Batik as Intertext: Reconstructing Cultural Meaning on TikTok in the ASEAN Digital Sphere

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Abstract
This paper examines batik as an example of intertextual culture in TikTok's digital space, focusing on how users reconstruct its meaning through interactions across cultural settings in the ASEAN region. The research treats TikTok content as a cultural text and analyses inter-meaning relations, visual codes, and algorithmic dissemination logic. Drawing on intertextuality theory, semiotics, and representation studies, the research confirms batik's potential for re-signification through hybridised visual stories that combine batik tradition with global aesthetics. It shows that batik functions as a dynamic cultural signifier whose meaning is constantly negotiated through users' participatory behaviour, including visual performance, aesthetic adaptation, and interaction. Batik is re-signified through recontextualization, in which its original symbolic meanings are not simply preserved but re-articulated under the platform's visual and algorithmic logics. This recontextualization produces a new hybrid meaning that reflects the intersection of local cultural identity and global digital trends. Moreover, it is found out that the process of meaning construction is not limited to the participation of users alone but is also influenced by the features of the platform.
Key words: *Batik; Cultural Representation; Digital Culture; Intertextuality; TikTok.*

Introduction

Unlike in the past, when culture flowed in a linear fashion, culture now operates in an interconnected network comprising texts, images, and interactions made possible through technology (Jenkins, 2006; Abidin 2020). Platforms like TikTok not only change how cultural meaning is created, shared, and understood, but also turn users into active contributors to the construction of cultural narratives (Hutchinson, 2021; Steinberg et al. 2024). In this context, cultural symbols can no longer be seen as fixed, static representations of identity, but as fluid, flexible signifiers negotiated

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through continuous interpretation (Hall 1997; Nuri 2025; Fabryka-Protska et al. 2024).

Indonesian batik, recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO (UNESCO 2009), is one example of cultural expression embedded with philosophical, social, and aesthetic values (Sedyawati, 2010). Traditionally, batik has been a cultural symbol representing national identity, the authenticity of traditions, and the origin of a nation (Nuriyanto, 2022; Febriani et al. 2023; Hayati & Christomy, 2022). Nonetheless, when introduced into the digital domain, especially TikTok, batik tends to undergo recontextualization marked by visual performativity, aesthetic stylisation, and user participation (Wesnina et al. 2025; Widagdo et al. 2021; Angkawijaya et al. 2020). In this scenario, batik moves beyond its traditional role as a cultural artefact and becomes a "cultural text".

To make sense of this phenomenon, one needs to rely on Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality. According to her, any text exists through its interrelation with other texts (Kristeva 1980). In other words, TikTok content becomes an intertextual field where different cultural codes intertwine, generating hybrid meanings. Batik presented on TikTok is not an independent phenomenon but a result of the interaction between local traditions, trends, and conventions shaped by the platform's logic (Prastomo & Widiantoro, 2018; Haryanti et al., 2025).

At the same time, meaning making cannot be separated from the practice of representation. As Stuart Hall claims, meanings are not pre-existing in the objects of culture but are generated through practices of representation that involve linguistic and discursive codes and images (Hall, 1997). On TikTok, users become both constructors and interpreters of meaning, offering cultural codes in the form of images, while audiences reinterpret them in their social and cultural contexts.

Although many studies have examined batik as a cultural symbol of identity (Sedyawati, 2010; UNESCO, 2009) and social media as a medium for the spreading of cultures (Abidin, 2021; Susanto, 2021), they either perceive culture as a stable concept or concentrate only on the communication aspect (Aririguzoh, 2022; Kiley & Vaisey, 2020). They do not sufficiently cover the textual and symbolic aspects of digital cultural production, including intertextuality and visualisation practices. Moreover, little academic knowledge remains on how platform logic, including algorithms and participatory culture, shapes the circulation and creation of cultural meanings (Gaw, 2021; Jenkins, 2006).

Against this background, this paper examines batik on TikTok as an intertextual phenomenon where culture is understood as a process. Rather than seeing it as a tool of cultural diplomacy or a static symbol of identity, this study examines how batik functions as a cultural text whose meaning is constantly generated, negotiated, and re-created in the digital environment. The key research question is: How is the meaning of batik re-created through intertextual relations and digital interactions on TikTok in the context of ASEAN countries?

Therefore, the main concern of this study is not about cultural distribution but the functioning, creation, and change of cultural meanings in digital intertextual environments.

Literature Review

Academic studies on batik mostly regard it as a representation of the nation's identity through the philosophy of its existence, which is connected to the values of Indonesian society. In this context, batik can be considered not only a textile product but also a cultural phenomenon that reflects the structure of social order and cosmology (Sedyawati, 2010; Woelandhary et al., 2024; Poon, 2020). Moreover, UNESCO's recognition of batik as Intangible Cultural Heritage (2009) emphasises its authenticity and longevity as a national cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, this perspective can be regarded as static because it sees culture as stable. Given today's rapid processes of globalisation and digitalisation, this view is no longer sufficient. Thus, we need to consider culture as dynamic.

Intertextuality is considered one of the essential foundations of contemporary cultural studies, allowing us to interpret how meaning emerges and reproduces itself. According to Kristeva (1980), every text represents a "mosaic of quotations" created through its interaction with other texts. Therefore, no single or ultimate meaning exists, as meaning is always embedded in a network of connections and intersections. This approach makes it possible to see cultural representations in digital media, such as TikTok, emerge through the convergence of different discourses that are often negotiated against each other.

This approach aligns with the semiotics developed by Barthes (1977), who treats cultural objects as systems of signs that function through multiple layers of denotation and connotation. In this case, batik is not only a visual object but also a signifier that carries ideological and symbolic aspects that continuously change. The alteration of batik in digital media thus shows how connotations can change, be simplified, or be reduced depending on the platform's specific aesthetics (Salma & Eskak, 2019; Wesnina et al., 2025).

According to Hall (1997), culture does not carry meaning inside an object but constructs it through processes of representation that involve language, imagery, and discourse. This becomes even more complicated in the digital world because it involves users' participation in reproducing meaning (Hou et al. 2022; Putikadyanto et al. 2021). TikTok, as a video-sharing platform, creates conditions for such cultural representations through visuals, sounds, and user interaction.

More broadly, digital media can be understood through Jenkins's (2006) notion of participatory culture. In this case, the line dividing producers from consumers becomes less distinct. As a result, users do not simply consume cultural artefacts but actively engage in their interpretation, modification, and distribution by means of such activities as creating remixes and duets and taking up viral challenges. This point will help interpret batik on TikTok as an activity involving collaboration and the creation of meaning.

Several recent works have begun exploring the role of social media in forming cultural representations. According to Abidin (2021), Boumaza and Baker (2026), and Manara and Weber (2023), digital platforms serve not only as means of distributing content but also as venues where identities and cultures are continuously negotiated. Nevertheless, most of these works focus on issues of

communication or popularity, and the intertextuality of cultural representation remains unexplored.

Therefore, a major research gap remains in how culture functions as a text in the digital domain. Previous works have not explained how culture constructs meaning through intertextuality, visualisation, and the logic of the digital platform. This study fills this gap by focusing on the intertextuality of batik on TikTok, approaching batik as a cultural practice and an intertextual construct that creates cultural meanings and represents cultural identity.

Research Methodology

This research uses an interpretive qualitative methodology, treating TikTok videos as cultural texts that can be analysed through relations of meaning, visual codes, and the logic of digital dissemination. This methodology offers insight into the production of cultural meaning, rather than assuming it is predetermined (Kristeva, 1980; Hall, 1997). The research data are TikTok videos featuring batik, selected according to relevant hashtags and user popularity. The units of analysis comprise visuals, captions and user interaction on the platform. Analysis uses intertextual and semiotic readings to trace how the meaning of batik is constructed through relationships with other texts, platform aesthetics, and participatory practices. This approach does not aim for generalisation but rather seeks to interpret the process of meaning reconstruction within a technology-mediated digital cultural context.

Discussion

Batik as Intertext in the Digital Space

In the TikTok context, batik is no longer a single representation; it is an intertext created by the intersection of several intertwined layers of intertextuality. This means that every time batik is represented, it is always done in a context where cultural texts are interacting with each other. It is crucial to stress that this interaction always takes place in an open way, meaning meaning is never fixed but always changing and evolving.

In the online environment, batik can no longer be seen as simply reflecting traditional practices and authentic cultural values. Instead, it becomes a product of interaction among various discourses, local and global, and exists within the logic of visualisation and computation on internet platforms. In this sense, TikTok not only disseminates information about batik but also shapes how it is depicted and interpreted, through an aesthetic that highlights visualisation and performance.

Thus, batik as an art form has shifted from an embodiment of cultural values with philosophical meanings to a visual object that is flexible, easily adaptable, and more accessible. This transition does not merely point to the depletion of its meaning; rather, it highlights a process of re-articulation that involves negotiating existing meanings in accordance with the aesthetics of the digital environment.

Consequently, batik may be seen as the site where meaning is negotiated, where different meanings intersect and compete, creating different configurations of meaning. This emphasises the fluid and non-essential nature of culture in the

digital era, which manifests as an intertextual field. In this field, meaning is not delivered linearly; on the contrary, it is created situationally in the context of the relations between texts, users, and the logic of the platform.

The Transformation of Meaning: From Denotation to Connotation

In Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, the representation of batik on TikTok shifts meaning from the denotative to the connotative level. At the denotative level, batik is a relatively "neutral" visual image of an object: a piece of fabric or cloth with a recognisable pattern worn in certain conditions.

Batik's significance in the digital context lies precisely in the connotations of this object. In this context, batik functions as a sign that carries multiple symbolic meanings, including cultural aspects, elegance, authenticity, or even modernity and lifestyle. Such meanings are formed not by the object itself, but through the practices of its representation using different visual codes and stories. Thus, batik is not just "displayed," but is a sign that constantly generates new meanings.

It is crucial to highlight the fact that these associations are no longer fully tied to the traditional cultural system. On TikTok, batik is interpreted through the prism of global aesthetics and trends, all of which relate to the visual appeal of the process. As a result, batik is translated into a symbolic language and thus "reinterpreted" through a new visual language that aligns with the platform's logic.

This process can be explained by the idea that a sign does not contain meaning in itself; its meaning always depends on the context of representation. In this regard, in the digital environment, the sign is not only constructed but also represented in the context of participants' activities. This implies that batik on TikTok is not a sign with one fixed meaning but a semiotic construct whose meanings continuously change.

Intertextuality and Platform Aesthetics

Intertextuality on TikTok depends not only on the relationship between cultural symbols, but also on TikTok's aesthetics, which form the basis of how meaning is constructed. In this case, in line with the concept introduced by Julia Kristeva, a text is not a separate entity but exists within a complex network of relationships with other texts. As for TikTok, the "other texts" are not only cultural references, but also the aesthetics of TikTok in terms of video transitions, the use of viral music, editing rhythm, and the repetition of videos.

TikTok should therefore not be seen as a neutral medium, but as one with its own visual and algorithmic logic and an impact on meaning-making. The medium's aesthetics, based on speed, visual attractiveness, and replicability, become elements of representation. Batik, in turn, is represented as a cultural image through this aesthetic. This representation is not completely traditional, yet it is not unrelated to tradition either.

In this context, the presentation of batik may be seen as the outcome of a complex negotiation between native culture and globalised aesthetics, mediated by digital technologies. The interaction is nonlinear; it includes borrowing, redefinition, and reinterpretation. That is why batik acquires a hybrid nature. This

hybridisation represents a paradigm shift in how we perceive culture in the age of digitisation. Boundaries between the traditional and the modern have blurred as they become interconnected. Culture is no longer perceived as static and essential but as dynamic and intertextual.

In this context, intertextuality works not only as an instrument for constructing meaning but also as a space for renegotiating cultural identities within the digital environment shaped by social media such as TikTok.

Representation as a Process of Meaning Production

According to Stuart Hall, cultural meanings are not inherent in an object but are created through representation via language, imagery, and discourse. This suggests that representation not only reflects reality but also shapes how reality is experienced. In TikTok culture, the process becomes even more complicated because it involves not only representation but also selection, construction, and negotiation of meaning through recording and editing videos.

Creating meaning on TikTok can be seen as making visual and narrative choices that may seem trivial but are highly significant. Camera shots, music tempo, the video maker's gestures and body language, and the way batik is used as cloth become signs that convey certain meanings. It becomes evident, then, that batik is not merely fabric or clothing but a means of communicating ideas such as identity and tradition.

However, the meaning created in a representation is not confined to the creator. Viewers also play a part in actualising meaning through their interpretations. Duet videos and comments illustrate how meaning is not passively consumed but actively negotiated in a space of interaction. Viewers from different backgrounds will offer different interpretations of the same representation.

This means that representation must always be viewed as an ever-evolving process, in which meanings are continuously constructed and circulated. Batik on TikTok exists not only as an exhibition but also as interpretation and discourse, through the interaction between content creators and their viewers.

Participatory Culture and Algorithmic Mediation

The representation of batik on TikTok cannot be discussed without referring to Henry Jenkins's notion of participatory culture, in which the distinction between producers and consumers becomes blurred. In such a context, users are no longer regarded as passive consumers of meaning but as active agents of the production and alteration of meaning. On TikTok, through remixing, duetting, and visualisation, users keep transforming cultural symbols like batik into new representations.

In this context, batik culture not only lives on as an important cultural heritage passed down from one generation to another but is also rejuvenated through participatory innovation and experimentation. Through the content they create, users give batik culture meaning by connecting it to various contexts, from current lifestyles to global fashion statements and even identity. This illustrates that cultural meaning does not belong to any single authority.

However, the process of generating meaning in the digital space is not entirely free or equal. It is also shaped by algorithmic logic that operates indirectly, controlling the visibility and circulation of information. For example, TikTok's algorithm, which curates content based on user engagement, prioritises images that are visually attractive, perceptible, and easy to consume. Thus, more accessible, appealing, and popular batik images are more likely to become publicly visible.

By contrast, more complex forms that involve specific histories, signs, or images may be hard to recognise in the fast-flowing stream of information. This creates a contradiction between the depth of meaning and the logic of visibility, because not all forms have an equal chance of spreading and being understood. This means that meaning construction depends not only on users' creativity but also on technological features of information spreading and understanding.

From this perspective, the re-signification of batik through TikTok can only be understood as a result of interaction between cultural practices and technological mediation. Participatory culture allows space for different interpretations, but how these are articulated also depends on the platform's algorithm. This interaction is not just about meaning-making by humans, but also about the algorithmic logic behind the creation of cultural objects.

Cultural Implications: Identity as a Process

The findings of this study show that the meaning of batik in the online realm is not fixed or essential but constantly changing. From this perspective, cultural identity is not inherent in objects and practices, but a process of representation in society and culture.

The evolution of batik on TikTok can illustrate how identity can be constructed not as a linear, stable narrative but as a discontinuous, ephemeral, and contextual process. The significance of each case of batik will differ depending on how it is encoded, performed, and perceived online. This means identity is no longer an inheritance but something users constantly negotiate through their practices. In this context, culture can no longer be seen as something that moves from the past into the present in one direction; rather, it becomes a field of convergence and interaction of different meanings that shape one another. In this sense, the interrelationship between texts, users, and technology plays an important role in reconstructing cultural identity. This function is performed by TikTok as a mediated space.

The cultural implications of this phenomenon therefore revolve around a transformation of identity from static to dynamic. In the digital era, identity is not a destination but a process of continual movement, a constant flow of meanings.

Conclusion

This paper shows that batik, in the context of TikTok, has evolved from a symbolic cultural representation into an active intertext whose meaning can be interpreted in different ways depending on its relationship with global trends and digital aesthetics. The intertextual and semiotic methods used show how batik's meaning keeps evolving through its relationships with other texts. The meaning of

the cultural artefact is not created in a vacuum but emerges from a complex network of meanings, where batik's meaning shifts from the denotative to a more flexible, situational connotative level. In the digital world, users become producers and interpreters of meaning who actively construct, reproduce, and negotiate cultural representations with the help of participation logics and platform algorithms. The main value of the research therefore lies in shifting the perception of batik from a symbol of identity to a cultural text that is constantly evolving within the digital environment.

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