

Sundanese Identity Politics as Embodied by Governor Dedi Mulyadi: Between Cultural Islam and Local Culture

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digital political landscape, identity serves as a strategic tool in shaping political image and electoral loyalty. This study examines the political representation of Sundanese identity in the digital content of Dedi Mulyadi, a West Java politician known for his down-to-earth communication approach via social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. Dedi Mulyadi presents himself as a leader deeply rooted in Sundanese culture and Islamic cultural values, while constructing an emotional and inclusive narrative of leadership. This research employs a qualitative approach using content analysis and thematic analysis to trace the cultural symbols, religious expressions, and visual and verbal narratives used in his content. Stuart Hall's theory of representation serves as the analytical framework to understand how identity is constructed symbolically and performatively in the digital space. The findings reveal that Dedi Mulyadi consistently constructs his political identity through local symbols such as traditional attire, regional language, and narratives of approachable spirituality. This approach not only reinforces his image as a leader who is close to the people but also creates a strong emotional bond with his constituents. These findings highlight that identity politics is not always exclusive or divisive but can serve as an inclusive strategy for building solidarity and legitimacy. This study makes an important contribution to the field of digital political communication and the dynamics of identity representation in Indonesian local politics.

Keywords: Identity politics; Governor Dedi Mulyadi; Sundanese culture; cultural Islam; digital political communication; representation

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary political landscape, identity plays a central role in shaping public perceptions of political figures. Political identity is no longer limited to static categories based on ethnicity, religion, or culture, but is a dynamic construction shaped through symbolic representations, emotional narratives, and social interactions mediated by digital technology. Identity politics in the modern context has evolved into a more complex strategy: it not only distinguishes one group from another but also serves as a tool for building strong emotional affiliations and electoral loyalty. As Manuel Castells explains in *The Power of Identity* (2010), in the information age, identity is not fixed but is constantly shaped, negotiated, and disseminated through digital communication networks. In this regard, social media is not merely a communication channel but also a battleground of meaning, where political actors reproduce their identities in visual, narrative, and performative forms. The digital space has become a venue that enables the personalization of political imagery not only in an intense manner but also by creating an emotional closeness that was previously difficult to achieve through conventional media.

This phenomenon is highly relevant in the context of Indonesian politics, where identity politics often emerges as a dominant strategy in various electoral contests. Numerous studies over the past five years have shown how religion- and ethnicity-based issues are exploited instrumentally by political actors to gain mass support. For example, Warburton and Aspinall (2019) documented how religious identity was mobilized on a massive scale in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, while a study by Hasani and Naipospos (2020) from the Setara Institute highlighted trends toward exclusivism and social segregation in political campaigns based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA). These patterns indicate that identity politics is often associated with social fragmentation and ideological polarization. However, not all practices of identity politics are confrontational or exclusive. In certain contexts, identity is actually used in an inclusive and reconciliatory manner to build narratives of togetherness and strengthen public trust. One striking example in the local context is Dedi Mulyadi former Regent of Purwakarta and a West Javanese politician who consistently presents himself through digital content as a leader rooted in

Sundanese culture and cultural Islamic values. Unlike other politicians who tend to be elitist and formalistic in their communication, Dedi Mulyadi projects the image of a down-to-earth leader who is close to the common people through a narrative approach rich in local symbols, humanistic spiritual values, and a visual aesthetic that emphasizes simplicity and local distinctiveness. The use of platforms such as YouTube and TikTok serves as a strategic medium for conveying this political identity in a personal and emotional manner. This demonstrates how social media is used not only to convey political messages but also to create representations of identity that resonate culturally and emotionally.

An analysis of Dedi Mulyadi's digital content in this context is particularly compelling when examined through the lens of cultural representation theory as formulated by Stuart Hall (1997). Hall emphasizes that identity is not a pre-existing essential entity but rather something constructed discursively through language, symbols, and social practices. In the digital space, this construction becomes even more intense, given the high reach and audience engagement with visual and narrative content. Through this approach, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how Dedi Mulyadi shapes his political identity through Sundanese cultural symbols and Islamic cultural values in his digital content. These representations serve not only as a political communication strategy to strengthen his image and electability but also as a mechanism to build strong emotional bonds with his constituents, particularly the people of West Java who share cultural and religious affinities with these symbols. This research is important because it fills a gap in the literature, which has largely focused on identity politics from the perspective of polarization and conflict. This study offers an alternative perspective by demonstrating that identity politics can also be used positively as a communication strategy that fosters inclusivity, social solidarity, and moral legitimacy. Thus, this research not only contributes to the study of identity politics and digital political communication but also to a broader understanding of local political dynamics and the practice of identity representation in Indonesia's digital public sphere.

Theoretical Framework

The literature review in this study serves as the theoretical and conceptual foundation for understanding how political identity is constructed and represented in the digital sphere.

In the fields of communication studies and political science, there are several key discourses relevant to framing this issue, namely: (1) theories of representation and identity construction; (2) identity politics in a contemporary context; (3) digital political communication and the mediatization of politics; and (4) cultural symbols and cultural Islam in Indonesian local politics. Each of these frameworks is explained in depth to demonstrate its connection to the focus of the analysis on Dedi Mulyadi's digital content.

Representation and Identity Construction in the Media

Representation theory serves as the primary framework for understanding how meaning and identity are produced, negotiated, and disseminated in the context of media. Stuart Hall (1997) emphasizes that representation is not merely a passive reflection of reality, but rather an active process of shaping social meaning through language, symbols, and discursive practices. Within this framework, identity is not a fixed or essential entity, but rather a discursive construction that is contextual and dynamic. This concept has important implications for the study of digital media, as representations on social media are determined not only by large institutions (such as the mass media) but also by individual actors who have control over their own narratives.

Giddens (1991) reinforces this by arguing that modern identity is a project of self-reflexivity that is continuously shaped through social interaction and the media. In this context, social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok become arenas where self-representations including political representations are constructed through narratives, visualizations, and digital performativity.

Identity Politics: Narratives, Differentiation, and Mobilization Strategies

Identity politics refers to the use of specific social identities based on ethnicity, religion, culture, or gender as a basis for political organization, the formation of solidarity, and claims to representation. In classical discourse, identity politics is often associated with the resistance of minority groups against hegemonic domination (Young, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). However, in the contemporary context especially in the digital age identity politics

has undergone a transformation into a strategic tool for building emotional affiliation and electoral loyalty.

Castells (2010), in *The Power of Identity*, explains that in a network society, identity is constructed through a struggle between identities of legitimacy (formed by dominant institutions), identities of resistance (formed by marginalized groups), and identities of project (formed by actors who creatively reconstruct identities for the purpose of social transformation). In this context, identity politics becomes a symbolic battlefield played out in digital communication spaces, where identity can serve as a tool to foster solidarity or promote segregation. In the Indonesian context, identity politics is often exploited instrumentally in the electoral arena. Research by Warburton and Aspinall (2019) demonstrates how religious sentiment was massively mobilized in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, resulting in significant social polarization.

Meanwhile, a study by Hasani and Naipospos (2020) from the Setara Institute highlights the consequences of exclusivism and conservatism in political campaigns based on ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA). However, the literature also acknowledges the existence of identity politics practices that are inclusive, reconciliatory, and contextual (Kaufmann, 2018; Meijer & Pels, 2020).

Digital Political Communication and the Personalization of Narratives

The transformation of political communication in the digital age has positioned social media as the primary medium for the exchange of political messages, image-building, and interaction with the public. Chadwick (2013) refers to this phenomenon as a “hybrid media system,” in which politicians use various platforms to combine formal, personal, and emotional communication. Social media enables narrative personalization (Enli, 2017) a communication strategy that emphasizes personal narratives, everyday experiences, and emotional closeness.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have shown how politicians use social media to create a populist identity, build direct relationships with voters, and bypass traditional media intermediaries (Lim, 2017; Nugroho & Syarif, 2020). This strategy positions narrative

as the primary tool in the construction of political meaning, where local symbols, regional languages, and informal communication styles serve as instruments to create cultural resonance.

In practice, digital representation is not neutral but is heavily influenced by platform algorithms, public tastes, and viral visual aesthetics (Lünenborg & Raetzsch, 2018). Therefore, studies of political representation on social media must account for the technological, performative, and emotional dimensions inherent in the process of constructing digital identity.

Cultural Symbols and Cultural Islam in Indonesian Local Politics

One of the distinctive features of Indonesian politics is the presence of cultural and religious symbols that are deeply embedded in local political practices. Local cultures, such as Sundanese or Javanese traditions, serve not only as cultural identities but also as political instruments for fostering closeness and legitimacy (Geertz, 1980; Heryanto, 2015). In this context, cultural symbols are used as a political language that conveys moral messages, social closeness, and loyalty to the roots of tradition.

Cultural Islam, as distinguished from political Islam, refers to religious practices that are contextual, tolerant, and rooted in local culture (Azra, 2006; Bruinessen, 2013). In the context of West Java, the values of cultural Islam are integrated into daily social practices and serve as a strong source of moral legitimacy. A study by Syaifuddin (2021) shows that politicians who project a down-to-earth and non-dogmatic religious image tend to be more accepted by a culturally religious, heterogeneous society.

Dedi Mulyadi is an interesting example in this regard because he combines a strong Sundanese identity with symbols of cultural Islam to shape the image of a “ngabumi” leader that is, down-to-earth, inclusive, and spiritual. This approach highlights symbols such as traditional attire, the local language, narratives of togetherness, and the value of mutual cooperation as means of building an authentic and resonant political image.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach focused on examining the representation of political identity through digital content. This approach is grounded in a constructivist paradigm that emphasizes that social reality including political identity is not objective or fixed, but rather is shaped and negotiated through language, symbols, and communicative practices (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A qualitative approach was also chosen because it provides ample interpretive space for the cultural and religious meanings conveyed in political representations.

The Qualitative Approach and Its Relevance to the Study of Identity Politics

As explained by Creswell (2013), the qualitative approach is well-suited for in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena, including identity, as it allows researchers to understand how individuals or groups construct meaning through symbols and interactions. In this context, Dedi Mulyadi's political identity is viewed as a narrative construction formed in the digital space through representations of Sundanese culture and cultural Islam.

Political identity in the digital space is not viewed as a static entity, but as a discursive product that is performative and contextual in nature (Butler, 1997; Hall, 1997). Therefore, qualitative methods are necessary to examine how symbols and narratives function in shaping the relationship of meaning between leaders and the public.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The primary method used is qualitative content analysis, as developed by Krippendorff (2004), which emphasizes the importance of contextual interpretation of messages conveyed in texts and visual media. In this study, digital content in the form of YouTube and TikTok videos was analyzed to uncover the following elements:

1. Cultural symbols (e.g., traditional Sundanese clothing, regional languages, rural settings);
2. Religious expressions representing cultural Islam;

3. Visual and verbal narratives that depict values such as mutual cooperation, simplicity, and emotional connectedness.

Content analysis is not limited to identifying the content itself but also includes interpreting the symbolic intentions and sociocultural meanings embedded in these representations (Schreier, 2012).

Thematic Analysis

To complement the content analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and dominant themes in the digital content. This technique follows the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which emphasizes five steps: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) initial coding, (3) theme identification, (4) theme review, and (5) theme naming and interpretation. In this context, themes such as:

1. Local wisdom,
2. Cultural Islam,
3. Grassroots leadership,
4. Emotional politics

These themes were analyzed as part of the identity communication strategy employed by Dedi Mulyadi. Thematic analysis helps capture not only explicit messages but also implicit messages and the narrative structures that link this digital content to the local community's culture.

Representation Theory as the Basis for Interpretation

This study is theoretically grounded in Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation, which posits that the media is a space for the production of meaning, where identity is constructed through language, symbols, and cultural practices. Thus, Dedi Mulyadi's representation on social media is not merely a reflection of his identity but also a strategic means of shaping and mediating political meaning to the public. This approach allows the researcher to understand how Sundanese cultural symbols and local Islamic values are

presented not only as heritage but also as tools of political communication to build an image, legitimacy, and emotional connections with the public.

Digital Political Communication as a Contextual Framework

This methodology is also situated within the context of digital political communication, as argued by Loader and Mercea (2012), who contend that social media is not merely a communication channel but an interactive space where politics is constructed, negotiated, and practiced in symbolic and performative ways.

In this context, social media allows politicians like Dedi Mulyadi to convey political messages that are not formal or bureaucratic, but rather personal, emotional, and “relatable”. This communication style adopts the principle of “narrative personalization” (Enli, 2017), in which political leaders convey messages through stories, personal experiences, or everyday events that evoke emotional closeness, rather than merely a rational appeal.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In the qualitative tradition, validity is not measured through numerical reliability, but rather through trustworthiness, which includes:

1. Credibility to achieved through methodological triangulation (content and thematic) and peer debriefing;
2. Transferability to ensure through rich contextual descriptions of Sundanese culture and local Islam;
3. Dependability to achieved through systematic and transparent documentation of the analysis process;
4. Confirmability to strengthened by the use of direct quotations, visualizations of symbols, and interpretive reflections on the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition to highlighting the importance of content analysis and thematic analysis, this study also needs to consider the patterns of political communication employed by Dedi Mulyadi on social media. Based on sociolinguistic analysis, Dedi Mulyadi’s communication patterns can be classified into vertical and horizontal patterns. Vertical patterns reflect

communication from those in power to the public, while horizontal patterns indicate a more equal and intimate relationship between Dedi Mulyadi as the speaker and the public as his conversation partners. Through his choice of linguistic codes, Dedi Mulyadi has successfully fostered an emotional connection with the public, thereby bridging the gap between elected representatives and the people. This is evident in the interactions on social media, where the public feels directly acknowledged through Dedi's responses and communication style.

In addition to being based on the relationship between participants, Dedi Mulyadi's political communication patterns are also analyzed in light of the surrounding context. In formal contexts, communication takes place during working meetings or official visits, whereas in informal contexts, it occurs through social gatherings, social visits, or casual activities that are documented and shared on social media. It is this informal communication style that often makes Dedi Mulyadi's content feel more relatable, human, and down-to-earth, thereby helping him build an inclusive political image that resonates with people from all walks of life.

Furthermore, Dedi Mulyadi's digital approach is not merely for public relations purposes, but rather a strategy for efficiency and transparency. By leveraging social media, he can document and directly communicate various programs, activities, and policies to the public without relying on conventional mass media, which requires high costs. Dedi has even formed a dedicated team to manage his digital content, ensuring that all his activities are documented and easily accessible to the public through various platforms such as TikTok and YouTube. This approach not only reduces promotional costs but also fosters a more personal, two-way interaction between leaders and the public.

However, behind the effectiveness of digital communication lie challenges that must be addressed, such as the potential for message distortion, polarization of opinions, and the tendency to measure the success of programs solely based on content popularity. Therefore, it is important for researchers to remain critical in assessing the impact of digital communication on the quality of public policy and the relationship between leaders and the public. Furthermore, in the context of this study, qualitative methods also provide researchers with the opportunity to conduct a more in-depth interpretation of the interaction process

between Dedi Mulyadi and his audience on digital media. This interaction is not limited to one-way message delivery but also includes responses, comments, and active participation from the public all of which play a crucial role in shaping Dedi Mulyadi's political image and identity. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher can analyze how the audience responds to the uploaded content, as well as how Dedi Mulyadi responds to various inputs, criticisms, and support provided directly by the public on digital platforms.

Furthermore, qualitative methods allow researchers to explore the social and cultural dynamics underlying the reception of political messages in digital spaces. In this regard, researchers can examine how the local and Islamic values highlighted by Dedi Mulyadi are able to foster an emotional connection with the public, as well as how these communication strategies can strengthen his political legitimacy in the public eye. Qualitative research can also highlight nonverbal aspects of digital communication, such as the use of visual symbols, facial expressions, and body language, which often serve as important indicators in building trust and rapport with the audience.

In addition to analyzing content and themes, this study can also examine the production and distribution of messages on digital media. Dedi Mulyadi is known to have a dedicated team tasked with documenting and disseminating his every activity across various social media platforms. This indicates that his political communication is not merely spontaneous but is also well-planned and structured. Researchers can examine the creative process behind content creation, posting scheduling strategies, and the selection of platforms deemed most effective for reaching specific audience segments. Thus, the qualitative approach in this study focuses not only on the content of the messages but also on the processes, interactions, and social dynamics occurring behind the scenes. This further enriches our understanding of how political identity can be built, maintained, and effectively communicated in the digital age, which is full of both challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, the use of qualitative methods in Dedi Mulyadi's research on political communication in digital media makes a significant contribution to understanding the complexity of modern political communication strategies. This approach is able to uncover various layers of meaning both explicit and implicit thereby providing a comprehensive and

in-depth picture of the process of political identity formation in a society that is increasingly connected digitally.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on a qualitative analysis combining content analysis and thematic analysis, this study reveals how Dedi Mulyadi strategically constructs his political identity in a holistic and integrated manner, utilizing local cultural symbols and Islamic cultural values as the primary foundation of his political communication. This approach provides an in-depth insight into how identity politics can be constructed in an inclusive and reconciliatory manner in the digital realm, particularly in the context of West Java.

The Representation of Sundanese Culture as a Grounded Local Identity

Dedi Mulyadi's use of Sundanese cultural elements serves not merely as visual attributes or aesthetic backdrops in his digital content, but as symbols of ethnic and cultural identity that strengthen emotional and cultural bonds with local constituents. The local language, traditional attire, and rural atmosphere featured in his various content serve as cultural markers that underscore cultural roots and communicate loyalty to traditional values.

Beyond the symbolic aspect, content that highlights mutual cooperation, simplicity, and etiquette not only constructs a political narrative but also reflects actual social practices within Sundanese society. This demonstrates that cultural representation is not merely political rhetoric but is connected to a social reality that the audience can directly experience. This approach aligns with Stuart Hall's conception of representation as a dynamic process that constructs shared meaning through symbols and social practices.

Cultural Islam as the Foundation of an Inclusive and Humanistic Political Narrative

Equally important, the values of cultural Islam developed by Dedi Mulyadi highlight a religious dimension that is neither formalistic nor dogmatic, but rather emphasizes the principles of tolerance, compassion, and social harmony. In his content, it is evident that religious practices are used as a medium to affirm a humanistic and down-to-earth religious identity capable of bridging diversity and reducing the potential for religion-based identity

conflicts. Cultural Islamic symbols presented narratively and visually such as communal religious activities and moral messages emphasizing equality demonstrate constructive efforts to shape an inclusive and reconciliatory political narrative.

This approach distinguishes Dedi Mulyadi from other politicians who often employ identity politics in an exclusive and polarizing manner, while also aligning with theories of identity politics that acknowledge space for flexible and dialogic identities.

Symbolic Polarization and the Strengthening of Emotional Bonds through Visual and Narrative Strategies

Content analysis reveals how Dedi Mulyadi carefully utilizes visual symbols traditional attire, cultural icons, facial expressions, and body language to project an image of authenticity and closeness. These symbols are not merely decorative elements but strategic tools for evoking strong emotional resonance with the audience, particularly the grassroots who feel represented in these narratives.

The chosen narratives also frequently elicit emotional responses, such as empathy for the common people or nostalgia for traditional values that are perceived as increasingly marginalized in the tide of modernity. This strategy demonstrates the use of symbols as a medium of political communication that combines cognitive and affective aspects, thereby not only shaping a political image but also fostering loyalty through a sense of togetherness and emotional connection.

Thematic findings reveal the dominance of themes such as togetherness, local wisdom, and social harmony in Dedi Mulyadi's various works. These themes not only appear explicitly through verbal messages but are also implicit in the depiction of social interactions and the narrative patterns employed. This underscores how the political identity being constructed is not an exclusive or elitist one, but rather a "down-to-earth" identity that draws closer to the cultural roots and social values of the community. This narrative approach simultaneously reveals a political strategy that is responsive to the local sociocultural context, where politics is not merely about formal power, but also about symbolic representation and the formation of authentic and accommodating social relationships.

Overall, Dedi Mulyadi's construction of identity politics in the digital sphere is a powerful blend of textual and non-textual messages. Qualitative analysis reveals that his digital content not only conveys messages explicitly through words and narratives but also constructs symbolic meaning through visuals, cultural symbols, and a communication style that incorporates emotional elements. This approach demonstrates how identity politics in the digital age is shaped through multidimensional communication strategies that synergistically combine narrative, symbolic, and emotional aspects.

Political Identity in Digital Representation

Based on the results of a qualitative analysis of Dedi Mulyadi's digital content, it was also found that his political identity is constructed holistically through the use of cultural symbols, religious values, and narratives of togetherness packaged in various forms of visual and verbal content. The use of qualitative approaches, particularly content analysis and thematic analysis, provides a deep understanding of the symbolic meanings and communication strategies employed.

Dedi Mulyadi consistently features elements of Sundanese culture in his content, such as the use of the local language, traditional attire, and settings that highlight a rural atmosphere. This not only serves as a marker of ethnic identity but also demonstrates his closeness to local cultural roots. In many of his videos and social media posts, it is evident how traditional values such as mutual cooperation, simplicity, and good manners are portrayed as part of daily life, which simultaneously serve as a deeply rooted political narrative.

Not only Sundanese culture, but also the friendly and inclusive cultural values of Islam are present both symbolically and narratively. Dedi Mulyadi often explores Islamic themes that emphasize tolerance, compassion, and social harmony. Content featuring religious activities, moral messages, and interactions with religious figures or marginalized communities demonstrates that the religious identity being constructed is not rooted in religious formalism but rather in down-to-earth social practices.

Through content analysis, it was found that Dedi Mulyadi utilizes various visual symbols such as traditional Sundanese attire, local cultural icons, and facial expressions and body language in his videos as tools to build an image of approachability and authenticity. The narratives he employs often evoke emotions, ranging from empathy for ordinary citizens to nostalgia for traditional values that are increasingly being marginalized. This strategy has proven effective in strengthening emotional bonds with digital audiences, particularly grassroots constituents.

Thematic Elements in Political Narratives

A thematic analysis reveals several dominant themes that consistently appear in Dedi Mulyadi's content, including solidarity, local wisdom, and values of social harmony rooted in tradition and religion. These themes appear not only explicitly in verbal messages but also implicitly through depictions of social relationships, ways of interacting with the community, and narrative choices in videos and captions.

Dedi Mulyadi constructs a political narrative that is not elitist but rather emphasizes closeness, simplicity, and a down-to-earth personality. This strategy positions him not merely as a political figure but also as a symbolic representation of the public's hope for a leader who understands local values while remaining responsive to social dynamics.

The Role of Digital Media as a Symbolic Political Arena

In the context of contemporary politics, digital media has become a vital space for the formation and dissemination of political identity. Dedi Mulyadi utilizes platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook not merely as communication channels, but as symbolic stages where his self-representation is continuously constructed and negotiated. Digital media not only enables two-way interaction but also provides a space for the audience to engage emotionally and culturally with the narratives being constructed.

This is important because content is not merely consumed passively, but is interpreted, discussed, and shared by the public, thereby broadening its scope of meaning and strengthening the resonance of the political identity it promotes.

One of the key strengths of Dedi Mulyadi's digital political communication lies in creating an impression of authenticity. Through direct interaction with the public in the form of daily vlogs, responses to netizens' comments, and spontaneous participation in social activities he fosters a genuine sense of closeness. This approach fosters a more fluid and participatory political dialogue, distinct from traditional political communication, which tends to be top-down and formalistic. Thus, political identity is not only shaped from above but is also reinforced through public responses and engagement as part of an evolving "narrative.

Representation of Marginalized Groups and the Politics of Compassion

In much of his content, Dedi Mulyadi consciously features marginalized groups such as small-scale vendors, farmers, the elderly, and street children as the central subjects in his political narrative. This representation not only demonstrates social sensitivity but also reinforces his image as a leader who stands with the common people. In this context, the political identity he has built is not merely about ideology or policy platforms, but also about taking a stand, showing empathy, and maintaining a tangible presence within the community.

The consistent use of visual symbols such as the Sundanese iket, the pangsi shirt, and rural settings is not merely an aesthetic element but part of a branding strategy that reinforces public recognition of the figure. This visual identity creates cohesion in the audience's perception of who Dedi Mulyadi is and what values he embodies. In a highly visual and rapidly changing digital age, consistency in visual elements is key to maintaining the relevance and continuity of political messages.

This strong personal branding makes Dedi Mulyadi a highly recognizable figure who is also able to stand out amidst the competition for public attention in the digital space.

Interestingly, although the identity highlighted is deeply rooted in Sundanese local culture, the narrative constructed remains inclusive rather than exclusive. Values such as togetherness, solidarity, and social concern are universal and can be embraced by audiences across cultures. Thus, the local identity presented does not act as a barrier but rather as a bridge to build broader communication within the framework of open nationalism.

Ultimately, what makes Dedi Mulyadi's political communication strategy compelling is his ability to integrate various layers of meaning from the literal to the symbolic, and from the emotional to the rational. In every piece of content, there is harmony between what is shown (visual), what is said (verbal), and what is felt (emotional). This approach not only demonstrates communicative intelligence but also reveals a deep understanding of the importance of cultural, social, and psychological contexts in building meaningful political relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Dedi Mulyadi's construction of political identity is a concrete example of how local culture and cultural Islamic values can be harmoniously integrated into political communication strategies in the digital age. Through a qualitative approach involving the analysis of digital content on social media, this study found that Dedi Mulyadi consistently presents Sundanese identity and Islamic values that are inclusive, egalitarian, and down-to-earth. This representation is built through the use of cultural symbols such as traditional attire, the local language (Sundanese), local artistic expressions, and religious narratives that emphasize the principles of morality, simplicity, and social harmony.

Dedi Mulyadi crafts a leadership image that contrasts with that of conventional politicians who tend to be formalistic and elitist by presenting himself as a figure close to the common people. Through narrative content such as videos of village visits, spontaneous social assistance, and personal interactions with marginalized communities, he builds strong emotional bonds with the public. This type of political communication strategy facilitates a process of identification between the leader and the people, rooted in the values of mutual cooperation, good manners, moderate religiosity, and social solidarity as part of the local cultural heritage.

From the perspective of Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the identity presented by Dedi Mulyadi is not something fixed and essential, but rather the result of a process of meaning production through language, symbols, and discursive practices. In this context,

identity politics is not used to reinforce segregation or group exclusivity, but is instead directed toward building narratives of inclusion, reconciliation, and public trust.

The cultural Islam he presents is not in a doctrinal or political form, but as part of the Sunda community's everyday values rich in ethics, tolerance, and practical spirituality. This study also makes an important contribution to the discourse on identity politics in Indonesia, which has thus far been largely dominated by studies on polarization, ethno-religious conflict, and identity mobilization based on segregation. By highlighting Dedi Mulyadi's approach which emphasizes local culture and moderate Islamic values as a unifying narrative this study offers an alternative perspective: that identity politics can be constructed positively as a representational strategy that builds symbolic and affective connections between leaders and the public. In the digital age, where politics unfolds not only in formal arenas but also in public communication spaces such as social media, a narrative-visual approach like the one employed by Dedi Mulyadi has become increasingly relevant. Digital platforms have provided him with a space to present his political identity directly and personally to the public, while avoiding overly formalistic or institutional mediation. Through this medium, he is able to harness the power of culture and religion as symbolic capital that strengthens political legitimacy not through the rhetoric of power, but through concrete actions that bring the values of togetherness to life.

Overall, this study demonstrates that:

1. Identity politics can be developed in a reconciliatory manner not as a tool of exclusion, but as a space for articulating shared values that strengthen social cohesion.
2. The representation of culture and religiosity in digital media is a key tool in shaping down-to-earth and inclusive political narratives.
3. Figures like Dedi Mulyadi open up possibilities for new political practices that integrate local aesthetics, cultural values, and digital communication as key tools for building public trust amid a crisis of formal political representation.

Thus, identity politics built through digital media serves not only as a means of identity expression but also as a cultural-political practice capable of fostering participation,

recognition, and closeness between political actors and the public. This finding is significant as a reflection on the future of democracy in Indonesia, suggesting that the integration of culture, religion, and communication technology can yield political practices that are more humane, contextual, and relevant to the needs of grassroots communities.

Dedi Mulyadi's political identity in the digital space is shaped through a communication strategy that combines cultural symbols, religious values, and narratives of solidarity and social empathy. Using a qualitative approach that employs content and thematic analysis, it was revealed that Dedi Mulyadi's political representation is not elitist but rather grounded in local wisdom and sensitivity to the conditions of grassroots communities. Elements of Sundanese culture and cultural Islamic values are consistently featured in various visual and verbal content, shaping an authentic and relatable image in the public eye. A communication strategy emphasizing simplicity, authenticity, and emotional closeness is key to building a connection with the digital audience. The use of social media not merely as an information tool but as a symbolic arena for identity negotiation has established Dedi Mulyadi as a political figure capable of reaching the public in a more humanistic and reflective manner regarding social dynamics.

The narratives presented in their content not only contain explicit political messages but are also rich in symbolic meaning, ethical values, and strong emotional dimensions. In this context, political identity becomes fluid and is continuously shaped through interactions, visual representations, and social responses from the digital community. Thus, this study confirms that in the era of digital politics, the success of building a political identity is not solely determined by the content of the message, but also by the manner of its delivery, the surrounding cultural context, and the ability to create strong emotional and symbolic resonance within society.

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