

Negotiating Cultural Change: Habitus, Cultural Capital and Digital Transformation in Blitar

Reggy Tri Astiti*, Febriandita Tedjomurti, Arief Sudrajat

Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Cultural capital;
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Intergenerational
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The rapid expansion of digital technologies and social media has transformed how local cultural practices are produced, represented, and negotiated across generations. While previous scholarship has focused on major tourism hubs, limited attention has been given to smaller localities where cultural shift occurs through everyday interactions. Addressing this gap, this qualitative case study investigates how digitalization reshapes cultural habitus, reconfigures cultural capital, and transforms cultural legitimacy across generations in Blitar, Indonesia. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and digital content analysis, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña alongside Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and social field. Findings reveal that digitalization does not generate a simple intergenerational conflict. Instead, it fosters continuous negotiations where older generations strive to preserve authenticity while younger actors serve as cultural brokers, reinterpreting traditions on digital platforms while retaining symbolic values. Rather than replacing tradition, digitalization facilitates hybrid cultural spaces where legitimacy is dynamically renegotiated. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that digital transformation should be conceptualized as an ongoing process of symbolic negotiation rather than a binary outcome of cultural preservation or decline.

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*Corresponding Author: 24040564093@mhs.unesa.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the ways in which cultural practices are created, circulated, and experienced across societies. Beyond facilitating communication, digital platforms increasingly function as cultural arenas where traditions are continuously interpreted, reconstructed, and negotiated by diverse social actors (Vicari & Kirby, 2023a). As (Prianti & Athique, 2026) argues, participatory digital culture has blurred the boundaries between cultural producers and audiences, enabling individuals to actively reshape inherited traditions through new forms

of media engagement. Consequently, cultural preservation is no longer confined to museums, archives, or traditional communities but increasingly unfolds within algorithm-driven digital environments where visibility, interaction, and public engagement determine the circulation and legitimacy of cultural expressions (Mandolessi, 2023). This transformation has generated renewed scholarly interest in understanding how digitalization simultaneously creates opportunities for cultural continuity while introducing new tensions concerning authenticity, authority, and cultural ownership (Rouhani, 2023).

The growing influence of digital media has become particularly evident among younger generations, whose cultural participation is increasingly mediated through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Rather than functioning solely as communication technologies, these platforms actively shape how cultural knowledge is consumed, interpreted, and reproduced (Vicari & Kirby, 2023b). Previous studies have demonstrated that digital media may strengthen cultural visibility by introducing traditional performances, local crafts, and indigenous knowledge to wider audiences (Ajani et al., 2024). At the same time, scholars have raised concerns that algorithm-driven content production often prioritizes entertainment value, visual appeal, and audience engagement over historical authenticity and cultural depth (Nattapong & Kittichai, 2025). As a result, traditional cultural expressions are frequently reformulated into shorter, more visually attractive, and commercially appealing formats capable of attracting digital attention, thereby creating continuous negotiations between cultural preservation and digital adaptation (Mesquita & Jucá, 2026).

Within the Indonesian context, this transformation has attracted increasing academic attention, particularly in regions recognized as major cultural and tourism destinations. Existing studies have explored the digitalization of traditional performing arts, local rituals, and cultural industries, demonstrating that digital media may simultaneously preserve cultural heritage and reshape its social meaning (Poddar, 2024). Research conducted in Bandung, Yogyakarta, Banyuwangi, and Borobudur, for example, illustrates how young cultural actors reinterpret local traditions through digital platforms while responding to changing economic opportunities and audience expectations (Alsaleh, 2024). Nevertheless, the existing literature remains predominantly centered on regions where tourism development substantially influences cultural transformation. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to smaller localities in which digital cultural change emerges primarily through everyday social interactions rather than tourism-oriented commercialization, leaving important questions regarding the dynamics of intergenerational cultural negotiation insufficiently explored.

Digital cultural transformation is equally evident in Blitar, East Java, a region with a rich cultural heritage but relatively limited visibility within national discussions on digital cultural preservation. Unlike prominent cultural destinations where heritage preservation is closely connected to tourism development, cultural practices in Blitar continue to evolve primarily through everyday community interactions. Local traditions such as wayang performances, handwritten batik production, and communal rituals increasingly intersect with digital platforms, creating new forms of cultural engagement among younger generations. Field observations presented in this study illustrate how traditional performances are shortened into TikTok videos, while locally produced batik is redesigned with contemporary aesthetics to appeal to digital consumers. Although these practices have expanded public exposure to local culture, they have also generated debates concerning authenticity, cultural legitimacy, and the boundaries between preservation and transformation (Ningrum & Abdullah, 2025). Such dynamics indicate that digitalization should not be understood merely as technological adoption but as a broader socio-cultural process through which cultural meanings are continuously negotiated across generations.

Despite the growing body of literature on digital culture, several important gaps remain insufficiently addressed. First, existing studies have concentrated predominantly on cultural tourism hubs, where economic interests strongly influence digital innovation and heritage promotion (Zhao et al., 2023). Consequently, relatively little is known about how digital cultural transformation unfolds in smaller localities whose cultural reproduction relies more heavily on community practices than tourism commercialization. Second, previous scholarship has frequently portrayed younger generations through a binary perspective, either as protectors of cultural heritage or as agents responsible for its decline (Childs & Isakhan, 2025). Such dichotomous interpretations overlook the complexity of everyday cultural interactions, where young people often navigate multiple and sometimes competing expectations arising from family traditions, economic opportunities, platform algorithms, and personal cultural commitments. More importantly, limited attention has been devoted to examining how digitalization reconfigures cultural authority by redistributing legitimacy from traditional cultural custodians toward digitally influential actors operating within online environments (Hu, 2023). These unresolved issues reveal the need for a more comprehensive sociological explanation of intergenerational cultural negotiation in contemporary digital society.

From this perspective, Pierre Bourdieu's theory offers a robust analytical framework for explaining how digitalization reshapes cultural practices through the dynamic interaction of habitus, cultural capital, and field. Rather than

viewing culture as a fixed inheritance, Bourdieu conceptualizes cultural practices as socially produced and continuously reconstructed through power relations, symbolic struggles, and the unequal distribution of resources (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). Within digital environments, these concepts become increasingly relevant because cultural legitimacy is no longer determined exclusively by traditional custodians or inherited authority. Instead, individuals possessing digital competencies, creative communication skills, and extensive online networks acquire new forms of symbolic recognition capable of redefining cultural influence. In this sense, digital platforms function not merely as technological media but as new social fields where conventional cultural capital intersects with emerging forms of digital capital, creating complex processes of negotiation rather than simple cultural continuity or disruption (Pitzalis & Porcu, 2024). Employing this Bourdieusian perspective therefore enables a deeper understanding of how intergenerational actors contest, adapt, and reproduce local cultural meanings within rapidly evolving digital landscapes.

Against this background, this study examines how digitalization transforms local cultural practices in Blitar by exploring the interplay of habitus, cultural capital, and social field in shaping intergenerational cultural negotiation. Rather than treating digital technology as either a threat to tradition or an instrument of preservation, the study conceptualizes digital transformation as a dynamic process through which cultural legitimacy is continuously reconstructed within everyday social interactions. By focusing on a local cultural setting that has received limited scholarly attention, this research seeks to enrich sociological discussions on digital cultural transformation while extending the application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to explain how local traditions are maintained, reinterpreted, and legitimized across generations in contemporary digital society.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how digitalization reshapes local cultural practices through the interrelationship of habitus, cultural capital, and social field in Blitar, East Java. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and social interactions within their natural cultural settings. Rather than measuring cultural transformation quantitatively, the study sought to understand how different generations construct, negotiate, and legitimize cultural meanings amid the increasing influence of digital technologies. Blitar was purposively selected as the research setting because it represents a culturally rich locality where traditional practices continue to coexist with rapidly expanding digital communication, providing an appropriate context for investigating the dynamic interaction between inherited cultural

values and emerging digital practices.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in local cultural activities and their experiences with the digital dissemination of cultural practices. The participants consisted of traditional artists, cultural practitioners, community leaders, young digital content creators, and members of local communities representing different generations. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis of digital cultural content, including social media posts, photographs, videos, and publicly accessible online materials related to local traditions. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researcher to capture both offline cultural practices and their digital representations while facilitating data triangulation to enhance the richness and credibility of the findings. Fieldwork was conducted by observing cultural activities directly and documenting interactions between traditional cultural expressions and digital media within the everyday lives of participants.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing through an iterative analytical process. Initial coding was conducted to identify recurring patterns concerning cultural practices, digital engagement, intergenerational interaction, and symbolic negotiation. These codes were subsequently organized into broader themes and interpreted through Bourdieu's conceptual framework of habitus, cultural capital, and field to explain the social mechanisms underlying digital cultural transformation. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, and participant validation (member checking), while dependability and confirmability were maintained through systematic documentation of analytical decisions and continuous comparison across multiple sources of evidence. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research by obtaining participants' informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, protecting anonymity through the use of pseudonyms where appropriate, and maintaining the confidentiality of all research data.

RESULT

The analysis of interview transcripts, field observations, and digital cultural content identified three interrelated themes describing how digitalization reshapes local cultural practices in Blitar. Rather than indicating a complete rejection or acceptance of digital technology, the findings demonstrate an ongoing process of adaptation involving traditional cultural actors and younger digital practitioners. The identified themes concern (1) intergenerational

transformation of cultural practices, (2) the changing forms of cultural resources valued within digital environments, and (3) the emergence of hybrid spaces where traditional and digital cultural practices coexist through continuous negotiation. These themes emerged consistently across interviews, observations, and social media documentation.

Table 1. Summary of Major Findings

Theme	Empirical Evidence	Main Finding
Intergenerational transformation of cultural practices	Interviews with senior artists and young cultural creators; observations in art studios	Older and younger generations practice the same traditions using different cultural approaches.
Changing forms of cultural resources	Interviews with batik artisans, digital entrepreneurs, and analysis of social media content	Traditional expertise and digital competencies are valued differently across cultural settings.
Emergence of hybrid cultural spaces	Field observations and online interactions	Cultural preservation increasingly occurs through negotiation rather than opposition between tradition and digital media.

Intergenerational Transformation of Cultural Practices

Interviews with senior cultural practitioners revealed that digitalization was not perceived as an entirely negative phenomenon. Several participants acknowledged that online platforms had expanded public access to local cultural performances and enabled younger family members living outside Blitar to remain connected with local traditions. Nevertheless, concerns emerged regarding the fragmentation of cultural performances into short digital content. A senior wayang performer explained that shortening performances for social media removed important narrative sequences and reduced the philosophical coherence traditionally embedded within a complete performance. Similar views were expressed by several senior artisans who regarded cultural authenticity as inseparable from the continuity of traditional processes rather than their digital visibility.

In contrast, younger participants viewed digital media as an effective means of introducing local culture to wider audiences. Cultural content creators described social media as a practical channel for attracting young people's attention before encouraging them to experience cultural activities directly. Field observations showed that short videos featuring dance performances, batik production, and local artistic activities frequently reached broader audiences than conventional promotional activities. Rather than considering digital adaptation as a replacement for tradition, younger participants viewed it as a strategy for maintaining cultural relevance within rapidly changing

communication environments.

The Changing Value of Cultural Resources in Digital Spaces

The findings indicate a noticeable shift in the types of cultural resources that receive recognition within digital environments. Senior cultural actors emphasized mastery of traditional techniques, ritual knowledge, and long-term experience as indicators of cultural competence. Conversely, younger participants highlighted video editing skills, audience engagement, digital storytelling, and familiarity with social media algorithms as essential resources for promoting local culture online. Although these competencies differed substantially, both groups expressed a shared commitment to sustaining local cultural practices despite adopting different approaches.

Evidence from observations of local batik businesses further illustrates this transformation. Several young entrepreneurs redesigned traditional batik motifs using contemporary colour combinations and marketed them through digital platforms. While these products initially generated criticism from experienced artisans, observations also indicated that increased online exposure encouraged new consumers to seek information about traditional batik production and to visit local workshops. This suggests that digital innovation generated both cultural debate and renewed public interest in traditional craftsmanship.

The Emergence of Hybrid Cultural Spaces

Across interviews and digital observations, the study identified a recurring pattern of negotiation rather than polarization between generations. Older participants gradually acknowledged the importance of social media for expanding cultural visibility, while younger participants continued to participate in traditional rehearsals, cultural ceremonies, and interactions with senior cultural practitioners. These reciprocal adjustments demonstrate that cultural change occurred through everyday interactions rather than through the replacement of one cultural orientation by another.

Social media observations reinforced this finding. Cultural content that combined traditional performances with contemporary visual presentation generally attracted greater public engagement than conventional documentation. At the same time, comment sections frequently became spaces where different generations debated authenticity, innovation, and cultural responsibility. Instead of producing clear winners and losers, these interactions revealed an ongoing process through which cultural meanings were continuously negotiated across offline and online settings. Overall, the findings indicate that digitalization has fostered hybrid cultural spaces in which preservation and innovation coexist as complementary rather than mutually exclusive cultural practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that digitalization should not be interpreted as a process that simply replaces traditional cultural practices with digital alternatives. Instead, cultural transformation in Blitar unfolds through continuous negotiation between inherited traditions and emerging digital practices. This pattern indicates that generational differences are shaped less by chronological age than by distinct social experiences that influence how culture is understood and practiced. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these differences reflect the operation of habitus, whereby dispositions acquired through long-term participation in particular social environments guide individuals' perceptions and practices (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2025). Senior cultural practitioners perceive cultural authenticity through continuity, ritual completeness, and adherence to inherited conventions, whereas younger actors approach the same traditions through digital creativity, accessibility, and audience engagement. Rather than producing an irreconcilable divide, these contrasting dispositions create an evolving cultural landscape in which both generations continuously adjust their practices while preserving their respective cultural commitments.

The study further reveals that digital transformation has altered the forms of cultural resources that acquire social recognition within contemporary cultural practice. While traditional expertise remains highly valued within local cultural communities, digital competencies increasingly determine visibility and influence in online environments. According to Bourdieu (Bañuelos & Jang-Tucci, 2026), cultural capital derives its value from the social field in which it operates rather than from its intrinsic characteristics alone. The present findings extend this argument by illustrating that mastery of social media production, algorithmic literacy, and digital communication has become an additional source of cultural legitimacy without entirely displacing conventional forms of expertise. Similar tendencies have been identified in studies of digital heritage preservation, where younger cultural actors act as mediators between inherited knowledge and contemporary digital audiences (Kumari & Puri, 2026). The evidence from Blitar nevertheless suggests a more nuanced process in which traditional and digital competencies coexist as complementary rather than competing cultural resources.

Another important finding concerns the reconfiguration of cultural authority within digital environments. Traditionally, legitimacy was largely determined by senior cultural custodians whose authority originated from experience, ritual knowledge, and long-standing participation in local cultural institutions. Digital platforms, however, introduce new mechanisms through which visibility, audience interaction, and platform algorithms contribute to

symbolic recognition. As Grenfell (Barlösius & Philipps, 2022) notes in his interpretation of Bourdieu's theory, every social field operates according to its own rules of competition and legitimacy. The present study illustrates that cultural actors increasingly navigate between two interconnected fields: the traditional cultural sphere and the digital communication sphere. Rather than replacing one another, these fields overlap and interact, requiring cultural practitioners to negotiate multiple forms of recognition simultaneously. This finding contributes to current debates by demonstrating that digitalization redistributes cultural authority instead of eliminating established cultural hierarchies altogether.

Equally significant is the emergence of younger generations as cultural intermediaries rather than cultural disruptors. Existing scholarship has frequently portrayed young people as either protectors of cultural heritage or agents of cultural erosion (Zhang et al., 2024). The empirical evidence presented in this study challenges this binary interpretation. Young cultural creators simultaneously preserve essential cultural values while adapting modes of presentation to meet the communicative logic of digital media. Their activities reveal that innovation and preservation are not mutually exclusive processes but interconnected strategies through which local traditions remain socially relevant. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining the digital adaptation of performing arts and community rituals (Caiola et al., 2023), yet the Blitar case highlights that such mediation also occurs in non-tourism settings where cultural change is driven primarily by everyday social interaction rather than commercial heritage promotion.

Overall, this study argues that digital cultural transformation is best understood as an ongoing process of symbolic negotiation rather than a linear transition from tradition to modernity. The interaction between habitus, cultural capital, and social field demonstrates that cultural continuity is sustained not through resistance to change but through continuous adaptation to new social conditions. By examining an underexplored local context, this research broadens the application of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to explain how cultural legitimacy is reconstructed within digitally mediated environments. The findings therefore contribute to the sociology of culture by showing that the future of local traditions depends less on preserving fixed cultural forms than on maintaining their capacity to acquire new meanings across changing social and technological contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the digital transformation of local cultural practices in Blitar cannot be understood as a simple process of cultural preservation or cultural decline. Instead, digitalization has created a dynamic

arena in which older and younger generations continuously negotiate cultural meanings through different forms of knowledge, practice, and participation. While senior cultural practitioners emphasize authenticity grounded in inherited traditions, younger actors reinterpret cultural expressions through digital media to enhance public engagement without necessarily abandoning traditional values. These findings indicate that cultural transformation occurs through continuous adaptation, resulting in hybrid cultural practices that connect traditional heritage with contemporary modes of communication.

The study contributes to the sociology of culture by extending the application of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and social field to explain how cultural legitimacy is reconstructed within digitally mediated environments. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the findings offer practical insights for cultural institutions and local governments seeking to design digital cultural preservation strategies that encourage collaboration across generations rather than reinforcing generational divisions. Future research may broaden this perspective by examining similar processes in other regions and by comparing different forms of local cultural heritage within increasingly interconnected digital societies.

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