

## Branding Strategies and Digital Journalism for Promoting Sulam Angkinan An Ethnographic Study in Sungai Lais, Palembang

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by traditional Sulam Angkinan embroidery artisans in Sungai Lais Village, Palembang, in gaining public attention and preserving their cultural heritage in the digital age. This study aims to explore how branding strategies and digital journalism through social media serve as tools for cultural empowerment and enhanced economic visibility. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and social media content analysis involving local artisans, community leaders, and digital content creators. Branding strategies are a crucial element in building the identity, image, and differentiation of a product, organization, or destination amidst increasingly competitive market conditions. The research findings indicate that narratives disseminated through social media can enhance the visibility of Sulam Angkinan and revive cultural identity among artisans and the community. This study concludes that digital journalism, when combined with the right branding strategy, serves as an effective means of preserving local heritage while reaching a wider audience. These findings enrich the field of mass communication by deepening our understanding of the intersection between digital media practices and the promotion of traditional culture. This study recommends strengthening digital literacy and fostering collaboration among artisans, media practitioners, and cultural institutions to support the sustainable promotion of Sulam Angkinan in the digital age.

**Keywords:** Sulam Angkinan, Digital Journalism, Cultural Branding, Ethnographic Approach, Social Media Communication

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas tantangan yang dihadapi oleh perajin sulam tradisional Sulam Angkinan di Kelurahan Sungai Lais, Palembang, dalam memperoleh perhatian publik dan menjaga kelestarian warisan budaya di era digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana strategi branding dan jurnalisme digital melalui media sosial menjadi alat pemberdayaan budaya dan peningkatan visibilitas ekonomi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif etnografi, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis konten media sosial yang melibatkan perajin lokal, tokoh masyarakat, dan pembuat konten digital. Strategi branding merupakan elemen krusial dalam membangun identitas, citra, dan diferensiasi suatu produk, organisasi, maupun destinasi di tengah persaingan pasar yang semakin kompetitif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa narasi melalui media sosial mampu meningkatkan visibilitas Sulam Angkinan dan membangkitkan kembali identitas budaya di kalangan perajin dan komunitas. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa jurnalisme digital, ketika dipadukan dengan strategi branding yang tepat, menjadi sarana efektif untuk melestarikan warisan lokal sekaligus menjangkau audiens yang lebih luas. Temuan ini memperkaya kajian komunikasi massa dengan memperdalam pemahaman tentang persinggungan antara praktik media

*digital dan promosi budaya tradisional. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penguatan literasi digital dan kolaborasi antara perajin, praktisi media, serta lembaga budaya untuk mendukung promosi berkelanjutan Sulam Angkinan di era digital..*

**Kata Kunci:** *Sulam Angkinan, Jurnalisme digital, Branding budaya, Pendekatan Etnografi, Komunikasi Media Sosial*

## INTRODUCTION

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage has become increasingly dependent on the capacity of local communities to adapt to digital transformation. As new generations become more integrated into globalized digital ecosystems, traditional crafts such as Sulam Angkinan face an identity crisis, losing both their cultural significance and economic viability. The decline in intergenerational transmission, limited market access, and the diminishing perception of traditional embroidery as a modern fashion or lifestyle commodity pose serious threats to its sustainability.

In addressing these challenges, digital communication offers a contemporary solution grounded in mass communication theories, particularly uses and gratifications theory and media ecology. Uses and gratifications theory posits that audiences actively seek media content that satisfies their needs and preferences, thereby requiring cultural promotion to be engaging and relevant. Media ecology, as introduced by Neil Postman, emphasizes that media environments shape not only communication practices but also cultural meaning and identity.

Previous studies have highlighted the effectiveness of digital storytelling in promoting cultural identity. Azmi and Abdullah (2021) demonstrated that Instagram-based campaigns significantly increased youth engagement with traditional batik in Malaysia. Similarly, Nugroho et al. (2020) found that narrative-based marketing of local crafts strengthens emotional connections and enhances consumer loyalty. These findings suggest that social media and storytelling play a crucial role in revitalizing traditional culture.

Despite these advancements, a significant research gap remains. Most prior studies adopt a top-down approach, focusing on institutional strategies or audience responses, while overlooking the perspectives of artisans themselves. The lived experiences of artisans as both cultural custodians and active digital content creators are still underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by positioning itself at the intersection of cultural studies and communication strategies. It explores how artisans engage with branding and digital journalism practices as tools for cultural revitalization. In this context, artisans are not merely subjects of representation but active agents who shape and communicate their own cultural narratives.

Using an ethnographic approach, this research captures the interaction between artisan practices, community identity, and media usage. By focusing on the community of Sungai Lais, Palembang, it provides a grounded understanding of how cultural meaning is negotiated within digital spaces.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:  
(1) How do local artisans perceive and apply branding and digital journalism practices?  
(2) What role does social media play in reconstructing the identity of Sulam Angkinan?  
(3) How can these practices contribute to the sustainable promotion of cultural heritage?

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of ethnographic immersion with digital media analysis, offering an insider perspective on cultural communication practices. It

contributes to both theoretical discourse and practical applications, particularly for policymakers, cultural institutions, and community organizations aiming to empower local artisans through digital strategies.

Ultimately, this study highlights the potential of digital media as a platform for both cultural preservation and economic transformation, reinforcing the role of artisans in sustaining and redefining cultural heritage in the digital era.

#### Literature Review

This study draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical foundation combining **Cultural Studies**, **Branding Theory**, and **Media Ecology** to understand how traditional crafts like *Sulam Angkinan* are mediated and transformed in digital environments.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Cultural Studies, Branding Theory, and Media Ecology**

Cultural Studies provides a lens to explore how media serves as a site for cultural negotiation, identity construction, and resistance (Hall, 2016). In the context of traditional crafts, cultural texts such as embroidery are not only artifacts but active symbols shaped by media practices and audience interpretation. Branding Theory emphasizes the strategic development of meaning through visual identity, storytelling, and emotional engagement. As noted by Aronczyk and Powers (2019), branding transcends commercial practice and functions as a socio-cultural tool to shape how traditions are perceived and valued in the public sphere.

Media Ecology, first conceptualized by Neil Postman, has been further developed to explore how changes in media technology alter communicative behavior and cultural production. According to Deuze and Witschge (2020), digital platforms restructure the ecosystem of storytelling, offering new modes for transmitting cultural narratives across generations. Cultural studies highlight how media serves as a site of cultural negotiation and identity construction (Hall, 2016). Media ecology theory further explains how communication technologies influence social interaction and cultural production (Postman, 2020).

#### **Role of Digital Journalism in Heritage Promotion**

Digital journalism has evolved beyond traditional reporting into participatory storytelling, community journalism, and user-generated content. Research by Siapera and Papadopoulou (2016) suggests that digital journalism provides new opportunities for heritage communities to narrate their own stories and counter mainstream narratives.

Recent studies show how digital journalism helps local communities to document, disseminate, and promote cultural heritage in real-time, often through visual content, micro-stories, and live interaction (Lewis et al., 2019). In Southeast Asia, local media initiatives have successfully integrated journalistic techniques to revive interest in endangered cultural practices (Ismail & Nordin, 2021). Digital journalism has expanded beyond traditional news production into participatory storytelling and community-based narratives (Deuze & Witschge, 2020). Through blogs, social media, and online video platforms, communities can share their own cultural stories and perspectives.

#### **Branding and Narrative Construction in Digital Spaces**

The construction of brand narratives in digital platforms is increasingly influenced by authenticity, visual storytelling, and cultural symbolism. As Kozinets et al. (2017) emphasize,

storytelling in digital branding is co-created through community interaction, hashtags, and audience engagement.

Visual platforms like Instagram and Facebook are used not only for commercial branding but also to emotionally connect audiences with cultural heritage. For example, Batik and Songket campaigns often rely on symbolic imagery, heritage discourse, and testimonials to construct legitimacy and appeal (Nugroho et al., 2020; Azmi & Abdullah, 2021). Branding in the digital age is not limited to commercial marketing but also involves cultural storytelling and symbolic meaning (Aronczyk & Powers, 2019). Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow communities to construct narratives that connect cultural heritage with contemporary audiences.

### **Relevant Case Studies on Local Craft and Digital Communication**

Several empirical studies have addressed how local artisans adapt to digital technologies. Zulaikha and Hasan (2020) documented how rural artisans in Java adopted Instagram and YouTube as low-cost promotional tools that allowed for self-representation. Similarly, Prasetyo and Widodo (2022) highlighted that narrative branding strategies increased product visibility and fostered community pride in marginalized areas.

Moreover, Azmi and Abdullah (2021) found that the use of digital storytelling in Malaysian Batik culture contributed not only to economic gains but also to intergenerational cultural transmission. These case studies reveal both the potentials and the limitations faced by traditional artists navigating digital spaces.

This study integrates Cultural Studies, Branding Theory, and Media Ecology into a unified conceptual framework. Cultural Studies (Hall, 2016) provides the foundation for understanding how meaning, identity, and representation are constructed and contested within media texts. Branding Theory extends this by explaining how cultural meaning is strategically packaged through storytelling, symbolism, and emotional engagement (Aronczyk & Powers, 2019). Meanwhile, Media Ecology highlights how digital platforms reshape communicative environments and influence how cultural narratives are produced and circulated (Postman, 2020; Deuze & Witschge, 2020). Together, these perspectives frame digital branding not merely as a promotional tool, but as a cultural process in which artisans actively negotiate identity, authenticity, and visibility within platform-based ecosystems.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how digital journalism and branding strategies are used to promote Sulam Angkinan as a cultural and economic symbol. Ethnography was chosen for its strength in capturing lived experiences, local meanings, and communicative practices within a specific cultural setting.

### **Fieldwork Site**

The research was conducted in Kelurahan Sungai Lais, Palembang, a community known for its strong tradition of Sulam Angkinan embroidery. The site was selected based on its relevance as the cultural hub for this traditional craft and the presence of active artisan groups engaging with social media platforms. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of four months (June–September 2024), allowing prolonged engagement with the community and deeper immersion into daily cultural and digital practices.

### **Data Collection Techniques:**

Data were collected through three primary methods:

1. **In-depth interviews** with traditional embroiderers, community leaders, and digital content creators involved in promoting Sulam Angkinan.
2. **Participant observation** during the embroidery-making process, local exhibitions, and digital content production activities to understand daily practices and communication routines.
3. **Online content analysis** of selected Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube accounts managed by the artisans or community promoters, focusing on narrative style, visual presentation, audience interaction, and cultural framing.

### **Sampling Strategy and Participant Profiles :**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research questions. The sample consisted of 8 active artisans, 2 local community organizers, and 3 digital media practitioners involved in crafting the online image of Sulam Angkinan. The participants varied in age, level of digital literacy, and length of experience in cultural production. All names were anonymized using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The study involved 13 participants, consisting of :

- 8 artisans (6 female, 2 male), aged 25–60 years, with 5–30 years of experience
- 2 community leaders (female, aged 40–55)
- 3 digital content creators (aged 20–35)

### **Data Analysis Procedure:**

The data were analyzed thematically using qualitative coding, where emerging patterns and categories were identified across interviews, observations, and online content. A total of 30 social media posts (Instagram and Facebook) were selected using purposive sampling based on: relevance to Sulam Angkinan promotion, engagement level (likes, comments, shares) narrative richness (captions, storytelling elements)

The coding process was iterative and grounded in the data, allowing for contextual interpretation and theoretical reflection based on cultural communication frameworks.

### **Ethical Considerations:**

Ethical clearance was ensured by obtaining informed consent from all participants prior to interviews and observations. Pseudonyms were used in the data presentation to protect identities, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The research was conducted with respect for cultural sensitivities and community norms in Sungai Lais.

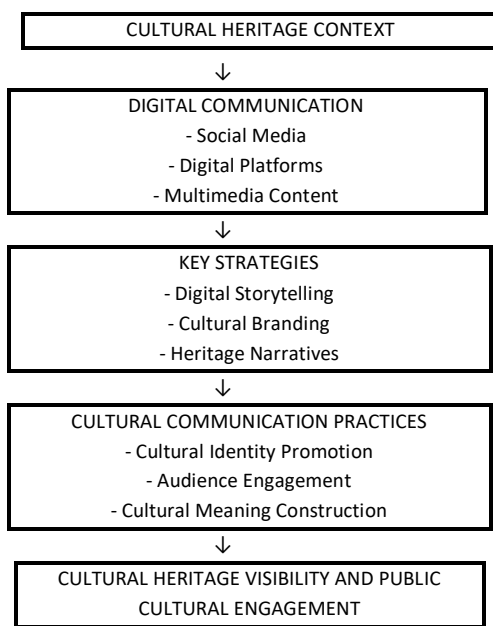
### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed a thematic coding procedure consisting of three stages:

1. Open coding to identify key concepts from interview transcripts.
2. Axial coding to group related themes such as digital storytelling and cultural branding.
3. Selective coding to develop broader interpretations related to cultural communication practices.

Figure 1.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Digital Cultural Communication in Cultural Heritage



Adaptasi dari Kasemsarn & Nickpour (2025); Zhang & Xu (2024); Valtolina (2016); dan Lin et al. (2025)

Figure 1 illustrates the interaction between cultural heritage context, digital media infrastructure, and communication strategies. Social media platforms function as enabling environments where digital storytelling, cultural branding, and heritage narratives are produced. These strategies lead to cultural identity construction, audience engagement, and meaning-making processes, which ultimately enhance cultural visibility and public participation. The framework emphasizes that communication is not linear but iterative and shaped by both technological affordances and cultural agency, illustrates the conceptual framework derived from the thematic coding analysis. The model shows that cultural heritage communication occurs within a broader cultural heritage context. Digital communication channels such as social media, digital platforms, and multimedia content function as communication infrastructures. These infrastructures enable key strategies including digital storytelling, cultural branding, and heritage narratives. Through these strategies, cultural communication practices emerge in the form of cultural identity promotion, audience engagement, and cultural meaning construction. Ultimately, these processes contribute to increased cultural heritage visibility and public cultural engagement.

**Data Validity**

Data validity was ensured through triangulation, comparing interview results, field observations, and digital content analysis. Member checking was also conducted to confirm interpretations with selected participants.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Local Artisans’ Perception of Digital Branding**

The local artisans of *Sulam Angkinan* in Sungai Lais exhibit a growing awareness of the role digital branding plays in the sustainability of their craft. For many, the concept of “branding” was initially unfamiliar or associated only with large-scale businesses. However, through

informal workshops and interactions with younger community members familiar with social media, artisans began to understand branding as a form of storytelling and identity preservation.

Interviews with senior artisans revealed a sense of pride in seeing their work recognized online, especially when shared by influencers or reposted by cultural pages. “It feels like the outside world finally sees what we do,” remarked one artisan, whose design was featured in a regional tourism campaign. The artisans recognize that branding is not only about logos or visual identity but also about communicating the cultural significance behind every stitch, motif, and color pattern, “We are not only selling embroidery, but also the story behind it. Every motif has meaning.” (Artisan A, 52 years). “Sometimes we feel unsure whether to follow trends or preserve tradition. We are afraid of losing our identity.” (Artisan B, 34 years)

Interestingly, many artisans expressed concern about “over-modernizing” their image, fearing that digital adaptation might dilute the authenticity of their craft. This reveals a complex tension between innovation and cultural preservation, highlighting the need for community-sensitive branding strategies that honor tradition while embracing technological tools.

Rather than merely aligning with existing theories, the findings reveal a more dynamic interaction between structure and agency. While Castells (2017) emphasizes networked identity formation, this study shows that artisans actively negotiate visibility within algorithmically constrained platforms. Similarly, Hall’s encoding/decoding model is extended in this context, where artisans not only encode meaning but continuously adapt narratives based on audience feedback and platform dynamics. Jenkins’ concept of participatory culture is also critically nuanced, as participation is unevenly distributed due to disparities in digital literacy and algorithmic visibility.

### Storytelling Strategies on Instagram and Facebook

A significant portion of digital promotion occurs on Instagram and Facebook, where images and captions function as the primary medium for storytelling. From the analysis of 30 curated posts across artisan-run accounts, four key storytelling strategies were identified:

1. **Personal Narratives** , Many posts feature personal reflections or stories from the artisans themselves. Captions often include phrases such as “This pattern reminds me of my grandmother...” or “We used to make this motif during the rice harvest season,” anchoring each piece within a lived experience.
2. **Cultural Education** , Posts explain the meaning behind motifs, colors, and techniques, transforming social media into an educational platform. These posts tend to receive higher engagement, particularly from younger audiences who are unfamiliar with the cultural context.
3. **Behind-the-Scenes Process** , Time-lapse videos, workshop photos, and process reels show the complexity and craftsmanship involved in creating each piece. These visual narratives build appreciation and reinforce the value of handmade goods in contrast to mass production.
4. **Customer Testimonials and Use Cases** , Images of customers wearing or using the embroidery help bridge traditional craft with contemporary use. Captions emphasize the continued relevance of *Sulam Angkinan*, showing it not only as heritage but also as wearable art.

The deliberate use of hashtags such as #SulamAngkinan, #WarisanPalembang, and #CulturalCraft also plays a role in increasing discoverability and creating a sense of digital community.

### **Role of Community in Shaping Online Identity**

One of the most prominent findings from the fieldwork is the communal nature of *Sulam Angkinan* branding efforts. Rather than individual competition, there is a strong sense of shared cultural mission. Several artisan groups collaborate to create unified visual campaigns and cross-promote each other's products.

Community leaders, particularly women, have played a crucial role in facilitating digital transitions. In several instances, younger members of the community often daughters or nieces of the artisans take on the responsibility of managing social media accounts. This intergenerational collaboration ensures that the traditional knowledge is preserved while the digital fluency gap is bridged.

Moreover, digital identity is not shaped solely by individual posts but emerges from collective interaction. Comments from followers, shares from local tourism boards, and media coverage all contribute to shaping the narrative of *Sulam Angkinan* as not merely a product but a community legacy. This aligns with Castells' (2017) theory on the networked society, in which identity is co-constructed within mediated spaces.

### **Digital Journalism as a Bridge Between Tradition and Innovation**

The artisans and content creators involved in this research do not explicitly identify themselves as "journalists," yet their activities reflect key aspects of digital journalism: content curation, audience targeting, storytelling, and public engagement. The blogs and social posts generated within the community serve as alternative forms of journalism that document cultural practices, share local stories, and challenge mainstream media narratives that often marginalize traditional crafts.

A notable example is a series of Instagram reels titled "Sulam Stories," which highlight individual artisans and trace the historical evolution of certain motifs. These videos function as micro-documentaries, blending oral history with digital aesthetics, and have reached thousands of views. They provide both cultural context and humanize the artisans, which traditional advertisements often fail to do.

This use of digital journalism does not merely amplify voices; it creates new public spaces where tradition and innovation coexist. As noted by Jenkins et al. (2018), participatory media environments enable communities to control their narratives and foster cultural resilience in the face of homogenization.

### **Opportunities and Challenges in Sustaining Digital Narratives**

While the adoption of digital media presents many opportunities, it is not without its challenges. On the positive side, artisans have been able to access wider markets, particularly diaspora communities and heritage-conscious consumers. Several artisans reported receiving orders from other provinces and even international buyers through Instagram DMs and WhatsApp.

However, sustaining a consistent digital presence requires time, resources, and technical skills that many artisans lack. Some accounts become inactive after an initial flurry of activity due to limited content production capacity or lack of confidence in using digital tools. This points to the need for ongoing training, mentorship, and perhaps institutional support to ensure long-term impact.

Another challenge is maintaining authenticity amid commercial pressures. Some artisans expressed discomfort when requested to modify traditional motifs for "trendy" appeal.

This raises ethical considerations around cultural appropriation and the boundaries of creative adaptation.

Lastly, algorithmic limitations pose a barrier to visibility. Posts from artisan accounts often struggle to reach larger audiences due to platform algorithms that favor paid content. This reinforces the importance of networked promotion, where partnerships with influencers, cultural institutions, and media platforms can amplify artisan voices. Algorithmic visibility presents a structural challenge, as platform systems tend to prioritize paid and highly engaging content. This creates unequal exposure for small-scale cultural producers, requiring artisans to rely on collaborative networks and community-based promotion strategies.

### **Synthesis**

The findings of this study reveal that digital branding and journalism practices among *Sulam Angkinan* artisans are complex, community-driven, and deeply rooted in cultural meaning. Far from being passive recipients of digital trends, these artisans actively engage in shaping their own narrative through storytelling, collaboration, and innovation.

The process is iterative and often non-linear, requiring negotiation between tradition and modernity, individual expression and community identity, commercial viability and cultural authenticity. These tensions, while challenging, also present opportunities for creative solutions and new models of cultural communication.

This aligns with Hall's (2016) concept of encoding/decoding, in which media messages are not simply produced and consumed, but constantly interpreted, contested, and redefined within cultural contexts. In the case of *Sulam Angkinan*, the "message" of heritage is being re-encoded into new formats, languages, and audiences through digital tools.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the intersection of digital journalism, branding strategies, and cultural heritage through an ethnographic investigation of *Sulam Angkinan* artisans in Sungai Lais, Palembang. Through interviews, observations, and content analysis, the research uncovered how local artisans navigate the digital environment to promote and preserve their traditional embroidery craft.

One of the key insights from this study is that digital branding, when rooted in cultural authenticity, serves as a powerful vehicle for reviving traditional arts and enhancing community pride. The artisans demonstrated an evolving understanding of digital tools not as threats to tradition, but as extensions of cultural expression. Instagram and Facebook, in particular, have become platforms for storytelling, education, and economic interaction blurring the lines between cultural heritage and creative economy.

Another important finding is the role of community in shaping online identity. Rather than relying solely on individual branding, the artisans operate within a collective framework where cooperation, shared narratives, and intergenerational collaboration play vital roles. This community-driven approach not only fosters resilience but also enables broader visibility and cultural legitimacy in the digital realm.

Furthermore, the artisans' informal engagement in digital journalism through documentation, storytelling, and cultural commentary demonstrates the expanding definition of journalism in participatory media environments. By crafting their own narratives and sharing them through accessible platforms, these artisans actively reclaim agency over their cultural representation, challenging stereotypes and offering nuanced insights into local traditions.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers several implications for stakeholders in cultural communication and media development. For media practitioners, it highlights the importance of integrating community voices in heritage promotion and designing communication strategies that are participatory, respectful, and culturally grounded. Branding is not simply about visual aesthetics; it is a process of meaning-making that requires sensitivity to local contexts and values.

For local governments and cultural agencies, the research points to the urgent need for capacity building in digital literacy among traditional artisans. While many artisans have embraced digital tools, gaps remain in technical skills, content strategy, and sustainable outreach. Targeted training programs, mentorship schemes, and partnerships with local universities or creative hubs could help bridge these divides. Additionally, support for digital infrastructure such as internet access and equipment remains a critical factor for inclusion.

This research also invites further exploration into the long-term impacts of digital branding on traditional knowledge systems. Future studies could investigate how digital visibility influences production practices, intergenerational transmission, or shifts in cultural values. Comparative research across different regions and craft traditions would also enrich understanding of how diverse communities are adapting to digital transformation in heritage preservation.

In conclusion, *Sulam Angkinan* serves as a compelling case of how tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive, but mutually reinforcing. Through digital storytelling and community-based branding, the artisans of Sungai Lais are not only preserving their heritage but reimagining its place in contemporary society. Their efforts offer a model of cultural resilience that is both locally rooted and globally connected an essential pathway in safeguarding intangible heritage in the digital age.

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