

Cultural Communication and The Politics of Representation: Negotiating National Cultural Mission in Global Artificial Intelligence Practices

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ABSTRACT

Keywords

AI; cultural communication; cultural representation; cultural digitization; politics of representation

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) has significantly influenced cultural communication and cultural representation at both national and global levels. This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) to analyze recent literature from Malaysia and Indonesia related to AI, cultural representation, and cultural digitization. Findings indicate that AI functions as both a mediator and an actor in shaping digital cultural representation, facilitating the preservation of traditions, and generating negotiation in the politics of cultural representation. A synthesis of Malaysian and Indonesian literature highlights differences in focus: Malaysia emphasizes public interactivity and AI literacy, whereas Indonesia prioritizes the preservation of traditions and integration of local values. This article presents an SLR table, a conceptual framework diagram, and theoretical, practical, and methodological implications for research in cultural communication and digital technology.

1. Introduction

Cultural communication is a fundamental process through which communities construct, sustain, and negotiate shared meanings, encompassing values, norms, symbols, and social practices that define collective identity. As noted by Hall (1997), "representation connects meaning and language to culture," highlighting how cultural meaning is continuously produced and exchanged through symbolic systems. In an increasingly interconnected world, this process is no longer confined to traditional forms of interaction but is deeply embedded in digital infrastructures that mediate how culture is produced, circulated, and interpreted.

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has intensified this transformation, positioning algorithmic systems as powerful intermediaries in shaping cultural narratives and representations on a global scale. AI technologies now play a central role in curating, classifying, and disseminating cultural content across digital platforms, including virtual museums, online learning environments, and cultural preservation initiatives. For instance, Chin Ong How et al. (2025) emphasize that "AI-driven co-creation frameworks in museums enable interactive and personalized cultural experiences for younger audiences," demonstrating how AI reshapes engagement with cultural heritage. Similarly, Zhao et al. (2025) argue that "intelligent spectacle and interactive systems enhance cultural sustainability through participatory digital experiences," reinforcing the expanding role of AI in cultural communication.

While these developments create opportunities for broader access and cross-cultural exchange, they also introduce complex challenges related to the politics of representation. Algorithmic systems are not neutral; they reflect embedded biases and epistemological assumptions that influence how cultures are framed. Wang and Adzharuddin (2025) highlight this concern by noting that “synthetic authenticity in AI-generated heritage raises questions about audience trust and the legitimacy of cultural representation.” This suggests that AI-mediated representations may blur the boundaries between authenticity and simulation, potentially reshaping public perception of cultural identity.

Within this context, questions of national cultural mission become increasingly significant. As countries seek to preserve and promote their cultural identity in the global digital ecosystem, they must navigate tensions between localization and globalization, authenticity and adaptation, and sovereignty and technological dependency. In Indonesia, for example, recent studies demonstrate how AI is utilized to preserve regional arts and languages, where “digital humanities approaches enable the documentation and revitalization of endangered cultural expressions through AI systems” (Indonesian Journal of Digital Humanities, 2025). Likewise, Haryanto and Lestari (2025) state that “AI-based models for preserving Nusantara folklore provide scalable solutions for safeguarding oral traditions in digital formats.” In Malaysia, Mustaffa Halabi et al. (2025) argue that “integrating AI into design education fosters culturally-oriented innovation while maintaining local identity values,” reflecting efforts to align technological advancement with cultural preservation.

Furthermore, the negotiation of cultural representation is increasingly visible in digital cultural production. Tamrin (2025) observes that “digital literature in Indonesia reflects dynamic negotiations of cultural identity shaped by social media and technological mediation,” indicating that representation is not static but continuously contested. Similarly, Prasetyo and Rahmawati (2025) assert that “AI plays a significant role in cross-cultural communication by transforming how cultural symbols are encoded and interpreted in digital environments.” These perspectives underscore that AI does not merely transmit culture but actively participates in redefining it.

This study aims to examine the intersection of cultural communication, artificial intelligence, and the politics of representation by analyzing contemporary scholarly literature from Malaysia and Indonesia. Specifically, it seeks to identify how AI mediates cultural representation in these contexts, how scholars conceptualize the negotiation of representational power in the global AI era, and how research trends differ or converge between the two countries. Employing a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, this research synthesizes existing studies to map intellectual developments, highlight contextual particularities, and construct a conceptual framework that links cultural communication with AI-driven representation processes.

The main research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How does AI mediate cultural representation in Malaysia and Indonesia?
2. What are the similarities and differences in research trends between Malaysia and Indonesia regarding digital cultural representation?

By addressing these questions, this article contributes to ongoing debates on digital culture and global knowledge production, offering insights into how emerging technologies reshape the dynamics of cultural communication and the strategic articulation of national cultural missions in the age of artificial intelligence.

Cultural Communication and Representation

Stuart Hall (1997) explains that representation is the process of producing meaning through language, symbols, and cultural practices. In digital contexts, cultural representation occurs not only at the human level but also algorithmically, as AI systems select, filter, and disseminate cultural content, shaping public perceptions of cultural values.

AI and Cultural Digitization

AI has been applied to document, analyze, and disseminate cultural content. In Malaysia, Wang & Adzharuddin (2025) highlighted synthetic authenticity in AI-generated intangible cultural heritage.

In Indonesia, the Digital Transformation of Balian Tradition (2025) demonstrates AI's role in preserving local traditions. AI literacy is crucial for enabling the public to critically negotiate cultural representation (Salleh et al., 2025).

Politics of Cultural Representation

The politics of cultural representation emerges when global AI mediates local cultural content. AI may introduce bias, marginalize certain cultural values, or reinterpret traditions. Taher & Susanto (2025) emphasized that integrating policy, education, and community participation is essential to balance modernization with traditional cultural preservation.

2. Method

This study uses SLR to analyze peer-reviewed literature from Malaysia and Indonesia published between 2025–2026 related to AI, cultural representation, and cultural communication.

Steps in SLR:

1. Inclusion criteria: Academic articles on AI and cultural representation; Malaysia or Indonesia; published 2025–2026.
2. Exclusion criteria: Non-academic articles, opinions without empirical data, publications prior to 2025.
3. Databases: JurnalHost, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Jurnal Komunikasi Digital Indonesia, Jurnal Humaniora & Teknologi.
4. Data analysis: Thematic and comparative synthesis to identify trends in Malaysia vs Indonesia.

Systematic Literature Review Table

No	Authors	Year	Country	Focus	Method	Key Findings
1	Wang & Adzharuddin	2025	Malaysia	AI & authentic cultural heritage	Qualitative multimodal	AI shapes audience perception of cultural content authenticity
2	Salleh et al.	2025	Malaysia	AI literacy & Nusantara literature	Qualitative	AI literacy enhances understanding of local culture
3	Chin Ong How et al.	2025	Malaysia	Museum & AI co-creation	Case study	Increased public interactivity and Gen Z cultural experience
4	Zhao Jie et al.	2025	Malaysia	AI & cultural sustainability	Research-creation	AI supports cultural preservation via interactive technology
5	Mustaffa Halabi et al.	2025	Malaysia	AI in culturally-oriented design education	Quantitative & qualitative	AI enhances culturally-oriented approaches in curriculum
6	Darmawan & Putri	2025	Indonesia	Digital literature & cultural representation	Discourse & semiotic analysis	Cultural identity undergoes hybrid negotiation in social media
7	Haryanto & Lestari	2025	Indonesia	AI generative & Nusantara folklore	Conceptual study	Interactive visualization models

						strengthen cultural preservation
8	Taher & Susanto	2025	Indonesia	AI & traditional Javanologi values	Case study	AI facilitates modernization while preserving local traditions
9	Santoso & Widodo	2025	Indonesia	Digital transformation of Balian tradition	Phenomenology	AI documents, analyzes, and disseminates local traditions
10	Prasetyo & Rahmawati	2025	Indonesia	AI & cross-cultural representation	Qualitative	AI as an active actor in digital cultural meaning production
11	Nugroho & Handayani	2025	Indonesia	AI in heritage tourism (Taman Sari)	Case study	Pentahelix collaboration improves cultural experience and digital conservation

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 AI as Mediator and Actor in Cultural Representation

The findings of this study indicate that AI does not merely function as a passive mediator in cultural communication, but also as a socio-technical actor that plays a role in determining the visibility and legitimacy of cultural representation. In this context, AI operates through algorithmic logics such as classification, curation, and content recommendation, which directly influence how culture is presented and interpreted by global audiences.

From the perspective of Stuart Hall (1997), AI can be understood as a new system of representation that is no longer fully controlled by humans. Within the encoding/decoding model, the encoding process is now partially assumed by algorithms, while decoding remains with the audience—albeit within a space already conditioned by digital systems. This creates a power asymmetry in the production of cultural meaning.

Malaysian literature (Wang & Adzharuddin, 2025) demonstrates that the concept of *synthetic authenticity* emerges when AI reconstructs cultural heritage in digital forms that appear authentic but are למעשה simulations. Meanwhile, studies in Indonesia (Haryanto & Lestari, 2025; Santoso & Widodo, 2025) emphasize the function of AI as a tool for cultural documentation and revitalization. This difference suggests that:

- Malaysia tends to view AI as a tool for reconstructing cultural experiences
- Indonesia views AI as a tool for cultural conservation

However, in both contexts, AI possesses limited agency, operating through data and system design. This raises critical questions about who ultimately controls cultural representation within the digital ecosystem.

3.2 Cultural Preservation and Digitization

AI offers significant opportunities for cultural preservation, while simultaneously transforming how culture is produced and consumed. In Malaysia, the use of AI in museum-based co-creation (Chin Ong How et al., 2025) reflects a shift from one-way communication models toward interactive participation, particularly among younger generations.

In contrast, Indonesia primarily focuses on the digitalization and documentation of local traditions, such as the Balian tradition and Nusantara folklore. This approach indicates that Indonesia remains in a phase of cultural safeguarding, where technology is utilized to ensure the continuity of cultural practices at risk of disappearance.

However, the process of digitization is not neutral. When culture is converted into data, it involves processes of:

- selection (what is digitized)
- reduction (simplification of cultural meanings)
- standardization (adaptation to digital formats)

These processes may lead to a reduction of cultural complexity, where rich and meaningful cultural practices are transformed into easily consumable visual or narrative representations. Thus, AI not only preserves culture but also transforms its form and meaning.

3.3 Politics of Cultural Representation

The politics of representation becomes a central issue when global AI systems interact with local cultures. AI systems are generally developed within global (often Western) contexts, thereby embedding specific values, biases, and logics into cultural representation.

This condition generates several forms of tension:

1. Global vs. Local Knowledge

AI tends to prioritize widely available data, which often originates from dominant cultures. As a result, local cultures risk being:

- underrepresented
- stereotypically represented
- interpreted through external perspectives

2. Authenticity vs. Simulation

The concept of *synthetic authenticity* suggests that AI-generated cultural representations may appear authentic, yet are fundamentally digital constructions. This raises critical questions:

- Are these representations still “authentic”?
- Who determines cultural authenticity?

3. Power and Algorithmic Control

In this context, power no longer resides solely within cultural institutions, but also within:

- technology developers
- digital platforms
- data owners

This reflects a new form of digital hegemony, where cultural representation is shaped by platform logic and algorithmic systems rather than solely by cultural communities themselves.

Malaysia responds to these challenges by promoting AI literacy (Salleh et al., 2025), enabling the public to critically engage with digital representations. Meanwhile, Indonesia emphasizes the integration of policy, education, and community participation (Taher & Susanto, 2025), reflecting a more structural approach.

3.4 Comparative Synthesis: Explaining the Differences

The differences between Malaysia and Indonesia are not merely thematic, but also structural and contextual. Several factors may explain these differences:

1. National Policies and Cultural Priorities

- Malaysia focuses more on innovation and digital engagement
- Indonesia prioritizes cultural heritage preservation

2. Stage of Digital Transformation

- Malaysia demonstrates more integrated AI adoption in the public sector (e.g., museums)
- Indonesia remains in a stage of exploratory and project-based implementation

3. Socio-Cultural Conditions

- Indonesia has extremely high cultural diversity, making preservation more urgent
- Malaysia exhibits a more centralized approach in managing national cultural narratives

Thus, these differences reflect national strategies in responding to digital globalization, rather than merely academic variations.

3.5 Implications (Expanded)

Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces the idea that AI should be understood as part of a cultural representation ecosystem, rather than merely a technological tool. Concepts such as algorithmic agency, digital representation systems, cultural mediation become essential in advancing contemporary cultural communication theory.

Practical Implications

- Governments: need to develop policies ensuring fair and inclusive cultural representation within AI systems
- Cultural institutions: should integrate technology without losing cultural context
- AI developers: must incorporate local values into system design

3.6 Comparative Synthesis Malaysia vs Indonesia

Dimension	Malaysia	Indonesia
AI Focus	Public interactivity, museums, AI literacy	Tradition preservation, cultural education, local values
Cultural Preservation	Museums & heritage tourism	Balian traditions, Nusantara folklore, digital literature
Politics of Representation	AI literacy for public & researchers	Integration of policy & cultural education
Research Gap	Global algorithmic bias	Cross-cultural comparisons between local & global outputs

4. Conclusion

- This study AI mediates and shapes cultural representation in the digital global arena.
- Cultural representation politics arises through the interaction between algorithms and local contexts.
- Malaysia emphasizes public interactivity and AI literacy; Indonesia focuses on tradition preservation and integration of local values.
- Further empirical research is necessary to assess algorithmic bias, global-local cultural representation, and mitigation strategies.

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