

**TRANSFORMASI MAKNA SAKRAL CANDI SEPILAR,  
MALANG MELALUI INTERAKSI SIMBOLIK LINTAS  
GENERASI**

**JURNAL**



**Disusun Oleh :**

**SYAFI'UDDIN**  
**20221552014**

**PROGRAM STUDI STUDI AGAMA-AGAMA  
FAKULTAS STUDI ISLAM DAN PERADABAN  
UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH SURABAYA  
2026**

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**Diajukan untuk Melengkapi Persyaratan Program Sarjana (S1)  
Studi Agama-Agama Fakultas Studi Islam dan Peradaban**



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2026**

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Maka dengan ini kami sahkan hasil sidang tersebut.

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## ABSTRAK

*Transformasi makna sakral tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh perkembangan teknologi, tetapi juga oleh proses interpretasi makna yang berlangsung melalui interaksi sosial. Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana makna kesakralan Candi Sepilar di Jawa Timur dikonstruksi dan dinegosiasikan lintas generasi dalam konteks representasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan paradigma interpretatif dan kerangka interaksionisme simbolik untuk memahami bagaimana aktor sosial memaknai simbol, ruang, dan praktik yang terkait dengan kesakralan. Data diperoleh melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam dengan penjaga tradisi dan generasi muda (Gen Z), serta analisis terhadap empat belas unggahan TikTok yang merepresentasikan Candi Sepilar. Analisis dilakukan secara tematik-interpretatif untuk menelusuri proses produksi dan negosiasi makna dalam praktik sosial sehari-hari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa generasi tua memaknai Candi Sepilar sebagai ruang spiritual yang terkait dengan relasi kosmologis antara manusia, leluhur, dan alam yang dipertahankan melalui norma etika dan praktik ritual. Sebaliknya, generasi muda cenderung memaknai ruang tersebut melalui pengalaman reflektif, nilai sejarah, dan representasi visual yang dimediasi oleh media sosial. Interaksi antara kedua generasi tidak menghasilkan konflik makna, tetapi membentuk proses negosiasi simbolik yang memungkinkan berbagai interpretasi kesakralan hidup berdampingan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bentuk kesakralan yang dapat dipahami sebagai sakralitas hibrid, yaitu konfigurasi makna sakral yang dipertahankan melalui norma etika dan memori budaya lokal sekaligus direpresentasikan melalui medium digital dalam interaksi lintas generasi.*

**Kata kunci:** sakralitas hibrid; interaksionisme simbolik; transformasi makna sakral; mediasi digital; lintas generasi

## ABSTRACT

The transformation of sacred meaning is influenced not only by technological developments but also by the process of meaning interpretation that occurs through social interaction. This article analyzes how the sacred meaning of *Sepilar* Temple in East Java is constructed and negotiated across generations in the context of digital representation. This study employs a qualitative approach using an interpretive paradigm and a symbolic interactionist framework to understand how social actors interpret symbols, spaces, and practices related to sacredness. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with tradition keepers and the younger generation (Gen Z), as well as an analysis of fourteen TikTok posts

representing *Sepilar* Temple. The analysis was conducted thematically and interpretatively to trace the processes of meaning production and negotiation in everyday social practices. The findings reveal that the older generation interprets *Sepilar* Temple as a spiritual space tied to cosmological relationships between humans, ancestors, and nature, maintained through ethical norms and ritual practices. Conversely, the younger generation tends to interpret this space through reflective experiences, historical values, and visual representations mediated by social media. The interaction between the two generations does not result in a conflict of meanings but forms a process of symbolic negotiation that allows various interpretations of sacredness to coexist. These findings reveal a form of sacredness that can be understood as hybrid sacredness, that is, a configuration of sacred meaning that is preserved through ethical norms and local cultural memory while being represented through digital media in cross-generational interactions.

Keywords: hybrid sacredness; symbolic interactionism; transformation of sacred meaning; digital mediation; cross-generational

**Research Article**



# The Transformation of the Sacred Meaning of Sepilar Temple, Malang Through Symbolic Interaction Between Generations

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<p><b>How to Cite:</b> First author, Second author., &amp; Third author. (20xx). The title. Satwika: Kajian Ilmu Budaya dan Perubahan Sosial, Vol (No), xx-yy. Doi: (filled by editor)</p>	<p><i>makna kesakralan Candi Sepilar di Jawa Timur dikonstruksi dan dinegosiasikan lintas generasi dalam konteks representasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan paradigma interpretatif dan kerangka interaksionisme simbolik untuk memahami bagaimana aktor sosial memaknai simbol, ruang, dan praktik yang terkait dengan kesakralan. Data diperoleh melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam dengan penjaga tradisi dan generasi muda (Gen Z), serta analisis terhadap empat belas unggahan TikTok yang merepresentasikan Candi Sepilar. Analisis dilakukan secara tematik-interpretatif untuk menelusuri proses produksi dan negosiasi makna dalam praktik sosial sehari-hari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa generasi tua memaknai Candi Sepilar sebagai ruang spiritual yang terkait dengan relasi kosmologis antara manusia, leluhur, dan alam yang dipertahankan melalui norma etika dan praktik ritual. Sebaliknya, generasi muda cenderung memaknai ruang tersebut melalui pengalaman reflektif, nilai sejarah, dan representasi visual yang dimediasi oleh media sosial. Interaksi antara kedua generasi tidak menghasilkan konflik makna, tetapi membentuk proses negosiasi simbolik yang memungkinkan berbagai interpretasi kesakralan hidup berdampingan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bentuk kesakralan yang dapat dipahami sebagai sakralitas hibrid, yaitu konfigurasi makna sakral yang dipertahankan melalui norma etika dan memori budaya lokal sekaligus direpresentasikan melalui medium digital dalam interaksi lintas generasi.</i></p> <p><b>Kata kunci:</b> sakralitas hibrid; interaksionisme simbolik; transformasi makna sakral; mediasi digital; lintas generasi</p>
<p>© 202... This is an Open Access Research distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/</a>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original works are appropriately cited.</p>	

## INTRODUCTION

The development of global digitalization and the expansion of social media have changed the way people interpret and experience sacred spaces. In the classical sociological tradition, the sacred is understood as a category that is symbolically separated from the profane and maintained through a collective rite that affirms those boundaries. Émile Durkheim explained that the sacred-profane dichotomy is the foundation of the religious structure of society, where ritual practices serve to maintain the symbolic boundaries between the two regions while strengthening social solidarity (Durkheim, 1995). Meanwhile, Mircea Eliade views the sacred space as a place where *hierophany* occurs, which is a manifestation of transcendent reality that makes a place ontological different from ordinary space (Eliade, 1959). This classical approach provides an important conceptual basis for understanding sacredness as a collectively constructed symbolic category. Nevertheless, the framework tends to view sacred space as a relatively stable structure, thus paying less attention to how sacred meaning can change through the dynamics of media and technology in modern society.

In a contemporary society that is increasingly mediated, the relationship between religion and the media has undergone a significant transformation. The

perspective of religious mediatization developed by Stig Hjarvard emphasizes that the media is no longer just a communication channel for religion, but also an institution that shapes the way religion is represented and practiced in social life (Hjarvard, 2008). Within this framework, the media has its own operational logic that influences how religious symbols are produced, disseminated, and understood by the public. A major contribution to the mediatization approach is its ability to explain how religious transformations occur in modern societies that are heavily influenced by media systems. However, some critics point out that this approach tends to focus on structural changes at the level of media institutions and religious organizations, thus highlighting less how individuals or local communities actively interpret religious symbols in everyday social interactions.

The study of *digital religion* provides additional perspective on the relationship between religion and digital media. Heidi A. Campbell emphasizes that religious practices in the digital environment do not simply move ritual activities to online spaces, but also generate new forms of religious experience that are connected through global communication networks (H. Campbell, 2013). Within this framework, the digital space can be understood as an arena where religious

identities, spiritual practices, and faith communities are negotiated through media interactions. In line with that, Stewart M. Hoover points out that modern media plays an important role in shaping religious authority as well as the way individuals experience spirituality through the practice of symbolic representations and visual narratives (Hoover, 2016). However, most research in the digital religion tradition still emphasizes religious phenomena that occur in online spaces in general, so it does not examine how these digital practices interact with local cultural contexts and more specific social relations.

A number of other studies highlight the phenomenon of *digital pilgrimage* and the transformation of spiritual experiences through visual media. (Cheong et al., 2012) show that religious practices in digital spaces often involve the process of sharing spiritual experiences through photos, videos, and online narratives that allow those experiences to be collectively consumed by global audiences. In this perspective, spirituality is not only practiced directly through rituals, but also through the process of visual representation that shapes religious experiences in media networks. This approach helps explain how religious symbols can circulate in the digital space as part of contemporary media culture. However, the focus of this study tends to be on the global circulation of religious symbols and digital communication practices, so it has not been in-depth to examine how social actors in the local context interpret and negotiate the meaning of these symbols in concrete social interactions.

In the Indonesian context, the dynamics of the transformation of sacredness can be observed in cultural and religious sites such as Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple. These two sites not only serve as world cultural heritage, but also as spiritual spaces that have religious significance for specific communities. Research on cultural heritage shows that digitalization through visual documentation, virtual reconstruction, and social media-based promotion has expanded public access to these sites while increasing their visibility in the global tourism industry (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2021; Winter, 2014). This study makes an important contribution in understanding the relationship between digital technology and cultural heritage management. However, most of them still focus on the perspectives of tourism management, heritage conservation, and cultural economy. The social dimension of how the meaning of the sacred is negotiated in community interactions especially in cross-generational relations has not been studied systematically.

The limitations of the literature show the need for an approach that emphasizes more on the dynamics of social interaction in the formation of sacred meaning. In the perspective of symbolic interactionism, meaning is not seen as something fixed, but as the result of the process of interpretation that takes place in social interaction. Herbert Blumer emphasized that individuals give meaning to social symbols through the process of interpretation that occurs in everyday interactions (Blumer, 1969). This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of how the meaning of the sacred can be renegotiated when individuals of different generations interact in the same cultural space.

The need to study these dynamics has become increasingly relevant in the case of Sepilar Temple in the Raden Soerjo Forest Park area, Malang, East Java. Different from Borobudur and Prambanan which have been institutionalized as national cultural destinations, Sepilar Temple is a local spiritual site that lives in ritual practices, myths, and cosmological relations of the local community. In recent years, social media exposure by younger generations has begun to introduce the site to a wider public through visual documentation and digital narratives. This condition creates a new space of interaction between the older generation who maintain traditional ritual ethics and the younger generation who practice digital documentation as part of their spiritual experience.

This research departs from the argument that the transformation of sacred meaning does not occur linearly as a direct consequence of digitalization, but through a process of symbolic negotiation between generations. In these interactions, older generations often maintain norms of respect for sacred spaces, while younger generations present new forms of expression through visual documentation and digital narratives. This process can give birth to reprimands, ethical compromises, and a more communicative reinterpretation of the meaning of the sacred in the visual language of social media. Thus, sacredness does not disappear in the digital age, but rather undergoes a hybridization of forms, where transcendent values are maintained while the medium of expression undergoes a reconfiguration in the mediatic space.

Based on this background, this research asks the main question: how is the transformation of the sacred meaning of Sepilar Temple constructed through symbolic interaction between generations in a digital context? In particular, this study aims to (1) analyze the differences and meeting points of sacred meaning

between the older generation and the younger generation, (2) examine digital media as an arena for symbolic interaction in the process of negotiating meaning, and (3) understand the implications of this transformation on the preservation of the spiritual value of local cultural sites.

Theoretically, this research integrates the perspective of symbolic interactionism and the theory of religious mediatization to explain how sacred meanings are produced and negotiated in a digital society. This integration results in the concept of **hybrid sacredness**, which is a condition in which spiritual values are maintained but their forms of representation and expression are mediated through the practice of visual documentation and online interaction. This conceptualization shows that the transformation of sacredness is not merely a deterministic result of technological development, but a social process formed through the interaction and interpretation of meaning by actors involved in certain cultural practices.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm to understand the transformation of the sacred meaning of Sepilar Temple that occurs through symbolic interaction between generations. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to trace subjective meanings constructed, maintained, and altered by social actors in the context of everyday life, rather than to test hypotheses or cause-and-effect relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework used is symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), which emphasizes that meaning is born from social interaction and can undergo change through the process of interpretation.

The research was carried out in the Sepilar Temple area which is located in the Raden Soerjo Forest Park (Tahura), Malang Regency, East Java. This location was chosen because Sepilar Temple not only functions as a ritual space for the local community, but also undergoes changes in function and representation due to increasing tourist visits and digital practices of the younger generation. This condition makes Sepilar Temple a relevant social space to observe shifts and negotiations of sacred meaning across generations (Moleong & Surjaman, 1989).

The research informants were determined through purposive sampling techniques, taking into account the direct involvement of informants in the process of interpreting Sepilar Temple (Sugiyono, 2013). The total

number of informants is 8 people, consisting of: 4 older generation informants (aged 45–70 years): locksmiths, ritual guards, and traditional leaders who are actively involved in the implementation and supervision of rituals. 4 informants of the younger generation/Generation Z (age 18–25 years): active visitors and social media content creators who have uploaded or documented activities at Sepilar Temple.

The generation category is based on a combination of biological age and social position in ritual practices and the use of digital media. This division is used to analyze differences in patterns of meaning and symbolic practices.

The number of informants is determined after reaching thematic saturation, i.e. when additional interviews no longer produce new categories of meaning (Guest et al., 2013)

The research data includes primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through field observation and in-depth interviews to explore interaction practices, symbols used, and how informants interpreted the sacredness of Sepilar Temple. Secondary data is in the form of scientific literature, cultural documents, and social media uploads that represent Sepilar Temple in digital space. The use of these various data sources aims to enrich perspectives and strengthen the meaning of the phenomenon being studied (Moleong & Surjaman, 1989).

Data collection was carried out through limited non-participant observation of ritual activities, visitor behavior, and digital practices around Sepilar Temple (Bungin, 2008). Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a duration of 45–90 minutes per informant. Question themes include:

1. Definition and meaning of the sacredness of the Sepilar Temple
1. Views on digital documentation practices
2. Cross-generational interaction or reprimanding experience
3. Perception of the change in sacred meaning

All interviews were recorded (with permission), transcribed verbatim, and analyzed as text data. Documentation in the form of photos, field notes, and social media content is used as supporting data (Sugiyono, 2013).

The digital data consists of 14 public TikTok uploads containing hashtags or descriptions related to Sepilar Temple in the period June–November 2025.

Due to the limited amount of data, this study does not claim to be full netnography (Kozinets, 2020), but

rather uses a qualitative content analysis approach to visual representation and digital narratives (Schreier, 2012).

Upload selection criteria:

1. Content displays the location of Sepilar Temple explicitly
2. Contain narratives, text, or captions that represent the meaning of the site
3. Produced by individual users (not institutions)

Units of analysis include:

1. Visuals (framing methods, shooting angles, symbolic expressions)
2. Narration/caption
3. Audience responses (relevant comments)

Data analysis was carried out simultaneously following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman ((Miles et al., 2013), which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The analysis is focused on the tracing of symbols, social actions, and the process of interpreting meaning that shows how the sacred meaning of Sepilar Temple is constructed, negotiated, and transformed through symbolic interactions between generations. The analysis was carried out thematically by combining inductive and deductive approaches.

Analysis steps:

1. Open Coding (Inductive) Interview transcripts, observation notes, and digital data are read repeatedly to identify initial units of meaning without any forced theoretical categories.
2. Axial Coding (Category Grouping) The initial code is grouped into categories such as:
  1. Ritual ethics
  2. Documentation practices
  3. Symbolic rebuke
  4. Compromise
  5. Re-framing makna
3. Theoretical Coding (Guided Deductive) Categories are then interpreted using Blumer's three premises of symbolic interactionism:
  1. Meaning as a basis for action
  2. Meaning born from interaction
  3. Meaning is modified through interpretation

The process model (digital exposure – negotiation – re-framing) is treated as a *sensitizing concept*, not a priori framework. The model is validated through the consistency of pattern occurrence in the data.

The validity of the data is maintained through the criteria of *credibility, transferability, dependability*, and

*confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation techniques and sources were used to strengthen the validity of the findings, while member checks were carried out to ensure the suitability of the researcher's interpretation with the informant's experience. The ethical aspects of research are considered by obtaining informed consent, maintaining the anonymity of informants, and respecting sacred values and local customary rules (Neuman, 2013).

## RESULTS

Field findings show that the meaning of the sacredness in Sepilar Temple differs between the older generation and the younger generation. However, these differences are not rigid opposition, but rather differences in emphasis born from social experiences and generational positions.

In the older generation group, sacredness is understood as the relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature that must be maintained through behavioral ethics. Mbah Ji stated that the sacredness "*depends on the behavior of the climber's*" (T1, interview, informant's residence, November 12, 2025) emphasizing that the sanctity of space is not automatic, but is activated through moral conduct. He narrated a number of illness and loss of direction events associated with ethical violations in the Eyang Semar Petilasan area. Mbah To described the sacred experience as a "*quiet but warm atmosphere*" (T2, interview, Sepilar Temple area, November 13, 2025). which presents the authority of space and demands a clean and calm attitude. Meanwhile, Mr. Karnadi emphasized the importance of good manners not to make a fuss, not to climb the temple structure, and not to disturb the sendang area as a form of respect for the sacred space (T3, interview, informant stall, November 13, 2025). Pak Kasri said that the sacred atmosphere feels "divided in two" when digital activities increase, especially when recording with mobile phone light takes place around the ritual (T4, interview, Sepilar Temple area, November 20, 2025).

Despite this, the older generation does not show a total ban on digital documentation. Mbah Ji explicitly states that climbers are allowed to take pictures as long as "excuses, permissions, and maintain ethics." This shows the flexibility of practice: sacredness is maintained through behavioral boundaries, not through an absolute rejection of technology.

In the younger generation, the meaning of the sacred appears more diverse. Kholil views the sacred as

a social construction and places Sepilar Temple as a historical site rather than a mystical space (M1, interview, climbing path to Sepilar Temple, November 16, 2025). Werai acknowledged that there are "*unwritten rules*" (M4, interview, Sendang area, November 17, 2025) that must be respected and reject excessive content creation. Wanto interprets the sacred as a form of self-awareness and relationship with nature, not just a formal ritual (M3, interview, Puthuk Lesung area, November 17, 2025). Meanwhile, Ali Al Faruq emphasized the importance of respecting cultural norms even if they are not directly involved in ritual practices. (M2, interview, Sepilar Temple area, November 16, 2025).

This internal variation shows that the younger generation is not a homogeneous group. There is a skeptical, reflective, and pragmatic position in interpreting the sacred. Some do not believe in mystical prohibitions, but still maintain a general ethic; Others see social media as a means of cultural promotion that can increase tourist attractions, as long as they remain within the limits of respect.

Field observations show that the dynamics of the sacred are also situational. In the morning and evening, the atmosphere is relatively calm and close to the image of "silence" as mentioned by the older generation. On the other hand, on weekends, documentation activity increases and mobile phone use is more dominant. The sendang and petilasan areas tend to be more guarded and rarely used as a content background compared to the stairs or the main structure of the temple.

Although older generations claim that digital activities have the potential to disrupt sacred atmospheres, practice in the field shows that photography and recording do not always get reprimanded as long as they are done calmly and do not interfere with rituals. No open conflicts were found between guards and climbers during the observation period. This indicates that the interaction takes place in the form of situational adjustments, not direct confrontations.

Overall, the meaning of the sacred in Sepilar Temple shows cross-generational variations operating in the same space through contextually negotiated boundaries. Older generations emphasize ancestral relationships and ethical adherence as the basis for the sanctity of space, while younger generations tend to place sacredness within the framework of cultural reflection, history, and personal experience. But in practice, the two orientations do not negate each other,

but rather interact within implicitly agreed ethical boundaries.

A total of 14 TikTok uploads published in the period June to November 2025 were analyzed as individual video units. The analysis includes visual elements, caption text, and interaction patterns in the comment column.

In general, the representation of Sepilar Temple is dominated by the landscape of the climbing path, the structure of the stone staircase, and the taking of pictures of the temple's architecture. The visuals tend to be cinematic, using wide angle or low angle to highlight the monumental and atmospheric effects of nature. No documentation of core rituals, joint prayers, or special activities in sensitive areas such as petilasan and sendang. The content focuses more on the travel experience, the silence of the atmosphere, and the aesthetics of space.

Captions that accompany videos are generally reflective and ethical, such as "*Mental diuji*," "*hormati tempat ini*," "*warisan leluhur*," or "*datang baik-baik, pulang baik-baik*." The phrase indicates an awareness of the value of reverence, although it is not always formulated in the framework of rituals or supernatural relationships. At the comment level, responses were dominated by questions about location and trail access as well as expressions of admiration for the beauty of the place. No extreme challenge content, acts of damaging symbols, or explicit abuse of sacred elements were found.

Of the fourteen uploads, four explicitly alluded to mystical experiences. Narratives appear in the form of overlay text or personal stories about an atmosphere that is "*tiba tiba hening*" or a feeling of "*merinding*." The mention of ancestral figures appears as a hereditary story, not as a ritual dramatization. In the comments section, some of the audience reinforced the narrative with the recommendation of "*izin dulu*," while others were neutral or skeptical, even challenging with a guts test tone. This variation in response suggests that the mystical dimension is interpreted in a non-uniform manner.

Some videos use dramatic music to build a mystical atmosphere, but remain within the limits of moderate visual representation. In addition, some commentaries emphasize the aesthetic aspect as a "good photo spot" rather than spiritual value. However, no indication of direct monetization, sponsorship promotion, or systematic commercial exploitation was found in the overall upload.

Overall, the digital representation of Sepilar Temple in the observation period shows the visual dominance of the landscape and architecture, accompanied by reflective narratives and occasional mentions of mystical experiences. The variation in audience responses shows that the meanings circulating in the digital space are plural and situational, not singular or uniform.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Sacredness as a Negotiable Meaning**

Sacredness In the classical tradition of the sociology of religion, sacredness is often understood through a firm dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. In his classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim views the sacred as a symbolic category that is clearly separated from the space of everyday life (Durkheim, 1995). This approach was later reinforced by Mircea Eliade who emphasized that the sacred space is present through hierophany—that is, the manifestation that separates the sacred space from the ordinary space (Eliade, 1959). In this perspective, the sacred is understood as an ontological quality that is relatively fixed and inherent in a particular place.

However, field data at Sepilar Temple shows that the meaning of the sacred does not always follow this rigid dichotomous pattern. The older generation informant emphasized that the sacred atmosphere is highly dependent on the behavior of visitors, such as maintaining calm, not climbing the temple structure, and respecting the sendang or pelasan area. The sacredness is thus not understood merely as an inherent nature of space, but as a condition produced through social practices that respect certain norms.

This understanding is in line with the anthropological study of sacred spaces which shows that religious spaces are often produced through the social practices of the communities with which they interact. Research on sacred spaces in Indonesia shows that the religious meaning of a place is not only determined by architectural structures or ritual symbols, but also by social practices that continuously bring that meaning to life in people's lives (Jamil et al., 2025)

In other words, sacred space is not just a static symbolic entity, but the result of the relationship between space, cultural practices, and the social experience of the community.

Similar findings are also seen in the study of local ritual traditions in Bali, where the sacredization of space is maintained through ritual practices, collective beliefs, and cultural narratives that are passed down from generation to generation (Pranajaya et al., 2023)

Thus, the sacred is more accurately understood as a social phenomenon that is produced and maintained through cultural practices that take place in a sustainable manner.

To understand these dynamics, the symbolic interactionism approach provides a relevant analytical framework. This perspective emphasizes that social meaning is formed through interactions between individuals and modified through a continuous process of interpretation (Blumer, 1969). In this perspective, human actions are not solely guided by social structures, but by the meaning they give to the situations they face.

In the context of Sepilar Temple, practices such as asking permission before taking pictures, avoiding certain areas, and subtle reprimands against behavior that are considered inappropriate can be understood as social symbols that maintain the sacredness of space. The symbols do not exist as formal written rules, but as social norms that are shared by the communities that interact with the site.

Practices found at Sepilar Temple such as requesting permission before taking pictures, restrictions on activities in certain areas, and subtle reprimands against behavior that are considered inappropriate can be understood as social symbols that maintain the sacredness of space. The symbols do not always present as formal rules, but as social norms that are shared by the communities that interact with the site. In research on symbolic communication in cultural rituals, symbols often serve as a medium of communication between people, communities, and the spiritual dimension they believe in (Inang & Aggasi, 2025).

Variations in meaning are also seen in the younger generation who visit Sepilar Temple. Some informants position temples as historical sites or spaces for natural reflection, while others still acknowledge the existence of unwritten norms that need to be respected. This variation suggests that sacred symbols do not have a single meaning, but undergo reinterpretation when dealing with different social experiences and generational positions.

Research on cultural symbols also shows that objects or spaces that are considered sacred can undergo a change in meaning when the younger generation begins

to interpret them in a more functional or cultural framework than religious (Salma & Budhi, 2025).

In the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the process of reinterpretation is part of the social dynamics that allow symbols to remain relevant in changing social contexts.

Field observations show that the sacred experience in Sepilar Temple is not always constant, but changes according to the social situation that occurs in the space. At certain times, especially in the morning and evening when visitor activity is relatively low, the atmosphere of the temple is closer to the "silent" image that older generation informants often refer to as a sacred experience. On the other hand, on weekends digital documentation activity increases, although the practice is not always considered an offense as long as visitors maintain ethics.

This phenomenon shows that the sacred is more accurately understood as a situational social process. In the theory of space production, Henri Lefebvre explains that the meaning of space is not only determined by physical structures, but also by the social practices that take place within it (Lefebvre, 1991). The sacred space is thus not only a place of ritual, but also an arena of social interaction that is constantly reshaping its meaning.

Studies on the transformation of ritual spaces also show that changes in social actors, cultural practices, and symbolic representations often result in the negotiation of new meanings without completely eliminating the religious dimension of the space (Nugroho et al., 2025).

In the context of Sepilar Temple, the practice of digital documentation and interaction between the older and younger generations shows that the sacredness is not lost, but undergoes a process of adjustment through ongoing social interaction.

A similar approach is also seen in the study of ritual spaces in the digital age, which shows that new technologies can change the way sacred spaces are represented without completely removing their symbolic value (Papantoniou et al., 2020)

Thus, changes in social practices do not necessarily result in the secularization of space, but can create new forms in sacred experience.

Overall, the dynamics seen at Sepilar Temple show that the sacredness is not only an inherited value system, but also a symbolic process that continues to be shaped through social interaction across generations. This approach affirms that changes in social practices do not necessarily eliminate the sacred dimension, but rather

open up space for the negotiation of meaning that allows the sacred to survive in a changing social context.

## **Mediatization: Determinism and Adaptation**

The development of digital media has changed the way religious practices are present and understood in the public space. Within the framework of mediatization theory, the media is no longer seen as just a communication channel, but as a social institution that has its own logic and is able to influence the form of religious practice. This perspective places the media as an agent of change that structurally shapes the way religion is represented, practiced, and understood in modern society.

In this framework, mediatization is understood as a process when religious practices are increasingly connected to the media communication system so that religious expressions must adapt to the visual, narrative, and performative logic of the media (Krüger, 2018).

The media not only channels religious messages, but also forms a structure of social interaction that influences how religious symbols and authorities are produced in public spaces.

A number of studies have shown that mediatization can change the shape of religious experience as spiritual practices begin to be produced in a format that is appropriate to the media culture. This transformation is seen in various digital religious practices where rituals, prayers, or spiritual experiences are represented through short audiovisual formats that are easily consumed in the ecosystem of digital platforms (Philips, 2025).

In this context, digital technology not only mediates religion but also has the potential to reshape spiritual experiences through algorithmic logic and digital connectivity.

Research on mediatization on the TikTok platform even shows that religious rituals can be recontextualized into short video content that follows the dynamics of the platform, so that religious authority and spiritual experiences are renegotiated in the digital space (Suardana & Sain, 2025).

This process shows how social media is able to create new public spaces for religious practices while opening up the possibility of diverse interpretations of sacred symbols.

Nevertheless, mediatization approaches that overemphasize the structural role of the media often

result in deterministic interpretations, as if the media automatically changes or even reduces the sacred dimension of religious practice. This kind of perspective views digital transformation as a process that tends to shift religion from the sacred space to the space of popular culture.

The deterministic approach to mediatization has been criticized by a number of studies that emphasize the agency role of religious actors in shaping the use of technology. The media does not always dominate religious practices; In contrast, religious communities often actively adapt technology to their religious values and norms.

This approach is seen in studies on *deep mediatization* that emphasize that religious actors are not just passive users of digital media, but also actively form communication strategies that allow them to maintain authority and religious communities in the digital space (Kołodziejka et al., 2023).

The concept of *settler media* in the study shows that religious institutions can strategically utilize digital media to expand community reach while maintaining their religious authority.

The approach that places religion as a mediating practice also emphasizes that religious experience always involves intermediary processes either through symbols, rituals, and communication media. Within this framework, digital media is only one form of mediation that allows religious experiences to be present in social life (Meyer, 2020).

Thus, the change of media does not automatically eliminate the sacred dimension, but can instead open up new forms in religious experience.

The literature on digital religion also shows that spiritual practices in the digital age are often hybrid, combining religious traditions with digital communication practices in an interactive form (Philips, 2025)

In this context, technology can expand access to religious experiences while creating new spaces for the negotiation of religious identity.

This approach suggests that mediatization does not necessarily mean the subordination of religion to the media. In contrast, the relationship between religion and media is often negotiable, where religious communities maintain sacred values while adapting forms of communication that are appropriate to the digital environment.

An analysis of fourteen TikTok uploads featuring Sepilar Temple shows a more complex dynamic of digital

representation than the secularization assumptions often associated with mediatization. The content analyzed featured more landscapes of climbing paths, stone staircases, and temple architectural structures through cinematic shooting with wide angle or low angle. The visual representation highlights the natural atmosphere, the silence of the space, and the experience of traveling to the temple site.

Interestingly, no direct documentation of core rituals or spiritual activities was found in areas considered sensitive such as petilasan and sendang. This shows that there is a limit to representation that is implicitly respected by digital content creators. Captions accompanying videos also often include reflective phrases such as "respect this place" or "ancestral heritage," indicating an ethical awareness of the symbolic value of the space.

This phenomenon shows that digital representation does not fully result in the desecration of sacred space. Instead of eliminating religious meaning, social media in this case serves more as an aesthetic space that highlights the visual and atmospheric dimensions of the sacred space without directly exploiting the ritual practice.

In the study of mediatization, this kind of aestheticization process is understood as a form of symbolic transformation in which religion becomes part of media culture without completely losing its religious meaning (Martino, 2020).

The media allows religious symbols to circulate in a wider public space, but the interpretation of the symbols is still influenced by the social and cultural context of the communities that use them.

In addition, no indication of aggressive commodification was found in the uploaded analyses. There is no sponsorship promotion, direct monetization, or sensational exploitation of sacred elements. This pattern is different from the forms of religious commodification that often appear in the context of marketing or popular culture, where religious symbols are used as a tool of cultural consumption (Putri & Sunesti, 2022).

The transformation of sacred representations in social media is not always synonymous with the loss of religious values. In the case of Sepilar Temple, mediatization actually shows a form of symbolic adaptation in which the sacred space is represented through digital visual aesthetics without completely eliminating the norm of respect for the site.

## **Transformation and Reconstruction of the Sacred Meaning of Sepilar Temple**

The debate over the transformation of sacred meaning in modern society is rooted in the classical tradition that views the sacred as a symbolic category that is relatively stable in the social structure. In this perspective, the sacred space is separated from the profane space through ritual practices, symbols, and certain behavioral norms that mark the boundaries between the two (Durkheim, 1995; Eliade, 1959). This concept then developed in contemporary studies that see sacred space as a social construct that continues to be produced through human practice and experience (Knott, 2010; Tomlinson, 2025). In such an approach, the sacredness is not only attached to a specific object or site, but can be formed through social practices that give special meaning to a place or experience.

In the context of a digital society, these changes are increasingly complex as sacred spaces are no longer limited to physical spaces, but can also appear in virtual spaces and digital representations. A number of studies have shown that digitalization has expanded the possibilities for sacred experiences by allowing symbolic practices and spiritual narratives to emerge in social media platforms, videos, and online communication spaces (Battista, 2023; Gao et al., 2022). Digital media not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a medium that shapes the way the sacred is represented and experienced in contemporary society.

However, some studies of the relationship between religion and digital media are still dominated by the mediatization framework, which emphasizes that religious practices are increasingly conforming to media logics, such as visibility, algorithmic distribution, and digital interaction (Ding et al., 2025; Lundby, 2014). This approach makes an important contribution to understanding the transformation of religious communication, but it often views technology as the dominant factor shaping the symbolic practices of society.

On the other hand, a number of studies have also highlighted the risks of commodification of the sacred in digital spaces, where sacred symbols are represented in the form of visual aesthetics or popular cultural consumption. This phenomenon can be seen in various digital practices that package spiritual symbols as media content or cultural products (H. Campbell, 2013; Meyer, 2020). Some studies have even shown that digitalization could change the way people access

spiritual practices, such as virtual rituals or app-based religious services.

Nevertheless, both approaches still tend to place technology as the main explanation of sacred change. This deterministic perspective pays less attention to microdynamics in everyday social practices, particularly how sacred meanings are negotiated by social actors in local contexts. In fact, a number of studies show that sacred experiences in contemporary society are often formed through social practices that are situational and relational, where the meaning of space is reproduced through human interaction with symbols, cultural memory, and social environment (Bognár, 2024; Tomlinson, 2025).

In addition, the existing literature also relatively rarely highlights the generational dimension in the transformation of the sacred. In a digital society, younger generations often interact with sacred symbols through visual mediums and digital experiences, while older generations maintain sacred meanings through traditional rituals and ethical norms. Recent research shows that Generation Z is increasingly shaping spiritual experiences through digital interactions and visual narratives on social media, which are influencing the way they understand sacred symbols and cultural spaces (Hussain & Wang, 2024; Liu et al., 2025).

Thus, there is a need to develop an analytical framework that not only sees the transformation of the sacred as a result of technology, but also as a result of social interactions that take place in different cultural and generational contexts.

To understand the transformation of the sacred more comprehensively, an approach that integrates microanalysis of social practices with macro analysis of changes in the media environment is needed. In the perspective of symbolic interactionism, meaning is not inherently attached to a particular object or space, but is formed through the process of social interpretation that takes place in human interaction (Blumer, 1969). Thus, the sacredness of a space is determined not solely by inherited symbolic traditions, but also by social practices that constantly renew that meaning.

This dynamic can be seen in social practices at Sepilar Temple. Informants from the older generation emphasized that the sacredness of the space is not automatic, but depends on the ethics of visitor behavior, such as maintaining calm, not damaging the temple structure, and respecting certain areas such as *sendang* and *petilasan*. In this perspective, the sacred is understood as a quality activated through social action.

This approach is in line with research on lived sacredness, which shows that sacred experiences are often formed through everyday social practices that give special meaning to a space (Ammerman, 2016; Bognár, 2024).

At the same time, the younger generation shows a more diverse interpretation of the site. Some informants interpreted Sepilar Temple as a historical site or a space for personal reflection, while others still acknowledged the existence of cultural norms that need to be respected when in the space. This variation reflects the tendency of contemporary societies in which sacred experience is increasingly reflective, individual, and contextual.

Analysis of fourteen TikTok uploads also shows similar dynamics. The digital representation of Sepilar Temple is dominated by the visual landscape of the climbing path, the architecture of the temple, and the natural atmosphere. No documentation of core rituals or direct exploitation of sacred areas such as *sendang* or *petilasan* was found. Captions that accompany videos often even contain reflective narratives such as "respect this place" or "ancestral heritage". This pattern suggests that digital representations do not automatically eliminate the sacred meaning of the space.

This phenomenon is consistent with research showing that digital spaces can become new arenas for the production of sacred meanings and spiritual experiences, especially through visual interaction and symbolic narratives in social media (Battista, 2023; Gao et al., 2022). In this context, digital media serves not only as a visual documentation tool, but also as a medium of interaction that allows sacred meanings to be renegotiated within a broader social space.

The synthesis between the dynamics of social interaction and digital media transformation in the case of Sepilar Temple shows that the change in sacred meaning does not take place in the form of total disruption, but through a gradual process of symbolic adaptation. Older generations maintain traditional ethical norms that govern behavior in sacred spaces, while younger generations integrate the experience of such spaces into digital documentation practices such as photography and social media content production. This dynamic suggests that the sacredness is not completely lost when the ritual space enters digital representation, but undergoes recontextualization through constantly negotiated social practices. In contemporary studies of sacred space, this kind of change is understood as a process of reproduction of symbolic meaning that takes place through social interaction and an ever-renewed

experience of space (Burchardt et al., 2023; Knott, 2010; Meyer, 2010)

The phenomenon reflects a broader transformation in sacred experience in contemporary society, where sacred spaces are no longer limited to the practice of physical rituals, but also interact with new social spaces shaped by communication technologies. A number of studies on digital mediation of religion show that digital media can be a new medium for the production of symbolic meaning, where sacred experiences are represented through images, visual narratives, and online interactions (H. Campbell & Evolvi, 2019; Hoover, 2016). In this context, digitalization does not always eliminate the sacredness of a space, but often expands the way sacred symbols are interpreted and shared in digital public spaces (Evolvi, 2021; Hutchings, 2023; Lövheim & Campbell, 2017)

Based on the synthesis between the empirical findings and the literature, this study proposes the concept of hybrid sacredness as a conceptual framework to understand the transformation of sacred meaning in the context of a digital society. Hybrid sacredness refers to a form of sacredness that is maintained through ethical practices and local cultural memory, but at the same time represented and negotiated through digital mediums by social actors across generations. This concept is in line with the lived religion approach which emphasizes that sacred experiences are not only formed through formal rituals, but also through daily practices and social interactions that give symbolic meaning to space (Ammerman, 2021; McGuire, 2021).

In this study, the concept of hybrid sacredness is operationalized through four analytical indicators that can be identified in social practices at Sepilar Temple.

#### 1. Continuity of Sacred Ethics

The first indicator can be seen in the sustainability of ethical norms that govern human interaction with sacred space. Informants from the older generation emphasized that the sacredness of Sepilar Temple is not automatically attached to the place, but depends on the behavior of visitors. One of the informants stated that the sacredness "depends on the behavior of the children of the climbers," (T1, interview, informant's residence, November 12, 2025) which affirmed that the sanctity of space is understood as something that is activated through moral conduct. Norms such as maintaining calm, not climbing the temple structure, and not disturbing the *sendang* and *petilasan* areas are seen as a form of respect for sacred spaces.

These findings suggest that the sacredness of space is maintained through social ethics that govern human interaction with place. This perspective is consistent with research on sacred place-making, which shows that the sacred is often formed through social practices that maintain symbolic boundaries between sacred space and everyday space (Burchardt & Gieryn, 2020; Meyer & Houtman, 2021).

## 2. Cross-Generational Negotiations on Sacred Meaning

The second indicator can be seen in the difference in interpretation between the older and younger generations on the meaning of the sacredness of space. The older generation emphasizes the relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature as the basis for the sanctity of space. On the contrary, some of the younger generation interpret Sepilar Temple as a historical site or a space for personal reflection.

For example, one of the informants of the younger generation said that he sees Sepilar Temple more as a historical site than a mystical space (M1, interview, climbing path to Sepilar Temple, November 16, 2025). Meanwhile, other informants still admitted that there are "unwritten rules" that need to be respected when in the area (M4, interview, Sendang area, November 17, 2025). These variations suggest that generational differences do not result in open conflict, but form a process of symbolic negotiation that allows various sacred interpretations to coexist in social practice. This phenomenon is in line with research on generational change in religious meaning, which shows that the younger generation often interprets sacred symbols in a more reflective and contextual way than previous generations (Stolz, 2023; Voas & Chaves, 2022).

## 3. Digital Representation of Sacred Space

The third indicator is seen in the way sacred spaces are represented in digital media. Analysis of fourteen TikTok uploads shows that the representation of Sepilar Temple is dominated by visual landscapes of the climbing path, stone staircase structures, and natural panoramas around the temple. No documentation of core rituals or activities was found in sensitive areas such as sendang and petilasan which in interviews were referred to as sacred points.

Captions that accompany videos also tend to be reflective, such as "mentally tested," "respect this place," or "ancestral heritage." The narrative shows that digital representations do not completely eliminate the

sacred dimension of the space, but rather reinforce reflective impressions of the experience of space. These findings are in line with research showing that social media often serves as a new arena in the production of symbolic meaning, where the experience of sacred space is represented through visual narratives and personal experiences (H. A. Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Hutchings, 2023).

## 4. Coexistence of Traditional Practices and Digital Expression

The fourth indicator is seen in the coexistence between traditional sacred practices and digital expression. The older generation did not completely reject digital documentation in the temple area. One of the informants even stated that visitors are allowed to take photos as long as "excuses, permissions, and maintain ethics." (T1, interview, informant's residence, November 12, 2025). This shows that there is flexibility in sacred practice.

Field observations also show that photography and video recording activities do not always get reprimands as long as they are done calmly and do not interfere with the ritual. The sendang and petilasan areas are maintained as sensitive spaces, while the staircase and climbing path areas are more often used as a background for visual documentation. This coexistence suggests that traditional sacred practices and digital representations do not exist in an antagonistic relationship, but operate simultaneously in complementary symbolic configurations. This kind of dynamic has also been found in various studies on religion and media hybridity, which show that traditional religious practices often adapt to new mediums of communication without losing their symbolic dimension (Hepp, 2020; Hoover, 2021).

These four indicators show that digital transformation does not always mean the secularization of sacred spaces. In the case of Sepilar Temple, the sacredness is maintained through ethical norms, cultural memory, and social practices maintained by the local community. At the same time, the experience of the space is also represented through digital mediums that expand its symbolic reach.

Thus, hybrid sacredness can be understood as a form of sacredness that survives through symbolic adaptation, where sacred values are maintained through local social practices while being re-represented through the medium of digital communication. This concept suggests that digital transformation does not necessarily lead to the profanization of sacred spaces, but can result in new

configurations in which traditional practices and digital representations interact in the production of sacred meaning.

## CONCLUSION

The meaning of sacredness in Sepilar Temple is formed through a process of symbolic interaction across generations that produces different but interrelated configurations of meanings. The older generation places the sacred in the cosmological relationship with the ancestors and the moral ethics that maintain the sanctity of space, while the younger generation interprets it through reflective experiences, historical values, and visual representations mediated by digital media. Such differences in orientation do not result in open conflict, but form a process of negotiation of meaning that takes place in everyday social practice.

Digital representation shows that digitalization does not erase sacred values, but rather shifts its expression from communal ritual practices to symbolic experiences and personal narratives in the mediatic space. This dynamic affirms that the sacredness is not statically attached to space, but is produced and modified through social interaction, as affirmed in the perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). In this context, Sepilar Temple can be understood as a **hybrid sacred space**, where traditional values and digital practices operate simultaneously in shaping sacred experiences in contemporary society.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The author was responsible for the conceptualization of the study, data collection, analysis, and the writing of the manuscript.

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"I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>) to assist in the language refinement, structural organization, and conceptual clarification of this manuscript. The use of artificial intelligence was limited to supporting the revision process and improving the clarity of academic writing. The prompts used include:

1. "Revise this abstract to make it more academically appropriate and concise."
2. "Improve the introduction to emphasize symbolic interactionism (Blumer)."
3. "Help restructure the literature review with clear research gaps."

The output from these prompts was used to refine sentence structure, enhance coherence between sections, and improve the articulation of theoretical arguments, while all core ideas, data interpretation, and analytical conclusions remain the author's original work.

While the author acknowledges the usage of AI, the author, Syafi'uddin, remains the sole author of this article and takes full responsibility for the content therein, as outlined in COPE recommendations."

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The authors have obtained informed consent from all participants.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Afiliasi : Universitas Muhammadiyah Surabaya  
Email : [syafiud121200@gmail.com](mailto:syafiud121200@gmail.com)

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
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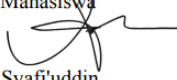
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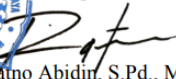
  
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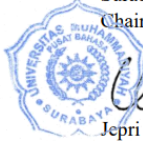
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