


## Experiences and Strategies of Self-Representation of Sunda Wiwitan Believers on Tiktok Social Media

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<b>Keywords:</b> Digital Communication, Social Media, Virtual Ethnography, Self-Representation, Minority Groups	This research examines how Sunda Wiwitan believers represent their identity and spiritual values through TikTok. As a minority faith group, they utilize social media to expand their space for expression and build their existence in the digital space. This research uses a virtual ethnography approach, with observation of five TikTok accounts and in-depth interviews. This study found that Sunda Wiwitan believers utilize TikTok as a space for strategic and adaptive representations of identity and spirituality. The content they display reflects a combination of cultural expression, education, and identity protection through selective visibility strategies. Self-representation is not only seen in the form of visual content, but also in the way creators manage social interactions with audiences. TikTok, in this context, acts as both a medium and a social space where spiritual identity is negotiated amidst the challenges of the digital public sphere.
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### INTRODUCTION

Sunda Wiwitan is an indigenous belief that has grown and developed in the Sundanese community, and is an integral part of the cultural and spiritual wealth of the archipelago. This belief has deep historical roots, passed down through generations through traditions, rituals and local wisdom values. Sunda Wiwitan teachings have a basic belief or teaching known as Pikukuh Tilu. The concept of Pikukuh Tilu emphasizes the high awareness of human nature about the relationship between God, humans, and the universe. The term "Sunda" itself includes three main meanings, namely as a philosophical, ethnic and geographical identity. Meanwhile, the word "Wiwitan" means origin. Overall, the term "Sunda Wiwitan" can be interpreted as "Original Sunda" (Cristianingsih et al., 2024).

However, in the modern era, Sunda Wiwitan faces various challenges that threaten its existence. One of the main challenges is preservation and recognition. In the midst of globalization and modernization, traditional values are often eroded by popular culture and consumptive lifestyles. The younger generation may not recognize or understand their ancestral heritage, including the beliefs of Sunda Wiwitan.

In addition, the official recognition of Sunda Wiwitan as a legitimate faith in Indonesia remains a complex issue. The lack of clear recognition can create various administrative and social difficulties for its practitioners. Another challenge is social pressure. Sunda Wiwitan

believers often experience discrimination and stigma from other community groups who do not understand or have a negative view of the belief. This can be manifested in various forms, ranging from unfair treatment, rejection in social interaction, to restrictions in carrying out religious practices. Limited space for worship is also a serious problem, especially in areas where the majority of the population adheres to other religions. According to Ashri (2021), although they have received legal recognition, the Sunda Wiwitan believers, especially in Kuningan Regency, still face various forms of discrimination, especially in terms of civil documents and freedom of worship.

Despite facing these challenges, Sunda Wiwitan believers show resilience and the spirit to defend themselves. They make various efforts to maintain the sustainability of their beliefs, including advocacy and socialization to the general public. The aim is to increase understanding of Sunda Wiwitan, correct misconceptions, and build a more positive image. In addition, they also actively fight for their rights in various forums, both through dialogue with the government, civil society organizations, and through legal channels. Communication and collaboration with other groups that share the same vision are also important strategies in strengthening their position.

In this context, the development of TikTok as a popular social media platform in Indonesia offers a new alternative space for Sunda Wiwitan believers to represent themselves. TikTok, with its creative and dynamic short video format, allows them to share their experiences, views and cultural expressions to a wider audience, especially the younger generation. As a platform with a very high user screen hour, TikTok has great potential to increase the visibility and understanding of Sunda Wiwitan. According to Fatika (2024), Indonesia was recorded as the country with the largest TikTok users in the world as of July 2024, amounting to 157.6 million users. This figure even surpasses the United States with a total of 120.5 million users. In third place is Brazil with 105.2 million users, followed by Mexico with 77.54 million users, Vietnam with 65.64 million, and Pakistan with 62.05 million users. The high number of TikTok users in Indonesia is driven by the massive use of mobile phones. By 2024, the number of cell phone users is projected to reach 194.26 million, an increase of 4.23 million from the previous year. Not only that, the better internet penetration rate has also boosted the popularity of this social media in the country.

However, self-representation on social media also has its challenges. Platform algorithms can influence how content is shared and received, social dynamics on social media are often unpredictable, and stereotypes developed in society can manifest in online interactions. Therefore, it is important to understand how Sunda Wiwitan believers effectively utilize TikTok and overcome these challenges.

Based on the background of the problem above, the problem formulations of this research are: 1. How do followers of the Sunda Wiwitan faith on TikTok represent their identity and belief values through the content they upload. 2. Identifying the strategies used by Sundanese Wiwitan believers on TikTok in facing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities in representing their beliefs. 3. Reveal the factors that influence the self-representation strategy of Sundanese Wiwitan believers on TikTok.

## METHODS

Given the focus of this research is the experience and strategy of self-representation in the digital context, this research uses a qualitative approach with virtual ethnography data collection techniques as the main observation method of content and interaction on TikTok social media, and supplemented with interviews. The virtual ethnography approach allows researchers to observe communication and cultural practices in digital spaces directly, including understanding the norms, values, and communication practices that apply there. However, due to the nature of social media, which is heavily influenced by algorithms, visualization and trends, this research approach also intersects with elements of netnography. Thus, in addition to observing cultural symbols and narratives, this research also looks at the representational strategies shaped by the dynamics of digital platforms.

Ethnography in cyberspace aims to provide a distinctive understanding of the significance and implications of Internet use. As cited in Nasrullah (2017), Christine Hine (2000, 2015) states that virtual ethnography is a methodology used to investigate the internet and explore entities (users) while using the internet. Virtual ethnography also reflects the implications of mediated communication on the internet. Robert V Kozinets (2012: 39) states that netnography is a special form of ethnographic research that is tailored to reveal the unique habits of various types of computer-mediated social interactions (internet) including in the field of marketing. Netnography (Kozinets, 2002: 65, 2010) can also be defined as a qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study cultures and communities that occur in computer-mediated communication.

This definition of netnography has evolved into a research technique for social media, where netnography researchers not only deal with words, but also with images, sketches, photography, sound files, edited audiovisual presentations, website creation, and other digital artifacts. Netnography provides participatory guidelines, including suggestions for creating research web pages, conducting Skype interviews, and in-person participatory fieldwork, with the aim of transforming deep ethnographic sensibilities into online media (Kozinets, 2015).

In addition, the research was complemented by in-depth interviews to explore the personal experiences and motivations of informants, especially regarding self-representation strategies. The data collected will then be thematically analyzed using several key theories, namely: Erving Goffmann's Dramaturgy Theory to understand representation strategies; Stuart Hall's Representation Theory to outline the production of meaning; and Marshall McLuhan's Media Ecology Theory to complete the analysis by looking at how the unique characteristics of the TikTok platform affect self-representation strategies.

According to Goffman (Mulyana, 2008), social life can be divided into "front area" and "back area". The front area can be likened to the front stage for the audience to watch, while the back area is like a back stage or dressing room where players relax, prepare or practice playing their roles on the front stage. In this study, Goffman's Dramaturgy is used to analyze the performance strategy (how the Sunda Wiwitan believers present themselves on Tiktok, and what their daily lives are like).

Broadly speaking, Representation Theory is a conceptual framework used in understanding how meanings and understandings about cultures in the world. These meanings and understandings are produced, communicated, and maintained in the form of symbols, images, or signs. In other words, the representations created can shape social perceptions, identities and relationships. Thus, representation has a crucial place in cultural studies (Radja & Sunjaya, 2024). Along with the development of information and communication technology, humans utilize social media as a channel for self-representation. There are many platforms that are used as media for self-representation, such as social media that are used to form online identities. Self-representation is related to social media such as photos and videos that will be uploaded. When wanting to upload something to social media, individuals have prepared a form of self-representation through several considerations because they want to show the best impression of themselves. This is the same when we communicate directly in the real world, where we will do impression management to look good in front of others (Azizah, 2022).

In this research, Hall's Representation Theory is used to analyze the elements of representation in TikTok videos and when interacting with other users (e.g. symbols, language, fashion choices, etc.). In his approach to cultural theory, Stuart Hall (1997) views representation not as a process of objectively mirroring reality, but as a way of producing meaning through language, symbols and sign systems. Representation is a social and cultural practice that allows individuals or groups to construct meaning about themselves and the world around them. According to Hall, meaning is not naturally attached to objects or events, but is formed in a cultural context through representation systems such as language, images, and media.

The process of representation is never neutral. It always involves power relations and certain ideological positions. In this context, representation becomes a means through which groups in society (especially those who are marginalized) can challenge symbolic domination and reconstitute their identities in the public sphere. Hall emphasizes that identity is not something fixed or essential, but rather dynamically formed through a process of representation and social relations that are constantly negotiated (Hall, 1996; 1997).

In the context of TikTok, Hall's theory helps explain that the symbols, language, and narratives used by Sunda Wiwitan believers are part of the process of meaning formation and identity negotiation. The cultural symbols displayed are not just ornaments, but communication strategies that reflect who they are. Thus, TikTok functions as a space of expression as well as an ideological arena for the struggle for spiritual representation.

Marshall McLuhan's Media Ecology theory helps explain how TikTok's character as a medium influences the way users perform identity. In *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan gave the example of electric light as a medium that appears neutral (non-content) because it does not carry direct content, but still changes the way people live. This shows that media can have a huge impact even if it does not convey an explicit message. TikTok, like the electric light, shapes the way users construct meaning and interact, not only through the content, but also through the form and structure of the medium.

The medium is the message, this is the catchphrase of Media Ecology Theory. The phrase refers to the power and influence of the medium on society, not the content of the message. The medium can change how we think about others, ourselves, and the world around us. However, McLuhan did not exclude the importance of content. McLuhan felt that content gets more of our attention than the medium does. Although a message affects our conscious state, the medium has a greater influence on our subconscious state (Meisyaroh, 2014). To complete this research, it will also analyze how the short video format, trend-driving algorithms, ease of sharing content, and features provided by the TikTok social media platform can shape the self-representation strategies of Sunda Wiwitan believers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Test Data Quality

This research was conducted through intensive observation over five months (mid-January-June 2025) of five TikTok accounts that actively represent the values of Sunda Wiwitan beliefs and expressions of the spiritual culture of the archipelago. These five accounts were selected based on the consistency of Sunda Wiwitan-related content, symbolic richness, and number of followers. To maintain research ethics and protect the privacy of the account owners, the names of the accounts have been disguised.

**Table 1:** Observed Account Information

No.	Account Name	Followers (As of 11-06-2025)	Number of Posts (As of 11-06-2025)	Most Appearing Themes in Content (As of 11-06-2025)	Most Popular Content (As of 11-06-2025)
1.	@C_Whiesa	7004	151	Education about Sundanese spirituality, philosophy and culture	1. Rajah Pamunah - Gayatri Mantra (470.4K) 2. Meaning & Philosophy of Hanjuang Tree 98.4K 3. Rajah Selam Sunda (65.1K)
2.	@AdatNusa	8608	>500	Addresses the problems faced by indigenous religions and issues of pluralism in Indonesia.	1. Screenshot of Comment About Brownie Shop-God Must Be Proud (2.2M) 2. Dewi Kanti interview video piece _ learning Tolerance in Cigugur Kuningan Film (296.4K) 3. The Fate of Mangir Hindu Believers, Every Worship is Disturbed and

No.	Account Name	Followers (As of 11-06-2025)	Number of Posts (As of 11-06- 2025)	Most Appearing Themes in Content (As of 11-06- 2025)	Most Popular Content (As of 11-06-2025)
3.	@BumiDg	16K	69	Education about the spirituality and philosophy of life of the Sundanese people	Accused of Mushrik (78.3K) 1. Let People Practice Karma, Don't Disturb! (676.8K) 2. God Is Not a Religion (159.7K) 3. God Isn't Out There (143.9K)
4.	@C_Nusantara	200.9K	122	Promotes Sundanese culture and characters.	1. KDM Part 3 Ngamuk Lingkungan (Bogor) Vandalized (10.5M) 2. KDM Part 27 Ngamuk Lingkungan (Bogor) Vandalized (3.9M) 3. KDM Part 8 Ngamuk Lingkungan (Bogor) Vandalized (3.1M)
5.	@Consci_ID	2688	23	Display critical reflection on the meaning of religion.	1. When Culture is Perverted (44.7K) 2. Mortgaged Religion (64.8K) 3. Rama Pangeran Djatikusumah Cemetery (209.4K)

(source: data processing results)

Observations were not only made of the uploaded video or photo content, but also of the interactions in the comment section, such as discussions, support, clarification, and resistance from the audience. In addition, researchers also interviewed two content creators as well as account owners, namely @C\_Whiesa and @Consci\_ID, to understand their personal experiences, motivations, creative processes, and challenges in representing the Sunda Wiwitan identity. These interviews enriched the context of the analysis and strengthened the validity of the virtual ethnography data.

### Representation of Sunda Wiwitan Identity and Belief Values in TikTok

Faith groups such as Sunda Wiwitan have experienced limited representation in mainstream media. TikTok presents a new space for them to display their identity, convey ancestral teachings, and build a more inclusive narrative. The results of virtual ethnography observations of five TikTok accounts show that this platform is used strategically, both for education, spiritual expression, and defense of identity. These representations can be seen in

the form of ritual videos, visits to ancestral sites, use of cultural symbols, explanation of teachings, and social criticism.

The most dominant type of content found is educational content that discusses the values of Sunda Wiwitan teachings, especially by the account @C\_Whiesa. She often uploads long videos, even more than 10 minutes, which contain explanations of ancestral philosophy, the importance of harmony with nature, and the debunking of myths surrounding Sunda Wiwitan. In his videos he appears directly in front of the camera with Sundanese cultural attributes such as a headband and traditional background music. His delivery is structured, supported by slide presentations to facilitate audience understanding. He also chants *raja* in Sundanese directly, rather than using someone else's voice. This ability is related to his profession as a puppeteer of *wayang golek* as well as a student of Sundanese culture, which makes him fluent in using subtle Sundanese and understanding traditional values. In addition to educational content, there is also content where he presents himself as a *wayang golek* puppeteer, which strengthens his credibility and authority in presenting Sundanese cultural and spiritual values in the digital space.

This is in contrast to the @Consci\_ID account, which shows a very closed tendency. There is no visualization of the account owner's face or figure in the content. The entire narrative is delivered using an AI-based voice-over. This shows a careful choice of representation and distancing from direct personal involvement, but still voicing the values of Sundanese spirituality through contemplative content.

Meanwhile, the @C\_Nusantara account mostly displays video clips of political figure Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM), who is known as a political figure who upholds Sundanese cultural values. The content contains footage of KDM reprimanding those who destroy nature, showing his closeness to the community, and voicing local wisdom values. Interestingly, this account does not show the owner or manager of the account in its content, but only presents video footage with additional explanatory text in the description. This style represents a symbolic form of support for Sundanese values without explicit personal expression.

The @BumiDg account features Lucky Hendrawan, who is known as a spiritual figure from the Bumi Dega Sun Academy community. His content addresses themes such as breathwork, silent meditation, and the reflective meaning of Sundanese spirituality. His delivery style is similar to his account on the Instagram platform, so it is likely that his TikTok content is the result of mirroring his Instagram account. Some videos also contain information on class schedules or spiritual activities offered by the community.

While the @AdatNusa account has a main focus on issues faced by minority religious communities, including indigenous faiths in Indonesia. The content is displayed in the form of text, screenshots, and video clips of activities featuring the figure of Dewi Kanti, one of the female figures of Sunda Wiwitan believers. Some of the content raises issues of law, discrimination, and religious freedom, which provokes active discussion and even debate in the comments section. The communication style of this account is more advocative and informative, voicing the struggle of minority groups in a socio-political context.

Stuart Hall's representation theory is an important framework in this research to understand how the identity and spirituality of Sunda Wiwitan believers are constructed

through symbols, language, and visuals in TikTok content. Hall (1997) asserts that representation is not just a reflection of reality, but an active process of meaning formation through language, symbols, and cultural codes.

Similarly, in the context of this research, where the selection of videos and images, the attributes of traditional clothing used, narratives and texts, and the use of Sundanese language are the ways they convey their spiritual and cultural identity to the digital public. This representation is ideological because it also serves to challenge stereotypes and marginalized positions that have been attached to indigenous faith groups. Thus, Hall's theory becomes an important framework to understand how their identity and spirituality are constructed through social media.

**Table 2.** Analysis of Representation of Cultural Identity of Sunda Wiwitan Believers in TikTok Based on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory

No.	Account Name	Cultural Symbols Displayed <i>Representation system (language, image, gesture)</i>	Narration & Delivery Style <i>The process of meaning production</i>	Constructed Meaning <i>Ideology/identity displayed</i>	Representation Strategy
1.	@C_Whiesa	Headbands, traditional Sundanese clothing; subtle Sundanese language; natural settings; ancestral sites; traditional rituals; wayang golek; offerings	Educational narration, using Indonesian and Sundanese subtleties; delivered live with authentic voices and presentation slides; curated education in thematic playlists (such as <i>guaran, rajah Sunda</i> , and <i>sastra jendra hayuningrat</i> ) to facilitate audience understanding; topical and coherent presentation. Some are accompanied by	Ancestral spirituality, natural harmony, Sundanese cultural pride	Open, educative, authoritative

			presentation slides.		
2.	@AdatNusa	Traditional rituals, traditional clothes, traditional clothes/white clothes, Sundanese art and culture; offerings; the figure of Dewi Kanti as a traditional religious warrior figure; action documentation; news snippets	Cultural meanings are shaped through narratives of minority struggles in public spaces (action video clips, news screenshots, and social media comments featuring inequality)	Criticism of discrimination, advocacy for recognition, struggle for rights, building collective awareness of the injustices experienced by indigenous communities and indigenous peoples.	Symbolic-arsival (arsival in the sense of consistently showing snippets of documentary videos, news footage, media screenshots, documentation of past figures or events).
3.	@BumiDg	The atmosphere of the hermitage; Lucky Hendrawan as a Sundanese cultural and spiritual figure; community activities; statues; offerings	Reflective and contemplative, focusing on spirituality and community activities	Building awareness of self-discovery, inner balance, universal ancestral teachings, Bumi Dega Sunda Academy as the center of community activities.	Reflective, educative
4.	@C_Nusantara	Figures considered as protectors of Sundanese culture: Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM), Lucky Hendrawan, Budi Dalton; nature and people of West Java; traditional rituals; Sundanese art.	Figurative and dramatic. The identity of the account creator is not shown. Representation is built entirely through the imagery of public figures, especially KDM, who is at the center of almost all content.	A symbol of Sundanese leadership rooted in tradition; a leader who is not only a political figure but also a protector of culture, a guardian of nature and a representation of wisdom; Sundanese cultural identity	Curatorial-visual representation (representation of cultural identity or values conveyed through curation of visual content). Presenting KDM not only as a political figure, but also as a protector of culture, a

			as a noble and spiritual heritage.	guardian of nature, and a representation of the wisdom of Sundanese society. Playlists such as <i>JJ</i> , <i>Sunda Wiwitan</i> , and <i>Kang Dedi Mulyadi</i> , are curated to frame a narrative of leadership rooted in tradition and closeness to the community.	
5.	@Consci_ID	Logo with symbols of various religions (interfaith), visuals of Nusantara culture, traditional music, AI voice-over	Universal spiritual narrative, reflective-contemplative, as well as a critique of religious practices that move away from true spiritual values; AI voice-based without showing faces, anonymous	Moral values, tolerance, and cross-cultural wisdom	Anonymity as identity protection; positioning the account as an inclusive and neutral space for spiritual contemplation. This style is aimed at caution in explicitly displaying belief affiliations, while reinforcing the image as a safe space for cross-faith reflection and spirituality. building a neutral and reflective spiritual space.

(source: data processing results)

**Table 3.** Comparison of Symbolic Representation Between TikTok Accounts of Sundanese Wiwitan Followers

No.	Account Name	Symbols of Dominant Culture	Character Visualization	Visual Representation Style	Personal Engagement
1.	@C_Whiesa	Headband, traditional Sundanese clothing	Perform live as a narrator	Educational, structured, personalized	High (face, voice, narration)
2.	@AdatNusa	Traditional clothing/white kebaya, photo/video/action screenshot	Figure of Dewi Kanti, documentation of struggle	Symbolic-arsival	Medium (fixed figures, limited narrative/short snippets of video). Account owner/admin does not appear.
3.	@BumiDg	Lucky Hendrawan as a Sundanese cultural and spiritual figure	Perform live as a narrator	Reflective-contemplative, spiritual	High (face, voice, narration)
4.	@C_Nusantara	Kang Dedi Mulyadi (KDM) as a protector of Sundanese culture, nature, and society	Public figures and visual narratives	Curatorial-visual (no main creator). No dramatic video editing	Medium (fixed figures, limited narrative/ video snippets). Account owner/admin does not appear.
5.	@Consci_ID	Logo with symbols of various religions (interfaith),	Does not feature real characters	Anonymous, contemplative, AI voice-over	Very low (total anonymity)

(source: data processing results)

Overall, the analyzed content shows that the representation of the identity of Sunda Wiwitan believers in TikTok not only functions as visual communication, but also as a cultural and spiritual strategy to maintain existence and fight for recognition amid the dominance of the majority religious narrative. This representation is dynamic, meaningful, and carried out consciously by considering the social context and comfort limits of each creator. TikTok, in this case, is not just a distribution medium, but an important digital space for building courage, connectedness, and visibility of identities that have been marginalized.

Various strategies appear to be used by the creators, ranging from open educational approaches (such as by @C\_Whiesa), symbolic-archival representations (such as @AdatNusa), to contemplative and anonymous reflective styles (such as @Consci\_ID). Visualizations of identity are built through cultural symbols, public characterizations, spiritual narratives, and carefully curated visual structures. Although the level of personal engagement

varies, all accounts demonstrate an awareness of the importance of seizing representational space and shaping self-image as a legitimate part of Indonesia's spiritual diversity. TikTok, in this context, becomes an arena for the articulation of identity and symbolic struggle that was previously difficult to find a place in conventional public spaces.

### Strategies for Facing Self-Representation Challenges on TikTok

Based on the observations of the five accounts, for them TikTok is not just a space for cultural expression, but also an arena for complex identity negotiations. As a spiritual minority group that is often marginalized in social structures and mainstream media, identity as a believer cannot always be expressed openly in a very public and viral-prone digital space. In this situation, the creators develop a strategy of *selective visibility*, which is to consciously choose the aspects of identity that they want to show and hide other parts that are considered sensitive or socially risky. *Selective visibility* strategies in social media can be understood as a continuation of the concept of *impression management* in Goffman's dramaturgy theory (1959), which was later developed in the digital context by Marwick & boyd (2011) and Papacharissi (2010). Marwick and boyd (2011) explain that individuals on social media actively adjust the information shared depending on who the audience is and the potential risks faced. Papacharissi (2010) also states that digital space allows the formation of private space in the midst of public openness, through content filtering and selection strategies.

This strategy is reflected in the variety of approaches used by each creator. For example, the account @C\_Whiesa chooses to appear openly on TikTok, delivering education in a polite style using subtle Indonesian and Sundanese, and utilizing presentation slides to clarify the material. In contrast, the @Consci\_ID account uses AI voice-over-based narration, without showing faces or personal identities, and emphasizes universal values and cultural symbols of the archipelago. Meanwhile, accounts such as @AdatNusa and @C\_Nusantara adopt an indirect symbolic approach by showing snippets of documentary videos or public figures as representatives of cultural narratives.

In this context, the digital identity representations of Sunda Wiwitan believers appear to be adaptive and fragmented. The creators not only show who they are, but also actively organize the boundaries of visibility in social conditions that are not yet fully inclusive, this is clearly seen in @Consci\_ID.

By utilizing the flexibility of visual and narrative content offered by TikTok, they are able to carry out situational and thoughtful representation strategies. The identity displayed is not a complete reflection of themselves, but the result of conscious curation to maintain spiritual existence while maintaining a safe space personally and socially. This view is in line with Stuart Hall's (1997) representation theory, which states that identities are formed and negotiated through a process of representation that is never fully stable.

**Table 4.** Selective Visibility Strategy in Self-Representation of Sundanese Wiwitan Believers in TikTok

No.	Account Name	Identity Displayed	Concealed Identity	Representation Strategy	Engagement Style
1.	@C_Whiesa	Face, original voice, traditional	Trust affiliation	Open, educative, authoritative	Direct and personalized

No.	Account Name	Identity Displayed	Concealed Identity	Representation Strategy	Engagement Style
		clothing, subtle Sundanese language, self-identity as a Sunda Wiwitan believer, puppeteer profession	outside the social media space		
2.	@AdatNusa	The figure of Dewi Kanti, the identity of the figure as a Sunda Wiwitan believer, documentation of the struggle of minorities	Account owner/admin identity	Symbolic-archival. indirect representation strategy with a symbolic and documentation-based approach. It acts more as a distribution channel for the narrative of the struggle of the indigenous community, especially through the figure of Dewi Kanti as a symbol of resistance.	Indirect, (does not clearly present the personal identity of the creator/account owner)
3.	@BumiDg	Figure Lucky Hendrawan, figure identity as a Sunda Wiwitan believer, setting hermitage, community activities	Social identity outside the community	Reflective, educative	Limited, formal. Limited in the sense that creators' interactions with audiences are not intense or personalized. Creators rarely actively reply to comments, do not build much two-way conversation, and tend to keep their distance from the dynamics of public

No.	Account Name	Identity Displayed	Concealed Identity	Representation Strategy	Engagement Style
4.	@C_Nusantara	Public figures (KDM, Lucky Hendrawan, Budi Dalton), Sundanese cultural symbols	Account owner/admin identity	Curatorial-visual	discussion on TikTok. Indirect representation (without the explicit presence or personal narrative of the creator/account administrator)
5.	@Consci_ID	Cultural symbols of the archipelago, universal narratives, AI voices	Name, face, location, trust affiliation outside of social media space	Protective anonymity (as identity protection); positioning the account as an inclusive and neutral space of spiritual contemplation.	Symbolic and Closed

(source: data processing results)

An interesting finding, based on interviews with @C\_Whiesa and @Consci\_ID , is that they do not openly admit to being Sunda Wiwitan believers outside of social media. Although their families accept their beliefs, the identity remains hidden in everyday life. This shows the difference in representation between the digital world and the real world. They utilize TikTok as a space that allows them to display their identities safely and purposefully, in a customized and thoughtful way. In this context, they can be understood as cultural actors who consciously manage their "digital stage", in line with Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy, which distinguishes between *front stage* (constructed public appearance) and *back stage* (personal aspects hidden from the public to maintain a certain impression).

As such, the self-representation strategies of the five are adaptive, situational and deliberate. They not only convey who they are, but also set the boundaries of visibility in a digital space that is not yet fully safe and inclusive. The identities displayed are the result of a negotiation between spiritual expression, protection strategies, and the utilization of media as a safe representation space that remains rooted in ancestral values. Based on the results of interviews and observations, several key factors that influence creators' decisions to reveal or conceal aspects of their spiritual identity include: (1) personal comfort level and social support from immediate family; (2) previous experiences with stigma or discrimination based on belief; (3) spiritual and educational motivation to spread ancestral values; (4) technological capacity and digital literacy; and (5) the creator's social position or profession, which could be affected if their spiritual identity becomes public knowledge. For example, creators like

@C\_Whiesa feel sufficiently secure because they have family support and a cultural professional background (as a puppeteer), while creators like @Consci\_ID choose anonymity due to social risk considerations. Additionally, the TikTok platform itself, with its viral algorithms and open public space, also serves as an external factor influencing creators' personal engagement levels. Therefore, the representation strategies adopted not only reflect individual expression but are also the result of negotiations between spiritual values, social context, and the logic of digital platforms.

### **TikTok as a Medium**

TikTok is not only a short video sharing platform, but also a social space where creators and audiences interact and shape meaning together. For the followers of Sunda Wiwitan, the platform provides an opportunity to introduce their beliefs and culture to the wider public, but also presents challenges of representation in a digital space that is open, viral and not always welcoming.

TikTok's characteristics-such as short video duration, creative editing features, and hashtag- and interaction-based algorithms-encourage creators to craft content that is concise, visual, and easy to digest. Within the framework of McLuhan's (1964) media theory, mediums like TikTok are not neutral, but influence the way we think and communicate. The phrase "the medium is the message" illustrates that TikTok shapes the style of representation: fast, symbolic, and according to the logic of trends. Devotees adjust by creating serialized content, choosing meaningful audio, and delivering inclusive spiritual narratives. In particular, the creation of serialized content is clearly found in @C\_Whiesa's account.

TikTok also acts as a social interactive space. The comment section becomes the meeting point between the creator's message and the audience's diverse interpretations. In Stuart Hall's (1997) theoretical framework, meaning is not fixed, but negotiated. Creators and audiences are both actors in the representation process. Accounts such as @C\_Whiesa often receive positive responses, questions and support in the comments section. However, accounts like @AdatNusa and @C\_Nusantara often become spaces for open debate between audiences, especially when the content touches on religious, political or indigenous rights issues. In these situations, the account admins choose not to comment or respond directly.

Interestingly, based on the interviews, both @C\_Whiesa and @Consci\_ID stated that they consciously avoid direct debate, even when facing negative comments. They choose to leave comments open without deleting them, as a form of respect for the diversity of opinions and to maintain a non-confrontational atmosphere. A similar approach was adopted by @AdatNusa and @C\_Nusantara, which allowed the comment space to develop organically without direct intervention. Meanwhile, accounts such as @BumiDg showed a very minimal level of interaction, with generic responses such as "rahayu" greetings without engaging in further discussion.

In this context, Goffman (1959) calls this strategy part of "*impression management*" - where individuals or groups organize how to appear in the public sphere to maintain the identity they want to display. The creators not only produce content, but also manage the social interactions that arise from it as part of the representation strategy.

**Table 5.** Audience Interaction and Response Management Strategies

No.	Account Name	Audience Interaction Character	Creator Response
1.	@C_Whiesa	Positive, questioning, critiquing, reflective	Selective in replying to educative comments, avoiding debates
2.	@AdatNusa	Minority issue debates, reflections, strong comments and criticisms	Not responding, letting the comments grow
3.	@BumiDg	Minimal comments, reflective, light greetings or compliments, questions about the spiritual class	Rarely respond to audience comments or even questions
4.	@C_Nusantara	Pros and cons of public figures, audience debates	Not responding, letting the comments grow
5.	@Consci_ID	General, reflective, light criticism	Does not reply to comments, does not delete negative comments

(source: data processing results)

As seen in the table, each creator shows a distinctive style of interaction management. Some selectively answer comments, while others choose to remain silent but open. This strategy shows that self-representation on TikTok does not only include content, but also includes how to manage social reactions. TikTok, in this case, is not just a medium for spreading messages, but a social space that is active in shaping and challenging the boundaries of minority spiritual identity in the digital age.

The interaction between the creators of Sunda Wiwitan and the audience on TikTok shows that the representation of identity does not stop at the content, but also occurs in the comments column. The creators respond with different strategies-some actively answer with an educative approach, while others choose to remain silent to avoid conflict. TikTok is not only a content-sharing medium, but also a social space where meanings are negotiated. Thus, digital interactions become an important part of self-representation strategies, as well as a reflection of how creators maintain their identity and spiritual values in a dynamic public space.

## CONCLUSION

This research shows that TikTok has become a strategic space for Sunda Wiwitan believers to represent their identity and belief values creatively, adaptively, and thoughtfully. Through a virtual ethnography approach to five TikTok accounts managed by believers, it is found that this social media is not only used to visually display culture, but also as a means of education, articulation of spirituality, and symbolic resistance to the marginalization of belief identity. The representation is realized through cultural symbols such as headbands, white traditional clothes/kebaya, Sundanese rajah, to reflective narratives about ancestral teachings, both in personal-educative and symbolic-anonymous forms. This research also found that the creators developed selective and situational representation strategies, depending on their personal comfort and the social context at hand. Selective visibility strategies are applied to

keep their spiritual identity safe, by choosing what to show (e.g. cultural symbols or universal values) and what to hide (e.g. face, faith affiliation or real name). This approach is not uniform: some creators are open, while others choose to voice values through public figures or cultural symbols without personal exposure. This reflects a high awareness of the social risks still attached to identifying as a believer. Another thing found in the research is that TikTok acts not only as a technological medium, but also as a social space where the meaning of identity and spirituality is actively negotiated between creators and audiences. Through the comment section, the audience responds to the content with support, questions, and even resistance. The creators respond in different ways, some replying selectively, while others let the comments develop without intervention. This approach shows how creators not only produce content, but also manage social interactions as part of their representational strategies. TikTok, in this context, becomes an important arena for Sunda Wiwitan believers to build a dignified and calculated existence in a dynamic digital space.

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