

## DRAMATURGY OF SUNDANESE CULTURE-BASED POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA HYPERREALITY

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze how Sundanese culture-based political communication is constructed through social media to form a political hyperreality in the midst of West Java society. The research uses a qualitative approach with dramaturgical analysis methods from Erving Goffman and hyperreality theory from Jean Baudrillard. Social media is no longer just a space for political communication, but has turned into a stage for symbolic performances that display images of closeness, simplicity, religiosity, and local cultural identity. Sundanese culture is used as a symbolic instrument to build political legitimacy through emotional and populist digital visualization. Research has found that local culture-based political content on social media tends to produce simulated realities that the public consumes as socio-political truth. In these conditions, the boundary between political reality and digital imagery becomes blurred. The dramaturgy of digital politics finally gives birth to hyperreality, which is a situation when media representations are more reliable than empirical reality in the field.

**Keywords:** *dramaturgy, political communication, Sundanese culture, hyperreality, social media*

### INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the communication patterns of society, including in the practice of political communication. Along with that, the presence of social media as a new public space allows political actors to build an image, produce symbols, and influence public opinion quickly and massively. According to Castells (2019), *network society* has changed political communication relations to be more open, interactive, and based on digital media. In this context, political communication no longer only takes place through formal forums, conventional campaigns, or mainstream media, but through visual constructions and digital narratives designed to create emotional closeness to society. As a result, social media has finally become an arena for political spectacle that displays symbolic reality that is often more dominant than empirical reality itself.

In Indonesia, the transformation of digital political communication is growing rapidly along with the increasing penetration of the internet and the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (2024) shows that the majority of Indonesians actively use social media as a source of information and daily communication. Therefore, these conditions are used by political actors to build *personal branding*, strengthen electability, and shape public perception of their identity and leadership character. According to Fahrisky & Rahmawati (2025), social media has become the main instrument in the formation of *political branding* in Indonesia because it is able to create emotional closeness between political figures and the public through intensive visual communication. Thus, this phenomenon shows that contemporary politics is no longer just about programs and policies, but also about how images are produced, staged, and consumed by the public. Politics turned into a dramaturgical space full of symbols, emotions, and visual imagery.

Especially in the context of West Java, digital political communication has unique characteristics because it is influenced by the strong Sundanese cultural identity. Sundanese culture is known to have social values that emphasize politeness, religiosity, simplicity, family, and social harmony. According to Azizah (2023), local culture in Indonesia is still a source of social identity and strong symbolic legitimacy in contemporary political dynamics.

In this regard, Sundanese cultural values then become symbolic capital that is often used by political actors in building legitimacy and closeness to society. The use of Sundanese language, traditional clothing, religious symbols, and visualization of social activities of local communities is an important part of the political communication strategy on social media. Furthermore, this phenomenon can be seen from the large amount of digital political content that shows political figures "hanging out with the people", using Sundanese *iket*, speaking in regional languages, attending religious activities, or showing simplicity through the visuals of daily life. Such representations not only serve as a means of communication, but also as an imagery strategy designed to build an authentic impression and close to the identity of the Sundanese people. According to Mulyana (2023), political communication based on local culture in the digital era tends to use cultural symbols as a means of building emotional closeness and public loyalty. In other words, local culture has been transformed into a politically produced symbolic instrument to gain public legitimacy. However, the use of Sundanese culture in digital political communication does not always represent the actual social reality. Many cultural symbols are displayed selectively and aesthetically for the needs of political imagery on social media. As a result, the public is more likely to interact with visual representations than with understanding the substance of policy or empirical realities on the ground. According to Nasrullah (2022), social media works through visual logic and digital participation that allows the reproduction of symbols to take place quickly and repeatedly. Therefore, this situation shows that social media has created a political simulation space filled with signs, symbols, and images that are deliberately constructed to shape public perception.

This phenomenon can be understood through the dramaturgical perspective of Walsh (2022). In dramaturgical theory, social life is seen as a stage of performance, in which individuals play a specific role in the presence of the audience to establish the desired impression. In the context of digital politics, political actors on social media try to present *the front stage* in the form of images of simplicity, closeness to the people, religiosity, and love for local culture. Meanwhile, *the backstage* containing actual political reality is often invisible to the public. Thus, social media allows impression management to be done more systematically through visual settings, narratives, shooting angles, and digital interactions that have been designed in advance. In addition, in the practice of digital political communication, dramaturgy no longer takes place directly between the actor and the audience, but is mediated by social media algorithms that reinforce the distribution of certain symbols and images. According to Tiisala (2022), digital media works through the logic of surveillance capitalism that encourages attention-based content distribution and public engagement. Therefore, content that is emotional, populist, and close to people's cultural identities tends to go viral more easily and gain public attention. As a result, digital political performances are becoming increasingly intensive and competitive. Political actors compete to create an image that is considered the most authentic and closest to society, although in many cases that image is the result of a strategically designed media construction. Furthermore, this condition is closely related to the concept of hyperreality put forward by van Kessel et al. (2025). According to Baudrillard, modern society lives in a simulated world, which is a state when representations or signs are more reliable than reality itself. In this situation, the line between reality and simulation becomes blurred because the public is constantly consuming the images produced by the media. Social media accelerates the formation of political hyperreality because it allows for the continuous reproduction of symbols through photos, videos, *reels*, and other viral content.

In the context of Sundanese culture-based political communication, hyperreality arises when the public trusts the digital image of a figure more than the empirical reality about his political performance. Political figures who often appear using local cultural symbols and show emotional closeness to the community can be considered more popular, religious, and concerned about regional culture, although the socio-political reality is not necessarily so. According to Piliang (2021), digital cultural hyperreality occurs when people trust symbolic representations more than real social facts. As a result, cultural symbols eventually became a simulation that the public consumed as a social truth. Politics is no longer understood through the substance of policy, but through digitally produced visual performances. In addition, the phenomenon of political hyperreality is also strengthened by the media consumption culture of modern society which tends to be fast, visual, and emotional. According to Mancini (2020), the media has the ability to shape the way humans understand social reality through the dominance of communication technology. Therefore, the social media public is more likely to be attracted to content that is simple, emotional, and has a symbol of cultural identity than to complex policy discussions. In these conditions, social media is a very effective space to build a political image based on local culture. Sundanese culture not only functions as a social identity, but also becomes a symbolic commodity in the practice of digital political communication. On the other hand, the use of local culture in political communication has complex social implications. On the one hand, the representation of Sundanese culture in social media can strengthen local identity and increase emotional closeness between leaders and the community. However, on the other hand, the exploitation of cultural symbols for the sake of political imagery

has the potential to obscure the meaning of culture itself. Thus, culture has become just a visual ornament that is displayed for the sake of electoral and digital popularity. This situation raises concerns about the commodification of local culture in modern political practice. Not only that, digital political hyperreality also has the potential to affect the quality of democracy. When society focuses more on image than substance, the process of assessing political actors becomes less rational and more emotional. Popularity on social media is often seen as an indicator of political legitimacy, although it doesn't always reflect the actual quality of leadership. According to Wellings & Sorensen (2022), digital politics in Indonesia is increasingly dominated by the performativity of social media, which places imagery as the main element of political communication. As a result, digital democracy risks giving birth to an image politics that places symbols and performances at the center of the public's attention.

Based on these various phenomena, research on digital political communication has generally discussed *personal branding*, social media, digital populism, and political campaign strategies. However, studies that specifically link digital political dramaturgy to local culture and the concept of hyperreality are still relatively limited, especially in the context of Sundanese culture in West Java. Therefore, this research has academic urgency to understand how local culture is constructed in digital political communication and how this construction gives birth to hyperreality in society. Furthermore, this research is important because West Java is one of the regions with very high political dynamics and social media use in Indonesia. The strong Sundanese cultural identity makes this region interesting to study in the perspective of political communication based on local culture. In addition, the development of social media has changed the pattern of people's political interactions, so a critical analysis of how cultural symbols are used in shaping public perception is needed. Thus, this research is also relevant to the development of digital political communication studies that increasingly highlight the relationship between culture, social media, and the formation of socio-political reality.

Based on this description, this study aims to analyze the dramaturgy of Sundanese culture-based political communication in the construction of social media hyperreality. The research focuses on how political actors display Sundanese cultural identity in social media, how cultural symbols are constructed as a political image strategy, and how the public consumes these representations as socio-political reality. Finally, using Goffman's dramaturgical approach and Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, this research is expected to be able to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the study of digital political communication based on local culture, as well as provide a critical understanding of political transformation in the social media era.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive descriptive method to understand the phenomenon of Sundanese culture-based political communication dramaturgy in the construction of social media hyperreality. This approach was chosen because qualitative research is oriented towards understanding the meaning, symbols, and social realities formed through digital communication interactions. According to Creswell (2023), qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning derived from social and cultural phenomena. In addition, the qualitative approach allows researchers to understand in depth how political actors display Sundanese cultural identity in social media and how people interpret these representations as political reality.

Theoretically, this study uses the dramaturgical perspective of Erving Goffman (Walsh, 2022) and the theory of hyperreality from Jean Baudrillard (van Kessel et al., 2025). Dramaturgy theory is used to analyze how political actors construct identity performances through the concept of *front stage* and *back stage* in social media. Meanwhile, hyperreality theory is used to understand how cultural symbols and digital imagery undergo a simulation process so that they are more trusted by the public than actual empirical reality. According to Piliang (2021), digital media hyperreality occurs when people consume symbolic representations as social realities that are considered authentic.

In this study, the object of research is in the form of Sundanese culture-based political communication content published through social media, especially Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. The focus of the research is directed at visual uploads, videos, *captions*, cultural symbols, regional languages, and digital narratives that display Sundanese cultural identity in political communication activities. Thus, research was conducted on the social media accounts of political figures, public officials, and local political figures in West Java who actively use Sundanese cultural symbols in their digital communications. According to Nasrullah (2022), social media is a virtual communication space that allows the formation of cultural identities, symbols, and representations on a massive scale through digital interaction. Furthermore, the data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through digital observation of social media content related to Sundanese culture-based political communication. Observations were carried out by observing the form of symbolic representation, communication style, use of cultural attributes, and audience response to the digital political content. In addition,

primary data is also obtained through documentation in the form of screenshots, videos, public comments, and other digital interactions that are relevant to the focus of the research. According to Bungin (2022), digital observation is an important technique in new media research because it is able to capture the phenomenon of virtual communication contextually and visually. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from scientific journals, books, articles, research reports, as well as various literature related to political communication, Sundanese culture, dramaturgy, hyperreality, and social media. The literature is used to strengthen theoretical analysis and support the interpretation of the phenomenon being studied. In other words, secondary data serves as a conceptual foundation in understanding the relationship between cultural symbols, social media, and the construction of digital political reality.

The data collection process, this research uses observation, documentation, and literature study techniques. Observation was carried out in a non-participatory manner by observing political communication activities on social media without being directly involved in digital interactions. The researcher identified content that displayed Sundanese cultural symbols, such as the use of the Sundanese language, traditional clothing, religious activities, local traditions, and visualization of closeness to the community. Furthermore, documentation is carried out by collecting visual and narrative data that is considered relevant for analysis. The literature study was carried out to obtain a theoretical foundation and strengthen the conceptual understanding of the dramaturgy of political communication and the hyperreality of social media. According to Sugiyono (2025), the combination of observation, documentation, and literature studies in qualitative research aims to obtain in-depth and comprehensive data. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique in this study uses the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. At the data reduction stage, the researcher selects, classifies, and simplifies data based on the focus of the research, namely the representation of Sundanese culture in digital political communication. Then, the data is presented in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate the interpretation of symbols, meanings, and patterns of political communication that appear in social media. The last stage is carried out by drawing conclusions through the process of interpretation of the relationship between digital political dramaturgy and the construction of hyperreality that is formed in society. According to Miles & Huberman (2021), the interactive analysis model allows researchers to carry out the continuous process of data analysis until they gain a deep understanding of the research phenomenon.

In addition to using interactive analysis, this study also utilizes the media semiotics approach to understand the symbolic meaning of Sundanese cultural representations displayed in social media. Researchers interpret signs, symbols, gestures, cultural visualizations, and digital narratives as part of a political imagery strategy that shapes a simulation of social reality. Thus, this study not only sees social media as a means of communication, but also as a space for the production of meaning and the construction of political reality. According to Mulyana (2023), communication symbols in digital media have the power to shape social perception through visual and cultural representations that are shown repeatedly. To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation and theoretical triangulation techniques. Source triangulation is done by comparing different types of data, such as social media posts, public comments, visual documentation, and scientific literature. Meanwhile, theoretical triangulation is carried out by combining dramaturgical perspectives and hyperreality in the data interpretation process. According to Denzin (2017), triangulation in qualitative research aims to increase the credibility and accuracy of data interpretation through the use of various sources and theoretical perspectives. Therefore, the use of triangulation is expected to strengthen the objectivity and validity of research results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research result**

#### **Representation of Sundanese Culture in Digital Political Communication**

Based on the results of observations on various social media accounts of political figures in West Java, this study found that Sundanese culture is used intensively as part of a digital political communication strategy. In general, the representation of Sundanese culture appears in the form of the use of regional languages, traditional clothing, religious symbols, community social activities, and the visualization of simple life that is close to rural communities. The content is published through the Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube platforms which are the main spaces for the formation of digital political images. In various uploads, political figures often use typical Sundanese expressions such as "sampurasun," "hatur nuhun," and "wilujeng," which aim to build emotional closeness with the local community. This finding is in line with the research of Pasaribu (2026) which explains that the use of local cultural symbols in social media is able to strengthen political image and psychological closeness to the people of West Java. In addition, the use of Sundanese cultural attributes is also seen in the visualization of traditional clothing such as iket, pangsi, Sundanese batik, and sarongs combined with symbols of religiosity. Political figures often

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appear in social activities such as recitations, eating with the community (*ngaliwet*), attending traditional events, and visiting traditional markets (Fathony, 2025). This representation shows that Sundanese culture is not only used as a cultural identity, but also as a symbolic instrument in digital political communication. Through these symbols, political actors try to build an image as a leader who is simple, religious, popular, and close to the local culture of the people of West Java. Research by Soffani & Nugroho (2019) shows that Sundanese cultural elements in social media are able to form a culturally strong leader's self-image.

The social media context serves as a visual space that allows local culture to be massively produced and disseminated. Research by Arwansyah et al. (2025) found that content containing elements of Sundanese culture tends to receive a higher public response than formal content that only contains the delivery of work programs or bureaucratic activities. This can be seen from the high number of comments, *likes*, and *shares* on uploads that feature local cultural symbols. The social media public is more interested in content that has emotional closeness and cultural identity than formal and administrative political narratives. This finding is supported by research on the mediatization of politics which explains that social media is the main space for the formation of personal, visual, and emotional political images. Furthermore, the representation of Sundanese culture in digital political communication shows the process of cultural simplification. Sundanese culture is represented in the form of visual symbols that are simple and easily recognizable by the community. For example, the use of Sundanese *iket* is directly associated with local identity and simplicity, while eating with the community is associated as a symbol of social closeness, which can be seen in the following figure 1:



**Figure 1. Visualization and Representation of Sundanese Culture**

Source: [www.rksbmajafm.com](http://www.rksbmajafm.com) (2022)

Figure 1 above shows the use of *iket* as a symbol of Sundanese culture which is often used in digital political communication to build local identity and the impression of cultural closeness. The symbol is widely used in the social media visuals of West Java political figures as part of the image of local culture. Research by Melisa & Yudhistira (2025) found that the use of Sundanese culture in political communication tends to be performative. Political actors display local culture not only as a form of respect for regional identity, but also as a communication strategy aimed at gaining public legitimacy. In various social media content, cultural symbols are displayed repeatedly and consistently so as to form a certain political identity. Political figures who often use Sundanese cultural symbols are finally perceived as figures who are close to the local community and understand the character of regional culture. On the other hand, the representation of Sundanese culture in social media also shows the process of cultural commodification. Local culture is produced as digital content that has popularity and visual appeal value. Cultural symbols are used to increase audience engagement while strengthening political imagery in the digital space. As a result, Sundanese culture has undergone a transformation from a social identity to a symbolic commodity used in social media political competition. Based on these findings, this study shows that the representation of Sundanese culture in digital political communication cannot be separated from the importance of political imagery and legitimacy. Local culture is used as a symbolic instrument to build emotional connections with the community while strengthening the popularity of political figures on social media. Thus, social media has become a new space for the reproduction of cultural identities that are not only cultural, but also political and performative.

## Political Dramaturgy in Social Media

The results of the study show that Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media has a dramaturgical character as the concept put forward by Erving Goffman. From a dramaturgical perspective, social

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media functions as a *front stage* where political actors display certain identities and images to the public. Political figures consciously build the impression of being a simple, religious, popular leader, and close to Sundanese culture through various visual representations that are published consistently on social media. Pasaribu research (2026) found that digital political communication in West Java emphasizes more emotional and symbolic approaches to build public legitimacy. In addition, research by Arwansyah et al. (2025) found that every digital political content is produced with highly structured *impression management*. Political actors not only pay attention to the content of the message, but also pay attention to visual aspects such as the angle of the shot, facial expressions, dress style, background music, and the selection of the location of the activity. Content that features activities with small communities, visits to villages, or religious activities is packaged in such a way that it looks natural and authentic. In fact, in reality, most of the content is the result of media production that has been strategically designed. These findings show that digital political communication has transformed into a visual performance that relies heavily on social media aesthetics, as shown in Figure 2 below:



Figure 2. Digital Political Dramaturgy Visualization

Source: Katadata.co.id (2024)

Figure 2 above shows how social media and political communication are positioned as symbolic performance spaces. The visualization of political communication, digital propaganda, and the formation of public opinion shows that *impression management* is an important part of the political dramaturgy of social media. The concept of *front stage* is very dominant in digital political communication. Political figures display a humanist and emotional side that can increase public sympathy. They showed simple activities such as eating at small stalls, talking to farmers, helping the community, and attending local cultural activities. The visualization aims to form the perception that political figures have social closeness and concern for the community. Thus, social media has become a space for political identity performances that are highly dependent on the creation of a positive image. Meanwhile, *the concept of backstage* in dramaturgy tends to be invisible on social media. The results of this study found that political realities related to elite conflicts, power strategies, political interests, and policy issues are rarely openly displayed to the public. Social media is more filled with visual representations that are positive, emotional, and populist. As a result, people only see certain parts of the political reality that have been constructed through digital media.

Furthermore, the research of Setiawan & Ananda (2025) found that political dramaturgy in social media is reinforced by the logic of digital algorithms. Content that has emotional elements, local culture, and social closeness is easier to gain public attention and get wider distribution. Therefore, political actors tend to produce content that emphasizes symbolic aspects rather than policy substance. Politics eventually turned into a visual performance oriented towards popularity and audience engagement. Digital political dramaturgy also creates the illusion of authenticity. The public on social media often considers the representations displayed to be real reality. Political figures who actively display local social and cultural activities are considered closer to the community than figures who rarely appear on social media. In these conditions, digital images become more important than empirical realities regarding leadership qualities or real political achievements. Based on the results of the study, it can be understood that social media has changed the practice of political communication to be more performative, symbolic, and visual.

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Digital political dramaturgy allows political actors to manage identities and shape public perception through the continuous performance of Sundanese cultural symbols. Thus, political communication in the era of social media is no longer only related to the delivery of political information, but also about how social reality is constructed and shown to the public through digital media.

## Culture as a Political Instrument

Sundanese culture in digital political communication no longer only functions as a social identity of the people of West Java, but has undergone a transformation into a symbolic political instrument. In this context, cultural symbols are used by political actors to build legitimacy, increase emotional closeness, and strengthen self-image on social media. Representations of Sundanese culture appear in various forms such as the use of regional languages, traditional clothing, local traditions, religious activities, to communication styles that highlight the simplicity and friendliness typical of the Sundanese people. In addition, this study found that Sundanese cultural symbols are used consistently and repeatedly in various social media content. Political figures often appear using Sundanese iket, speak in local dialects, attend cultural events, and show social interaction with rural communities. The use of these symbols aims to build the perception that political figures have a cultural closeness to the people of West Java. In these conditions, Sundanese culture becomes an effective political communication tool because it is able to build a sense of collective identity in the midst of a digital society. Presented in picture 3 below:



Figure 3. Visualization of Sundanese Culture as a Political Symbol

Source: detik.com (2024)

Figure 3 above shows how Sundanese cultural symbols are used in political communication activities to build closeness of identity with the community. The use of traditional clothing, local language, and cultural activities is part of the symbolic strategy in digital social and political media. Furthermore, the study found that Sundanese culture is represented visually and emotionally so that it is easily accepted by social media audiences. The cultural symbols displayed tend to be simple and easy to recognize, such as eating with the community (*ngaliwet*), visits to Islamic boarding schools, traditional art performances, and mutual cooperation activities. The visualization creates the image that political figures are part of the life of the local community. As a result, it is easier for the public to build emotional closeness to characters who display cultural identities than to characters who use a formal communication approach.

From the perspective of political communication, the use of Sundanese culture as a political symbol also shows the process of cultural commodification. Local culture is produced as digital content that has the value of popularity and visual appeal on social media. Cultural symbols are used to increase *engagement*, expand audience reach, and reinforce political imagery in the digital space. Thus, culture is no longer only understood as a social value system, but also as a strategic instrument in digital political competition. On the other hand, research found that the use of Sundanese cultural symbols in political communication often highlights the visual aspect more than the cultural substance itself. Political figures feature more cultural elements that are popular and easy for public consumption, while the philosophical value of Sundanese culture is rarely explained in depth. As a result, local culture has undergone a simplification of meaning to become just a visual symbol that serves to strengthen political imagery. In addition, social media accelerates the reproduction of cultural symbols through the continuous distribution of content. Viral cultural content will more easily shape social perceptions and political identities in society. Research found that social media people tend to associate the use of Sundanese culture with simple, popular, and religious leadership characters. In these conditions, cultural symbols have great power in shaping public opinion and digital political legitimacy. Based on the results of the research, it can be understood that Sundanese culture has undergone a transformation into a political symbolic instrument in digital communication. Social media allows cultural symbols

to be massively produced, displayed, and consumed as part of a political imagery strategy. Therefore, local culture not only functions as a social identity, but also as a tool for image construction and legitimacy in social media politics.

### The Construction of Political Hyperreality on Social Media

Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media has formed a political hyperreality as proposed by Jean Baudrillard. In this condition, media representation becomes more dominant than actual empirical reality. The social media public judges political figures more based on digital images displayed through visual content than based on real performance or socio-political conditions in the field. In addition, the study found that Sundanese cultural symbols displayed on social media create a simulation of political reality that is consumed by the public as social truth. Political figures who often display local cultural activities are perceived as simple, religious, close to the people, and concerned about the community. In fact, these images do not necessarily fully represent the real political reality. Thus, social media has created a simulated space where visual representations are more reliable than empirical facts. As can be seen in the following figure 4:



**Figure 4. Visualization of Political Hyperreality on Social Media**

Source: [retizen.republika.co.id](http://retizen.republika.co.id) (2024)

The image above shows how social media builds a visual and symbolic-based political representation. Digital political content is produced in such a way that it creates a certain image that is then consumed by the public as a socio-political reality. Further, the study found that political hyperreality is amplified by social media characters that are based on visual, emotional, and virality. Content that displays social proximity, local cultural activities, and religious symbols is more likely to attract public attention than formal and complex policy discussions. As a result, the public focuses more on the personal image of political figures than on the substance of the program or the quality of the leadership they have.

This context makes social media function as a space for reality simulation production. Political figures are constantly producing content that displays a positive image through photos, videos, reels, and emotional narratives. The repetition of cultural symbols and the visualization of social closeness finally form a collective perception that the digital image is a real representation of the character of political figures. Thus, the boundary between reality and imagery becomes increasingly blurred. On the other hand, the research found that people as social media audiences are often unaware of the symbolic construction processes that occur in digital political communication. Many social media users accept cultural representations and political imagery as a form of authenticity without verifying the empirical reality on the ground. This condition shows that the hyperreality of social media has the ability to form a strong socio-political perception through the continuous reproduction of symbols. In addition, social media algorithms also play a role in reinforcing political hyperreality. Content that gets high engagement will appear more often in the user's *timeline*, increasing the likelihood of reproducing certain political imagery. Therefore, political figures are increasingly encouraged to produce emotional and populist symbolic content in order to gain wider public attention. Politics has finally shifted from a space of rational deliberation to a space of visual performance oriented towards digital popularity. Based on the results of the study, it can be understood that political hyperreality in social media occurs when digital representations are more trusted than empirical reality. Sundanese culture-based political communication is part of the process of simulating reality that shapes public perception of leadership and social legitimacy. Therefore, social media is not only a means of political communication, but also a space for the production of symbols and the construction of socio-political reality in a digital society.

### The Role of Social Media Algorithms in Political Dramaturgy

Social media algorithms have a very significant role in strengthening the dramaturgy of Sundanese culture-based political communication. In this context, social media algorithms not only serve as an information distribution system, but also become a mechanism that determines what political content is most viewed, liked, and shared by

the public. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube work based on audience engagement levels such as the number of *likes*, comments, impressions, and *shares*. As a result, political content that is emotional, visual, and close to local culture tends to go viral more easily than content that is formal or substantive. In addition, the study found that political actors consciously adjusted their communication strategies to the logic of social media algorithms. Political figures often produce content that features simple activities, interactions with small communities, the use of Sundanese language, and local cultural symbols because they are considered more effective in attracting public attention. Such content has been shown to receive a higher response than posts about public policy or government programs that are administrative in nature. Social media algorithms indirectly form a more symbolic and performative pattern of political communication, as presented in the following figure 5:



**Figure 5. Visualization of the Role of Social Media Algorithms**

Source: katadata.co.id (2024)

The image above shows how social media algorithms work in distributing digital political content. Content that has emotional, visually appealing, and cultural closeness tends to gain a wider reach, thus strengthening political imagery in the digital space. Furthermore, the study found that social media algorithms drive the birth of visual popularity-based politics. Political figures who actively produce local cultural content and social activities are more likely to gain public attention because the algorithmic system prioritizes content that is widely discussed by users. In these conditions, political communication has shifted from the orientation of substance to the orientation of media performance. Politics is no longer only judged based on ideas or policies, but also on the ability of political actors to build an attractive visual image on social media. In a dramaturgical perspective, social media algorithms reinforce *the dominance of the front stage* in digital political communication. Political actors are encouraged to continue to maintain a positive image through uploads designed according to the preferences of digital audiences. They display activities that are humane, simple, religious, and close to Sundanese culture because the image has proven to be effective in increasing public interaction.

Meanwhile, *backstage* aspects related to political conflicts, elite interests, or bureaucratic problems are rarely shown because they are considered algorithmically unattractive. In addition, research shows that social media algorithms also create symbolic repetition effects. Sundanese cultural content that often appears in *users' timelines* eventually forms a strong social perception of the identity of certain political figures. People are constantly receiving the same cultural visualizations so that the digital image is considered an authentic reality. In these conditions, social media algorithms act as symbols reproduction machines that reinforce political hyperreality. On the other hand, the study found that the logic of social media algorithms has the potential to reduce the quality of democratic political communication. Viral content tends to take precedence over in-depth policy discussions. As a result, people are exposed to more symbols, imagery, and emotional narratives than substantive information about political programs or government performance. Politics has finally turned into a digital popularity competition that relies heavily on the ability of political actors to manage social media image. The results of this study can be understood that social media algorithms have a great influence in shaping the dramaturgy of digital politics. Algorithms not only determine the distribution of political content, but also shape the way political actors produce images and the way people perceive political reality. Therefore, Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media cannot be separated from the algorithmic logic that encourages the dominance of symbols, cultural visualization, and digital performativity in the modern political space.

### **The Social Impact of Culturally Based Political Communication**

Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media has a complex and ambivalent social impact. On the one hand, the use of local culture in political communication is able to strengthen the cultural identity of the people of West Java. The representation of Sundanese culture through social media creates a sense of emotional

closeness between political figures and the community because cultural symbols are considered to represent local values that are familiar to the social life of the community. The use of Sundanese language, religious symbols, and local cultural activities is able to build a sense of togetherness and collective identity in the digital space. In addition, the study found that Sundanese culture-based political communication can increase public participation in digital public spaces. Political content packaged through local cultural symbols is easier to attract public attention than formal communication that is bureaucratic. As a result, people have become more active in commenting, sharing content, and engaging in political conversations on social media. Meanwhile, local culture serves as a bridge of communication that strengthens the emotional connection between leaders and the community. As shown in the following Figure 6:



**Figure 6. Visualization of the Social Impact of Digital Political Communication**

Figure 6 above shows how social media has become a space for public interaction in digital political communication. Local culture and social symbols are used to build emotional closeness while increasing community participation in the digital space. On the other hand, the study found that the use of Sundanese culture in political communication also has the potential to cause a simplification of cultural meaning. Cultural symbols are more often displayed as attractive visual elements than as deeply understood social values. As a result, Sundanese culture has been reduced in meaning to just a tool for political imagery and digital commodities. In these conditions, local culture is no longer positioned as a legacy of community values and philosophies, but as an instrument to gain political popularity on social media. Furthermore, research shows that Sundanese culture-based political communication can affect the way people assess leadership quality. The social media public tends to be more easily influenced by visual images and cultural symbols than by rational judgments of political policies or performance. Political figures who actively display local culture are often considered more popular and care for the community even though the empirical reality is not necessarily so. Thus, digital political communication has the potential to create social perceptions that are more emotional than substantive.

In the context of digital democracy, this phenomenon shows a shift in people's political orientation. Politics is no longer understood primarily through the discussion of ideas and work programs, but through visual performances and social media imagery. People interact more with cultural symbols and emotional narratives than with complex policy information. As a result, the quality of digital public spaces risks being dominated by imagery politics that place popularity as the primary measure of political legitimacy. On the other hand, the research also found that political communication based on local culture is able to strengthen the existence of Sundanese culture in the digital era. Social media allows local culture to be known more widely by the younger generation and people outside the region. Sundanese cultural symbols produced in political content indirectly introduce the cultural identity of West Java to a larger audience. Therefore, social media has a dual role, namely as a space for political imagery as well as a space for local cultural reproduction. It can be understood that political communication based on Sundanese culture has a multidimensional social impact. On the one hand, local culture is able to strengthen social identity and community participation in digital political communication. However, on the other hand, the use of culture as an instrument of political imagery has the potential to create a social hyperreality that blurs the boundaries between media representation and empirical reality. Therefore, people need to have critical digital literacy in order to be able to understand that cultural representation in social media does not always reflect the real political reality.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Representation of Sundanese Culture in Digital Political Communication**

The results of the study show that Sundanese culture is used as a political communication strategy to build emotional closeness with the people of West Java. The use of Sundanese language, traditional clothing, and local cultural activities became symbols that strengthened the political identity of figures on social media. This finding is

in line with the view of Mulyana (2023) who states that local culture has symbolic power in shaping social relations and public communication. In addition, Nasrullah (2022) explained that social media allows for the massive reproduction of cultural symbols through digital visualization. Meanwhile, Fahrisky & Rahmawati (2025) affirm that local cultural identity is still a strong source of social legitimacy in contemporary Indonesian politics.

### **Political Dramaturgy in Social Media**

This study shows that digital political communication based on Sundanese culture has a dramaturgical character as Erving Goffman's concept (Walsh, 2022). Political figures use social media as a *front stage* to display the image of simplicity, religiosity, and closeness to society. Political content is produced visually and emotionally in order to build an authentic impression in front of the public. These findings are supported by Tiisala (2022) who explains that digital media works through the logic of public attention and emotional engagement. In addition, Mancini (2024) states that digital political communication in Indonesia is increasingly dominated by the performativity of social media and the management of political images.

### **Culture as a Political Instrument**

The results of the study show that Sundanese culture has undergone a transformation into a symbolic instrument in digital political communication. Cultural symbols such as Sundanese iket, regional languages, and local traditions are used to build political legitimacy and strengthen social closeness with the community. This finding supports the view of Piliang (2021) regarding cultural commodification in the digital media era. In addition, Mulyana (2023) explains that cultural symbols in public communication are often used to build social loyalty and collective identity. Meanwhile, Bungin (2022) emphasized that social media has turned culture into a visual commodity produced for the sake of digital popularity and legitimacy.

### **The Construction of Political Hyperreality on Social Media**

This study found that Sundanese culture-based political communication has formed a political hyperreality as Jean Baudrillard's concept (van Kessel et al., 2025). The representation of social media is more trusted by the public than the empirical reality in the field. Political figures who actively display local cultural symbols are perceived as simple and popular leaders although not necessarily in accordance with socio-political reality. This finding is reinforced by Piliang (2021) who explains that digital hyperreality is formed through the reproduction of symbols and media simulations. In addition, Marshall McLuhan (Harris, 2022) stated that the media has the ability to shape the way people understand social reality through the dominance of visual and communication technology.

### **The Role of Social Media Algorithms in Political Dramaturgy**

The results of the study show that social media algorithms play an important role in strengthening the dramaturgy of digital politics. Content that is emotional, visual, and based on local culture is more likely to gain public attention than substantive content about policy. This condition encourages political actors to produce images that are in accordance with the preferences of social media algorithms. These findings are in line with the views of Shoshana Zuboff (Tiisala, 2022) regarding the logic of surveillance capitalism in digital media. In addition, Nasrullah (2022) explained that social media algorithms work based on the level of audience engagement (*engagement*). Meanwhile, Sjoraida (2025) emphasized that modern digital politics increasingly depends on visual performance and popularity of social media.

### **The Social Impact of Culturally Based Political Communication**

This research shows that Sundanese culture-based political communication has an ambivalent social impact. On the one hand, the use of local culture is able to strengthen cultural identity and increase public participation in digital political communication. However, on the other hand, Sundanese culture has the potential to undergo commodification because it is used more as a tool for political imagery than as a substantive social value. This finding is in accordance with the view of Bungin (2022) who explains that social media encourages culture to become a digital commodity. In addition, Fahrisky & Rahmawati (2025) stated that local culture has a strategic position in the formation of the socio-political identity of Indonesian society. Meanwhile, Mulyana (2023) emphasized that cultural communication in digital media has a great influence on the formation of people's social perceptions and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media has developed into a practice of digital political dramaturgy that places cultural symbols as the main instrument in the formation of political image and legitimacy. Political actors in West Java actively utilize Sundanese cultural elements, such as regional languages, traditional clothing, religious symbols, and social activities of local communities to build a simple, popular, religious, and close impression to the community. Social media is a *front stage* that allows political imagery to be done visually, emotionally, and planned through *impression management*. In addition, this study shows that Sundanese culture has undergone a functional transformation from a social identity to a symbolic commodity of digital politics. Cultural symbols are constantly reproduced in social media content to increase popularity, audience engagement, and public legitimacy. In these conditions, local culture not only functions as a representation of cultural values, but also as a means of political communication that is performative and populist.

This research also found that digital political communication based on Sundanese culture has given birth to political hyperreality as the concept put forward by Jean Baudrillard. The representation of social media is more trusted by the public than the empirical reality in the field. The public tends to judge political figures based on visual imagery and cultural symbols displayed on social media rather than on the substance of real policies or political performance. As a result, the line between political reality and digital imagery has become increasingly blurred. In addition, social media algorithms play a big role in reinforcing political dramaturgy and the construction of such hyperreality. Content that is emotional, visual, and based on local culture is easier to go viral and gain public attention than content that is substantive in nature. This condition encourages political actors to focus more on visual performance and digital popularity than on the quality of rational and educational political communication. On the other hand, political communication based on Sundanese culture has an ambivalent social impact. On the one hand, the use of local culture can strengthen cultural identity and increase public participation in digital political communication. However, on the other hand, local culture has the potential to undergo simplification and commodification because it is used more as a tool for political imagery than as a substantive social value. Therefore, critical digital literacy is needed so that people are able to understand that cultural representation in social media does not always reflect the actual socio-political reality. Thus, this study confirms that the dramaturgy of Sundanese culture-based political communication on social media has formed a political hyperreality in a digital society. Social media is no longer only a means of political communication, but also a space for the production of symbols, simulations of reality, and the formation of public perceptions that influence the way people understand political leadership and legitimacy in the digital era. This study suggests that people increase critical digital literacy in understanding political communication on social media so that they are not easily influenced by symbolic imagery. In addition, political actors are expected to use Sundanese culture authentically and educationally, not just as a tool for digital popularity, so that local cultural values are maintained and not overly commodified. For further research, it is recommended to examine the comparison of local culture-based political communication in various regions of Indonesia and analyze the influence of social media algorithms on the formation of political opinions in more depth.

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## DRAMATURGY OF SUNDANESE CULTURE-BASED POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA HYPERREALITY

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