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Instagram as Arena: Interdisciplinary approaches to symbolic power and cultural representation in the royal palaces of Cirebon

Nina Sofiyawati[1*], Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra[2], Sugeng Bayu Wahyono[3]
*Corresponding Author

[1] Doctoral Program of Cultural and Media Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
and Visual Communication Design Lecturer, Ciputra University, Surabaya, Indonesia
[2] Professor of Anthropology, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[3] Professor of Curriculum and Educational Technology, Yogyakarta State University, and lecturer of Cultural and Media Studies
Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

nina.sofiyawati@ciputra.ac.id, heddy.shri@ugm.ac.id, sugeng_bw@uny.ac.id
Tel: +6281903154886

Abstract

In the digital era, cultural heritage is not only preserved physically but also negotiated through media such as Instagram. This research explores how Cirebon Palaces uses Instagram to emphasise symbolic power and cultural legitimacy. Using an interdisciplinary approach and social semiotics grounded in Bourdieu and Hall's theories, this study analyses visual content and narratives to examine how symbolic power and cultural legitimacy are constructed and contested through multimodal representation on Instagram. The results show that Instagram is used as a space for symbolic power contestation by Cirebon Palaces through ceremonial images, royal symbols, and historical narratives that are strategically used to strengthen legitimacy.

Keywords: Cirebon Palaces; Symbolic Power; Cultural Representation; Instagram

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1.0 Introduction

The existence of royal palaces in contemporary Indonesia no longer carries direct political power, a condition that has increasingly raised questions regarding their role, authority, and relevance in the present socio-political landscape. This situation is also evident in the context of the Cirebon palaces, particularly as internal conflicts related to succession and lineage became publicly visible following the death of Sultan Sepuh XIV and the subsequent transfer of the Kasepuhan throne to PRA Luqman Zulkaedin as Sultan Sepuh XV. The public exposure of this succession issue not only revealed internal tensions but also highlighted the fragile position of palace authority in a contemporary setting where legitimacy is no longer secured solely through inherited status. This dynamic is further reinforced by the long history of the Cirebon Sultanate. Established as an Islamic political authority in the 15th century, the Sultanate later fragmented into several palaces (Kasepuhan, Kanoman, Kacirebonan, and Peguron Kaprabonan) each claiming genealogical continuity with the original Cirebon lineage (Sulendraningrat, 1985; Hardjasaputra, 2011). Despite originating from the same lineage, these palaces have developed different interpretations of history, institutional identities, and forms of symbolic capital. These differences have resulted in overlapping and, at times, competing narratives of authority and power, placing the palaces in a fragmented symbolic landscape. In this

context, the struggle for symbolic dominance becomes inevitable, as each palace seeks to assert their legitimacy and relevance amid changing socio-political conditions.

Symbolic contestation in this setting does not occur solely through direct political engagement or institutional confrontation. Instead, these conflicts are increasingly spreading to the representational realm, particularly through digital media. Social media platforms have emerged as strategic arenas where legitimacy, authority, and power are symbolically constructed, negotiated, and projected. As part of new media, social media has characteristics that are apparent in their speed, interactivity, and algorithmic logic, which together facilitate the rapid production and circulation of messages across various platforms (Flew, 2002; Miller, 2011). In contemporary political practice, these platforms have been widely used by elites for campaigning, image building, and struggles for legitimacy, as demonstrated during the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election, when competing presidential camps mobilized narratives and symbols through social media to influence public perception (Patrick & Savithri, 2019) [1].

A similar pattern can be observed at the level of traditional institutions. Palaces such as Kasepuhan and Kanoman have increasingly adopted Instagram not merely as a tool for cultural promotion, but as a strategic medium for symbolic power practices. Through the visual circulation of heirlooms, rituals, ceremonial activities, and historical quotations, these palaces construct identity narratives that operate as mechanisms of symbolic power, through which authority and legitimacy are reaffirmed (Bourdieu, 1991 in Fashri, 2007). From a social semiotic perspective, such visual practices function to legitimate institutional identity by naturalising hierarchy and tradition within representational forms (van Leeuwen, 2005). When articulated through Instagram, these symbolic strategies are further shaped by contemporary dynamics of cultural negotiation, political visibility, and digital mediation. Instagram thus functions not only as a platform of documentation but as a symbolic arena in which meanings, hierarchies, and distinctions are actively produced and contested.

Palace authority is examined through the lens of symbolic power as articulated in digital representation particularly on Instagram, an area that remains relatively underexplored compared to historical or material-based cultural studies of royal institutions. Instagram is selected due to its intensive use by the palaces and its capacity to integrate visual and textual elements into cohesive symbolic narratives. Notably, shifts in content strategy became increasingly apparent following the public emergence of the Kasepuhan succession polemic, indicating that digital representation plays a significant role in responding to internal legitimacy challenges. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman as the primary actors within Cirebon's contemporary power dynamics, where differences in narratives, symbols, and visual strategies reveal how legitimacy is constructed, maintained, and contested within the digital media space. This study aims to examine how Instagram functions as a symbolic arena in which the royal palaces of Cirebon, particularly Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman construct, negotiate, and contest symbolic power and cultural legitimacy through multimodal visual and textual representations.

2.0 Literature Review

Previous studies on the Cirebon palaces have largely approached royal institutions through historical, legal, and material-cultural perspectives. Murbarani (2019), for instance, examined Keraton Kasepuhan within a constitutional framework, positioning the palace as a cultural institution whose authority is grounded in tradition rather than contemporary political power. Similarly, Nujuliyani (2021) analysed cultural preservation practices in Keraton Kanoman, emphasising rituals and traditions as mechanisms for sustaining cultural continuity in modern society. While such studies provide valuable insights into historical legitimacy and cultural functions, palace authority is generally treated as a fixed attribute rooted in heritage and lineage. This approach tends to portray royal palaces as static custodians of tradition, with limited attention to ongoing negotiations of legitimacy and authority within changing socio-cultural contexts. Notably, the role of digital media particularly social media platforms such as Instagram as a contemporary arena for articulating and contesting palace authority remains largely absent, despite increasing public visibility of palace-related content in digital spaces.

To address this limitation, theories of representation and symbolic power offer a critical framework for examining authority beyond formal political structures. Hall (1997) conceptualises representation as a social practice through which meaning is actively constructed and circulated, rather than merely reflected. Meaning production operates through the interrelation between mental representation and signifying practices, a process that increasingly unfolds in multimodal forms within digital media environments (Noviani, 2020). Within this framework, media platforms such as Instagram function as sites of discourse production shaped by selective framing and ideological interests, rather than neutral channels of communication (Hall, 1982, in Noviani, 2020).

Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power further explains how domination is sustained through symbolic recognition and social acceptance. In royal contexts, symbols such as heirlooms, titles, rituals, and genealogies operate as forms of symbolic capital that can be strategically mobilised to reinforce authority. When mediated through visual representation, these symbols contribute to the reproduction of power relations rather than merely communicating cultural heritage (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). From a social semiotic perspective, visual practices legitimise institutional identity by naturalising hierarchy, tradition, and authority within representational forms (van Leeuwen, 2005). Within digital environments characterised by intensified visibility and circulation, symbolic practices undergo continuous negotiation, requiring traditional institutions to reposition authority within mediated public spaces.

The political dimension of symbolism further clarifies this process. Cohen (1979) distinguishes cultural symbols from formal political symbols, emphasising the effectiveness of cultural symbolism in concealing power interests behind shared traditions and values. Edelman (1967; 1971) similarly argues that political life operates through symbolic action, whereby rituals, narratives, and images generate legitimacy and public consent. In royal settings, symbolic practices function as mechanisms for sustaining aristocratic authority even in the absence of formal political power, aligning with Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, in which domination is reproduced

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[1] See https://www.cnnindonesia.com/teknologi/20190109175018-185-359665/adu-kasak-kusuk-citra-jokowi-dan-prabowo-di-media-sosial

through socially legitimised representations (Fashri, 2014). Within social media environments, symbolic capital such as honour, lineage, and public recognition is increasingly constructed through visual and narrative strategies designed for public visibility and algorithmic circulation (Bourdieu, 1990).

Recent scholarship reinforces the relevance of this representational approach in contemporary cultural and digital contexts. Suwarno (2024) demonstrates how symbolic practices are mobilised through visual expression in response to social and cultural crises, while Septian (2024) examines the construction of identity and power through visual and spatial representation in village landscapes. Legino et al. (2024) highlight the role of regional platforms such as ARCADESA2024 in sustaining symbolic dialogue and cultural representation across Southeast Asia. Although these studies do not directly address royal institutions, recent scholarship collectively indicates a broader shift toward understanding culture, identity, and authority as dynamically negotiated through visual and representational practices in contemporary public and digital spaces. Despite these developments, a clear gap remains in studies examining how traditional royal institutions employ social media as an arena for symbolic contestation. Research on the Cirebon palaces continues to prioritise heritage preservation and institutional continuity, while studies on digital representation predominantly focus on artists, communities, or cultural platforms rather than aristocratic institutions. Responding to this gap, the present study integrates theories of representation (Hall), symbolic power (Bourdieu), and social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen) to examine Instagram as a contemporary arena for constructing, negotiating, and contesting palace authority. By focusing on Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman, this research positions royal palaces as active agents within digital power dynamics, contributing to current discussions on cultural legitimacy and symbolic authority in the digital age.

3.0 Methodology

Within the framework of cultural studies, research is understood as an interpretative practice shaped by social, historical, and ideological contexts (Saukko, 2003). Accordingly, this study adopts a qualitative approach using multimodal critical discourse analysis to examine how symbolic authority and institutional legitimacy are constructed through Instagram by Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman between 2020 and 2023. Instagram is treated as a contemporary cultural arena in which visual, textual, and narrative elements operate together to produce symbolic meaning and power relations.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected through content analysis of posts published on the official Instagram accounts of Keraton Kasepuhan (@keraton_kasepuhancirebon/@keratonkasepuhan) and Keraton Kanoman (@official_kesultanankanoman). A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select posts containing symbolic representations related to authority, legitimacy, genealogy, ritual practices, heritage, and cultural preservation. Selection criteria included the presence of visual symbols (such as regalia, heirlooms, ceremonies, and architectural elements) and linguistic components (captions, hashtags, quotations, and historical references). Posts lacking symbolic relevance were excluded. All selected posts were archived with accompanying captions, posting dates, and engagement indicators to maintain contextual consistency. Secondary data were obtained from interviews with palace representatives or account managers (where accessible), academic literature on the Cirebon palaces, theoretical texts on symbolic power and representation, and relevant mass media and online news sources. These materials provided historical and institutional context for interpreting digital representations.

3.2 Data Analysis Method

Data were analysed using multimodal critical discourse analysis based on a social semiotic framework (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2010/2011). This approach was selected to address the multimodal nature of authority construction on Instagram, where meaning is produced through the interaction of visual composition, language, and narrative structure. Analysis focused on four interconnected layers: discourse, design, production, and distribution. At the discourse level, dominant symbolic themes related to authority and legitimacy were identified. The design level examined visual and textual organisation, including composition, framing, and salience. The production level addressed institutional control and representational choices, while the distribution level considered Instagram as a platform shaping visibility and circulation. Across these layers, strategies of exclusion, rearrangement, addition, and substitution were examined to reveal how symbolic power is articulated and negotiated in digital space.

While multimodal critical discourse analysis allows for in-depth interpretation of symbolic meaning and power relations, this approach is inherently interpretative and relies on the researcher's analytical positioning. The study focuses on content production rather than audience reception. Therefore, it does not capture how Instagram users interpret, negotiate, or contest the symbolic representations analysed. In addition, the analysis is limited to selected posts from official palace accounts between 2020 and 2023 and does not account for deleted content, algorithmic reach, or cross-platform dynamics that may also shape symbolic visibility. These limitations do not undermine the analytical value of the study, but instead delineate its scope and point toward opportunities for future audience-centred or comparative digital research.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Digital Presence and Symbolic Communication on Instagram

As part of contemporary digital communication strategies, each Cirebon palace maintains an official Instagram account to convey institutional identity, cultural activities, and symbolic authority. Platform observation conducted between 2020 and 2023 indicates

noticeable differences in follower numbers and posting intensity. The account @official_kesultanankanoman recorded the highest number of followers (2,933), followed by @keraton_kasepuhancirebon (2,328) and @keratonkasepuhan (1,068). These variations reflect differing levels of audience engagement and communicative reach, serving as early indicators of how symbolic legitimacy and public visibility are negotiated within digital space. Figure 1 presents the appearance of two Instagram accounts associated with Keraton Kasepuhan. The account @keratonkasepuhan, managed directly by Sultan Sepuh XV PRA Luqman Zulkaedin, prioritises formal content such as royal agendas, religious quotations, and visually structured compositions. Visual consistency and improved image quality suggest an emphasis on institutional authority and leadership visibility. In contrast, @keraton_kasepuhancirebon, managed by palace staff, shows higher posting frequency and thematic diversity, although visual organisation appears less refined, indicating a stronger focus on activity documentation rather than symbolic curation.
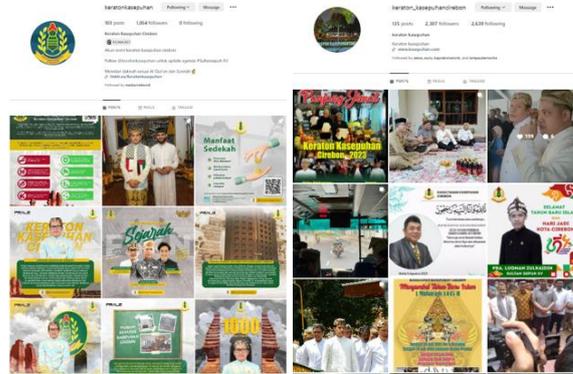

Fig. 1. Kasepuhan Instagram account
(Source: Screenshot documentation @keratonkasepuhan and @keraton_kasepuhancirebon)

Figure 2 shows the Instagram account of Keraton Kanoman (@official_kesultanankanoman), which demonstrates a marked shift in content strategy from mid-2020 onward. Structured visual layouts, the consistent use of megamendung motifs, and more informative narrative captions indicate an effort to strengthen symbolic coherence and institutional identity. However, a sharp decline in posting activity during 2023 reveals inconsistency in sustaining symbolic visibility, highlighting the dependence of digital authority on continuous representational practices.

Fig. 2. Kanoman Instagram Account
(Source: Screenshot documentation @official_kesultanankanoman)

4.2 Thematic Distribution of Symbolic Power in Instagram Content

A preliminary multimodal-oriented reading of Instagram posts from Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman identifies five dominant symbolic themes: ancestral heirlooms, rituals and traditions, historical-cultural narratives, promotion and leadership visibility, and social or institutional recognition. These themes are derived from an integrated examination of visual elements-including depicted objects, compositional structure, spatial arrangement, and symbolic attributes in relation to textual components, such as captions, narrative framing, and the use of titles or honorific language. Rather than functioning as isolated content categories, these themes constitute an analytical framework for understanding how symbolic power is articulated and differentiated through digital representation.

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of the distribution of these symbolic themes across the Instagram accounts of both palaces. Keraton Kasepuhan demonstrates stronger emphasis on historical narratives and a more diverse representation of heritage symbols, while Keraton Kanoman prioritises public rituals and community-oriented religious traditions. These variations indicate that symbolic authority is not communicated uniformly, but selectively constructed through recurring configurations of visual signs and textual narratives that foreground particular dimensions of legitimacy, heritage, and leadership.

Table 1. Comparison based on content categories of Kasepuhan and Kanoman Palaces' posts on Instagram.

Aspect	Kasepuhan	Kanoman
Heirloom	More diverse and symbolic	More Specific
Rituals and traditions	Great symbolic tradition	Public traditions and more popular religious traditions
Historical narrative	Dominant and strategic	Minimal
Promotion	Combination of culture and leaders	Focus on leadership promotion in ritual and tradition
Social recognition	The relationship between elites and public figures	Community and social relations

(Source: Author's Editing, 2025)

Further quantitative mapping provides empirical support for these thematic patterns. Keraton Kasepuhan dominates representations related to cultural heritage, including visual displays of gamelan and wayang (12 posts), and maintains a strategic presence in historical-cultural narratives (8 posts). Keraton Kanoman features fewer heritage-related posts (4 posts), focusing instead on specific artefacts such as ancient manuscripts positioned as markers of authenticity and lineage. In ritual representation, Keraton Kanoman is particularly active in socio-religious traditions such as Grebeg Syawal (36 posts), while Keraton Kasepuhan concentrates on major court rituals such as Pelal Ageng (30 posts). These distributions reveal distinct symbolic priorities that later inform divergent visual and discursive strategies.

The thematic patterns identified in this section provide empirical evidence for the research objective by demonstrating how symbolic power is selectively constructed through multimodal representation on Instagram. These findings establish a methodological bridge between the content mapping stage and the subsequent multimodal critical discourse analysis, where visual composition, textual narration, and discursive positioning are examined in greater depth to explain how symbolic authority and legitimacy are constructed and contested within Cirebon's digital media space.

5.0 Discussion

Building on the patterns identified in the findings, this discussion shifts the analytical focus from what is represented on Instagram to how and why symbolic authority is discursively produced, legitimised, and stabilised through multimodal means. Rather than reiterating descriptive observations, this section interprets the empirical results through a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) perspective, examining the interaction between visual composition, textual framing, symbolic selection, and platform-specific affordances. From a multimodal critical discourse perspective, these representations function not merely as cultural expressions, but as strategic discursive practices through which authority is naturalised, hierarchised, and made socially recognisable in digital space. In doing so, the discussion situates the Cirebon palaces' Instagram practices within broader theoretical debates on representation, symbolic power, and digital mediation in contemporary cultural institutions. Symbols, according to Edelman (1967), represent more than themselves. Symbols can evoke perceptions, emotions, or associations across time and space. Edelman (1971) emphasises that politics operates through power symbols, such as narratives, rituals, objects, or actions that project authority and stability. These symbols are crafted to influence public perception without necessarily presenting a realistic depiction. The media amplifies these messages, knowing that emotionally charged symbols attract more public attention than factual information, making "public opinion" itself a symbolic construct. In the context of the Cirebon Palaces, Instagram becomes a medium for symbolic display, reinforcing royal authority and heritage. These symbols subconsciously shape public perceptions of enduring power, making them powerful tools that can be manipulated for material or symbolic gains by those in power.

In the representation of heirlooms, Kasepuhan displays sacred objects such as the Singabarong Carriage, Gamelan Sekaten, and the robe of Sunan Gunung Jati with a spiritual-historical narrative that emphasises the role of the palace as the guardian of the great heritage. Symbols such as the Singabarong Carriage are interpreted not merely as historical objects, but as symbols of spiritual-political glory. Meanwhile, Kanoman emphasises the authenticity of tradition (pepakem) through the display of the Paksi Naga Liman and Jempana Carriages and highlights the recognition from foreign nobles to strengthen the image as the legitimate heirs of past greatness. Figure 3 shows the differences in the symbolism of the heirloom chariot in Kanoman and Kasepuhan's Instagram posts.

Analysis of two posts from @official_kesultanankanoman and @keraton_kasepuhancirebon shows different symbolic strategies. Kanoman displays the Paksi Naga Liman carriage in an exclusive and sacred context, emphasising historical authenticity ("with narration maintains its authenticity") and external recognition through the narrative of a visit by foreign nobles. The visuals create a formal distance between the figures and the heirloom, reinforcing the impression of elitism. In contrast, Kasepuhan displays the Singabarong carriage with a modern and populist approach as part of the narrative of cultural preservation and heritage tourism. Symmetrical and clean visuals, without figures, and an invitation to the public reflect openness. The caption also emphasises the conservation aspect: "the cultural heritage and its customary rules are still well-maintained." However, this approach can reduce the impression of symbolic exclusivity and lineage authority because the heirloom is positioned as a tourist attraction, not a sacred symbol of power. Within the framework of multimodality, Kanoman builds exclusive symbolism through a combination of visual modes (colour, composition, and background) and linguistics (historical and elite narratives) to emphasise their ideological position as the owner of the legitimate heritage. In contrast, Kasepuhan displays sterile and structured visuals with promotional captions, forming a more open and tourist-friendly image of power. These two approaches show that visual and textual symbols are not neutral but rather loaded with power strategies. Instagram functions not just as documentation but as an arena for contestation of discourse and legitimacy, where each palace builds their self-image according to the direction of its narrative and symbolic strategy. Recent studies on Instagram and institutional communication emphasise that authority and legitimacy on social media are increasingly negotiated through curated visual repetition, affective

storytelling, and algorithmic visibility rather than formal declarations of power (e.g., Abidin, 2021; Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020). Within this framework, the symbolic strategies observed in the Cirebon palaces' Instagram practices resonate with broader findings in platform studies, which describe Instagram as a space where cultural institutions must continuously perform relevance through multimodal coherence, ritualised posting, and audience-oriented framing. This reinforces the argument that symbolic authority in digital environments is not static, but contingent upon sustained multimodal circulation and recognisability within platform logics.

Fig. 3. Posts of the Golden Chariot of Paksi Naga Liman Kanoman (left), and the Golden Chariot of Singabarong Kasepuhan (right)
(Source: Screenshot documentation of the @official_kesultanankanoman and @keraton_kasepuhancirebon accounts)

Other posts, two Instagram posts from the Kanoman and Kasepuhan Sultanates, show the use of the robe symbol as a sign of power with different multimodal approaches. In Figure 4, Kanoman visually displays the robe worn by Gusti Pangeran Patih in the Grebeg Agung ceremony, strengthening legitimacy through ritual practices. Within the multimodal framework and Bourdieu's theory (1990), this robe functions as symbolic capital that shows spiritual leadership and an exclusive position in the traditional power structure. In contrast, Kasepuhan conveys the robe symbol indirectly through the promotion of the Sunan Gunung Jati heritage museum, framing the robe as cultural capital in an institutionalised historical narrative. The robe symbol here becomes an object of modern heritage, not a ritual act. Kanoman displays power through structure and exclusivity, while Kasepuhan does so through an inclusive and emotional narrative. Both show the robe as a dominant symbol (Turner, 1967) that has spiritual, historical, political, and ideological meanings in a multivocal manner.
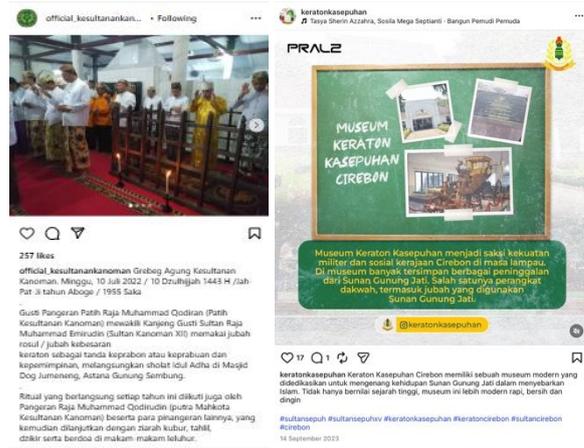

Fig. 4. Posting of the Robe of the Prophet/Leadership of Kanoman (left), and the Robe of Sunan Gunung Jati in Kasepuhan (right)
(Source: Screenshot documentation of the @official_kesultanankanoman and @keraton_kasepuhancirebon accounts)

Post of the Grebeg Syawal ritual from Kanoman features Gusti Pangeran Patih Raja Muhammad Qodiran as the main figure in the nyekar procession, who is visually placed in a central position with close framing and bowing gestures. This composition builds an impression of spirituality and respect for ancestors, strengthening the symbolism of power in a sacred atmosphere. Multimodally, visuals and texts unite to form an authoritative and solemn image. The formal caption narrative and the mention of full titles reflect Bourdieu's hierarchical structure and accumulation of symbolic capital. The mention of the involvement of other palaces (Kasepuhan, Kacirebonan, and Kaprabonan) expands the reach of social meaning while also being a symbolic strategy to show harmony and legitimacy in the Cirebon power map. Behind the narrative, there is an implied symbolic construction that places Kanoman as the centre of cultural and spiritual authority. This is a subtle but effective form of symbolic hegemony. Meanwhile, the tradition of visiting the tomb of Sunan Gunung Jati and the ancestors of Cirebon, as seen in Figure 5, shows an effort to strengthen spiritual lineage, which in Bourdieu's

framework (1990/1991) is a form of claim to cultural and symbolic capital that is difficult to match by non-lineage authorities. The embedding of hashtags such as #sultanrajamuhammadqodiran #denwelassihingsapapada also strengthens self-image and digital branding based on symbolic and religious power.

Fig. 5. Post of Grebeg Syawal Ritual of Kanoman Palace
(Source: Screenshot documentation of the @official_kesultanankanoman account)

Kasepuhan's post, as shown in Figure 6, about the annual tradition of prayer, dhikr, and shalawat at the Sang Cipta Rasa Grand Mosque, does not merely show religious practices but becomes a symbolic arena where cultural and political power is negotiated. Visually, the parallel position between Sultan Sepuh and the Mayor of Cirebon reflects the consolidation of symbolic capital and political capital, reinforced by the bright lighting on the Sultan's figure and the participants' collective gaze. The caption emphasises the Sultan's spiritual leadership status with language full of symbols of respect. In Bourdieu's framework (1990/1991), this shows the actualisation of symbolic power through cultural habitus and rituals that receive social recognition. The location of the mosque becomes a field of capital exchange, where the palace builds legitimacy through affiliation with the government.

Fig. 6. Post of the Annual Traditional Ritual of the Kasepuhan Palace at the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa
(Source: Screenshot documentation of the @keratonkasepuhan account)

On Instagram, Kasepuhan and Kanoman not only share their cultures but also compete to shape public perceptions of who holds the most legitimate symbolic authority in Cirebon. Social media has become an arena for multimodal production of meaning, ranging from texts and images to hashtags that are strategically used to construct the image of the palace. Unlike traditional forms of communication, Instagram enables continuous, curated and interactive representations, allowing each palace to selectively highlight specific rituals, heirlooms and historical narratives or certain moments. This selective framing is in line with Hall's (1997) assertion that representations are not passive reflections of reality but rather active social practices that construct meaning, shaping people's perspectives on the world. In this case, representation functions as a legitimising tool, where symbols are recontextualised to serve current ideological and institutional needs. The displayed symbols do not represent objective reality; instead, they are constructs of meaning designed to foster symbolic tranquilly amid internal conflicts, such as issues of legitimacy. In the digital age, cultural symbols like heirlooms, titles, and rituals are dynamically reinterpreted, necessitating the Cirebon palace to adapt in order to maintain relevance and compete in an increasingly competitive digital environment. This suggests that symbolic authority in the digital age increasingly

49

depends not on historical continuity alone, but on the capacity to translate inherited power into platform-specific multimodal performances. Beyond the Cirebon context, these findings carry broader theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study demonstrates how multimodal critical discourse analysis can be applied to understand symbolic power as a dynamic, platform-mediated process rather than a fixed institutional attribute. Practically, the findings offer insights for cultural and heritage institutions navigating digital visibility, highlighting the need to balance authenticity, ritual authority, and audience engagement without reducing sacred symbols to mere performative content. At a societal level, the study underscores how digital platforms increasingly shape public understandings of tradition, legitimacy, and leadership, raising critical questions about how cultural authority is maintained, contested, or transformed in algorithmically driven public spheres.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that Instagram has become a strategic arena for Keraton Kasepuhan and Keraton Kanoman in constructing and contesting symbolic power through curated visual and narrative representations. Symbols such as heirlooms, robes, rituals, and political affiliations are mobilised not only for cultural preservation but also to shape legitimacy and public image amid internal conflicts and broader socio-cultural dynamics. While Keraton Kasepuhan tends to adopt a formal, narrative-driven, and tourism-oriented strategy, Keraton Kanoman emphasises spiritual rituals, exclusivity, and aristocratic symbolism, demonstrating that symbolic power is continuously negotiated through multimodal visual and textual practices.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is limited to Instagram content from two Cirebon palaces during the 2020–2023 period, which may not capture broader historical shifts or cross-platform dynamics. Second, the study focuses on the production of symbolic representations rather than audience reception; thus, interpretations are based on multimodal discourse analysis and do not directly reflect how audiences perceive or negotiate these symbols. Third, as a qualitative study, the selection and interpretation of posts are inherently selective, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.

In a broader context, this research highlights how digital platforms such as Instagram enable traditional institutions to reassert relevance through symbolic representation. Future research is encouraged to incorporate audience-centred approaches, such as netnography or digital ethnography, and to conduct comparative studies with other royal institutions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia in order to deepen understanding of how cultural authority and symbolic power are negotiated in digital environments.

Acknowledgements

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study contributes to the study of visual communication, culture, and power by analysing how the traditional institution of the palace utilises Instagram as a symbolic contestation space. Combining Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Bourdieu's symbolic power, and multimodal critical discourse analysis, this study offers a new perspective in reading the digital strategies of traditional cultural institutions. Methodologically, the multimodal approach enriches the study of digital communication, while empirically, this study opens up a discussion space about cultural legitimacy in the era of social media.

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