital transformation does not eliminate Sundanese political culture, but rather provides a new space for the community to reproduce and renegotiate cultural meanings within contemporary political life.

The model developed in this study also shows that digital technology is not a factor that replaces local culture, but rather a medium that expands the process of meaning-making. All components within the model interact dynamically with one another, meaning they do not form linear relationships. Cultural values influence the formation of identity; identity is represented through cultural symbols; symbols form the basis for the establishment of legitimacy within power relations; whilst digital technology provides the social space in which all these processes take place. Thus, the practice of political anthropology amongst the Sundanese people in the digital age is the result of a collective interpretative process that continues to evolve in line with the social changes taking place.

4.6. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the analysis focuses on the interpretation of the Sundanese people's political cultural practices in the digital sphere; consequently, it does

not provide an in-depth examination of the variations in political cultural practices amongst Sundanese communities in different regions. Secondly, the study places greater emphasis on the interpretation of cultural representations and digital communication; consequently, it has not explored the subjective experiences of cultural actors through in-depth interviews. Thirdly, the rapidly evolving dynamics of digital technology enable the emergence of new forms of cultural representation and power relations that have not been fully accommodated in this study.

Given these limitations, it is recommended that future research develop a more in-depth study through digital ethnography, involving various Sundanese cultural communities across a range of digital platforms. Future research could also compare the political cultural constructions of Sundanese society with those of other local cultures in Indonesia to produce a more comprehensive model of political anthropology. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach integrating political anthropology, digital communication, cultural sociology and media studies is expected to enrich our understanding of the political cultural dynamics of local communities in the era of digital transformation.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the political anthropology of Sundanese culture in the digital age is a process of meaning-making that unfolds through the interplay between cultural values, collective identity, cultural symbols, power relations and digital technology. From an interpretivist perspective, political-cultural transformation is not understood as the loss of local culture due to digitalisation, but rather as a process of reinterpretation and reproduction of Sundanese cultural values within the digital sphere. Values such as care (*silih asih*), mutual encouragement (*silih asah*), mutual support (*silih asuh*), deliberation (*musyawarah*), politeness and religiosity remain the foundation upon which society builds its cultural identity, provides legitimacy to leadership, and shapes political-cultural practices relevant to the dynamics of digital society.

Based on an interpretation of the research findings, a Conceptual Model of Sundanese Cultural Political Anthropology in the Digital Age has been developed, which illustrates the dynamic relationship between cultural values, identity construction, the representation of cultural symbols, the reconstruction of power relations, and the practice of political anthropology within the digital space. This model emphasises that digital technology does not replace local culture, but rather serves as a social space that expands the processes of meaning-making and the reproduction of the Sundanese community's political culture. These findings make a theoretical contribution to the development of political anthropology through an interpretivist perspective and provide a conceptual framework for future research on the transformation of local communities' political culture in the digital age.

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