

Indonesia's Creative Economy as a New Expression of Cultural Nationalism

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ABSTRACT

Amid globalisation and digital transformation, Indonesia's creative economy demonstrates that cultural nationalism no longer rests solely on formal national symbols, but is increasingly produced through creative practices that link cultural heritage, innovation, markets and technology. This study aims to analyse the creative economy as a new expression of cultural nationalism through a qualitative approach using an interpretative-critical case study design, employing interviews, observation, documentation and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that the creative economy is developing as a symbolic ecosystem that transforms local culture into representations of Indonesian identity through the hybridisation of local and global elements, digital circulation, cultural consumption, and the formation of soft power and cultural resilience. This process yields a form of nationalism that is more participatory, adaptive and distributed, arising from the interactions between creative practitioners, cultural communities, consumers, the state, the market and digital platforms. These findings expand our understanding of the creative economy from a sectoral paradigm towards a sphere of production that generates both economic value and national identity, whilst also revealing the risks of commodification, cultural simplification and the marginalisation of source communities. Consequently, Indonesia's creative economy must be developed as a cultural strategy that integrates economic competitiveness with cultural justice, community protection, cultural resilience and digital sovereignty.

A. Introduction

Indonesia's creative economy is developing not merely as an economic sector based on creativity, innovation and intellectual property, but also as a space for the production of meaning that brings together culture, identity, technology, markets and national identity (Haerunnisa et al., 2023; Karimullah, 2023). In Indonesian society, shaped by its diversity of ethnicity, language, art, traditions, cuisine, fashion, music, architecture and local cultural expressions, nationalism is manifested not only through formal state symbols, historical narratives or political institutions, but also through everyday creative practices that transform cultural heritage into products, images, experiences and new representations of Indonesian identity.

The presence of batik in modern fashion, the adaptation of traditional motifs into contemporary designs, the marketing of regional cuisine through branding strategies, the use of folk tales in films and digital games, the adaptation of traditional music into popular formats, and the dissemination of various cultural expressions via social media demonstrate that the creative economy has become a key medium through which national identity is produced, negotiated and communicated to the public. This phenomenon illustrates that culture is no longer merely positioned as a heritage to be preserved, but also as a source of creativity that is continually reinterpreted within the context of social change and economic development.

The strategic position of the creative economy is further strengthened when this sector is positioned as a vital component of national development policy. Indonesia's legal framework for the creative economy identifies human creativity, intellectual property, cultural heritage, science and technology as sources of value creation (Insani et al., 2024). This orientation indicates that the creative economy differs in character from conventional economic sectors, as its economic value cannot be separated from the symbolic meaning, knowledge, identity and creativity of the communities underpinning it. In this context, the development of the creative economy is fundamentally not only about job creation, income growth, exports and competitiveness, but also about a nation's ability to harness its cultural wealth as a source of innovation without losing its connection to the social values and identity of the communities that gave rise to it.

The development of digital technology is further expanding this process, as cultural products and symbols can be produced, distributed, consumed and reconstructed in the digital space rapidly and beyond geographical boundaries. These changes simultaneously give rise to more complex issues. The integration of cultural elements into economic mechanisms and digital markets opens up opportunities to enhance the visibility of Indonesian culture, but at the same time may lead to the simplification, commodification, or even detachment of cultural symbols from their social context.

A traditional motif, a folk tale, regional cuisine, ethnic music, or a local symbol can take on new meaning when used as part of a commercial product and marketed to a wider consumer base. This process is not neutral, as it involves the selection of cultural elements deemed attractive, adaptation to market tastes, the construction of a specific image of Indonesia, and the negotiation between the need to preserve cultural values and the demands of innovation. Therefore, the creative economy must be understood not only as an arena for the creation of economic value, but also as a social and cultural arena in which creative practitioners, the state, the market, cultural communities, and consumers participate in shaping representations of the nation.

The perspective of cultural nationalism is relevant for explaining this phenomenon because nationalism does not always operate through direct political action, but can be shaped through symbols, collective memory, language, art, traditions and shared cultural experiences. Anderson describes the nation as an imagined community through the process of communication and the circulation of symbols, whilst Hobsbawm demonstrates that collective

identity can be constructed through traditions that are preserved, recreated, or adapted to the needs of society at a particular period. Bhabha subsequently positions the nation as a narrative construction that is continually produced and negotiated within social life. In the contemporary creative economy, the process of shaping this national imagination takes place across an ever-widening range of spheres, such as fashion, crafts, film, music, design, culinary, gaming, digital content, festivals, social media platforms, and various forms of cultural consumption industries.

Several previous studies have shown that Indonesia's creative economy has been extensively examined in relation to economic growth, innovation, regional development, digitalisation, public policy, competitiveness, and cultural sustainability (Khan et al., 2026; Pramono et al., 2025; Zidane et al., 2025). Studies on the governance of the creative economy, for example, highlight the importance of collaboration between the government, businesses, communities, and knowledge institutions in building an innovation ecosystem (Catala et al., 2023; Hajli et al., 2025; Nan & Huang, 2025). Studies on the resilience of the creative sector also highlight the ability of several subsectors, such as gastronomy, crafts, film, apps, games and the performing arts, to adapt to technological changes and economic conditions (Khlystova & Kalyuzhnova, 2023; Protogerou et al., 2022). Meanwhile, studies on the arts and culture emphasise that cultural wealth can form the basis of Indonesia's competitive advantage if supported by adequate policies, infrastructure, funding and intellectual property protection (Mahrinasari et al., 2024; Sukania et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the view that the creative economy lies at the intersection of economics, culture, technology and policy. However, most studies still treat these dimensions as relatively separate objects of analysis.

Studies of specific sub-sectors also indicate that creative economy products can serve as a medium for representing identity. Batik, for example, is not merely understood as a textile product or an economic commodity, but has evolved into a symbol of national pride and identity used across various social spheres (Febriani et al., 2023). Similarly, music, film, crafts, visual design and various forms of digital creativity are increasingly drawing upon local language, stories, motifs, characters, mythology and aesthetics as sources of inspiration for their works. Studies on digital creativity rooted in local culture demonstrate how cultural elements can be translated into audiovisual formats, applications, animations, games and social media content, thereby reaching new audiences, particularly the younger generation (Adikpo & Kapure, 2025; Shi et al., 2026). However, such studies generally focus on specific sub-sectors, products or regions and therefore do not yet fully elucidate the broader relationship between creative economy production and the formation of national identity within the context of contemporary Indonesia.

Based on the development of this research, the research gap in this study lies in the limited number of studies that position Indonesia's creative economy in an integrated manner as a space for the formation and expression of cultural nationalism. Previous studies have predominantly discussed the creative economy through the perspectives of economic growth, job creation, competitiveness, digitalisation, entrepreneurship, sub-sector policies, the development of MSMEs, or cultural preservation in isolation (Idolor et al., 2025; Mehrjoo & Shahbazi, 2026).

Studies on national identity also tend to focus on specific cultural symbols or forms, and thus have not yet sufficiently explained how various creative economy practices can collectively generate new representations of Indonesianness. Consequently, the relationship between the utilisation of local culture, the creation of creative products, innovation, digital distribution, cultural consumption, and the fostering of a sense of belonging to the national identity has not yet been adequately explained. Similarly, the tensions between preservation and commercialisation, between authenticity and innovation, and between cultural representation for the market and the interests of the original cultural communities still require a more in-depth analysis.

These gaps are becoming increasingly significant because the transformation of culture into creative economy products is an interpretative process involving various actors and interests. When fashion designers use traditional motifs, filmmakers adapt local stories, musicians blend regional instruments with popular genres, or digital creators incorporate cultural symbols into social media content, they are not merely producing economic goods. Still, they are also determining which cultural elements are highlighted, how those cultures are represented, and what meaning of 'Indonesianness' is conveyed to the public. The same process occurs amongst consumers who assign value to, use, share and interpret these products.

This study aims to analyse how Indonesia's creative economy functions as a new expression of cultural nationalism by identifying how local cultural heritage is selected and transformed into creative products, how practitioners construct narratives of 'Indonesianness' through their works and economic practices, and how innovation and digital media influence these processes of representation. The study also seeks to understand the relationship between economic interests and the preservation of cultural meaning, as well as the role of various actors in shaping the form of Indonesian identity as expressed through the creative economy.

Academically, this study expands the field of nationalism studies by positioning economic activities and cultural consumption as part of the process of nation-building, whilst enriching the study of the creative economy through an analysis of symbolic and cultural dimensions that have not always been central to the discussion. In practical terms, the findings of this study are expected to form the basis for the development of creative economy policies that not only pursue growth and competitiveness. Still, they are also capable of maintaining the interconnection between economic innovation, cultural sustainability, the interests of local communities, and the strengthening of Indonesia's identity within both the national and global spheres.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using an interpretative case study design to analyse Indonesia's creative economy as a form of cultural nationalism. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on the interpretation of cultural elements, symbols of nationhood and national identity as represented through the products and practices of the creative economy. The study focuses on the utilisation of local culture, the construction of national narratives, creative innovation, and the distribution of products via digital media. The subjects of the study are creative economy practitioners in sub-sectors that showcase elements of Indonesian culture, such as fashion, crafts, cuisine, film, music, design, and digital content, selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of their work to the study's theme.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, documentation, and a review of policy documents and publications relating to the creative economy. The research instruments comprised interview guidelines, observation sheets, and a document analysis matrix, all developed in accordance with the concepts of the creative economy and cultural nationalism. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, peer checking, and audit trails (Ahmed, 2024). The data were then analysed using thematic analysis through a process of coding, categorisation, thematic interpretation and concluding to identify how the creative economy serves as a medium for cultural representation and the formation of contemporary Indonesian cultural nationalism.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Transformation of Cultural Nationalism through the Digital Creative Economy

The transformation of cultural nationalism through the digital creative economy demonstrates that the process of shaping national identity no longer takes place primarily

through state institutions, formal education, monuments, national rituals or conventional media, but is increasingly shifting towards the production, distribution and consumption of culture based on digital technology. Creative economy practitioners do not merely utilise cultural elements as a source of aesthetics or product differentiation; rather, they actively select, interpret, modify and redistribute symbols of Indonesian culture through fashion, crafts, cuisine, music, film, design and digital content. In this process, local culture assumes a dual function as both a source of economic value and a source of national identity.

The use of traditional motifs, local stories, regional languages, distinctive cuisine, ethnic music, architectural symbols and collective memory is driven not solely by commercial interests, but also by a desire to present Indonesian identity in a form more closely aligned with contemporary life. This finding is reinforced by products and promotional materials that demonstrate a tendency to blend traditional elements with modern visual language, as well as digital documentation showing that such cultural representations are circulated via social media, e-commerce platforms, streaming services and audiovisual spaces, enabling expressions of local culture to achieve national and even transnational reach.

This phenomenon marks a shift from institutional cultural nationalism towards an increasingly participatory form of cultural nationalism. Whilst nationalism in previous periods was largely produced through the state's official narratives regarding history, language, heroes and symbols of unity, the digital creative economy opens up space for the public to help determine what is considered to represent Indonesian identity (Karimullah et al., 2025). Within Anderson's framework of imagined communities, a nation is formed through the ability of individuals who do not know one another to imagine themselves as part of the same community through the circulation of symbols and media. In the digital context, this process of imagination has undergone a fundamental transformation.

Print media, which was a key focus in Anderson's argument, is now complemented, and in some spheres even replaced by social media, video platforms, digital music, online marketplaces, games and various forms of algorithm-based communication. Creative products thus become one of the new mediums through which people experience nationhood via their everyday consumption practices. Wearing fashion items featuring traditional motifs, enjoying music that blends local instruments with global genres, consuming regional cuisine presented in a modern way, watching films that highlight Indonesian social experiences, or sharing culture-based content on social media are simple practices that can generate an affective experience of connection to national identity.

The concept of cultural nationalism arises because a sense of national identity is no longer tied solely to loyalty to the state, but also to the practices of recognising, utilising, developing and disseminating culture. Nationalism within the creative economy operates through mechanisms that are relatively soft, symbolic and everyday. At this point, the concept of 'everyday nationalism' becomes relevant as it demonstrates how a nation is reproduced through actions that appear ordinary and are not always recognised as nationalistic acts. In the digital creative economy, this form of nationalism emerges when consumers choose local products because they are perceived to represent Indonesian culture, when creators use regional narratives as a source of inspiration, or when digital communities appreciate products deemed successful in bringing local identity to the global stage.

Cultural nationalism is thus not confined to major political moments, but is alive in aesthetic choices, consumption preferences, content-sharing activities, language use, and everyday creative practices. This transformation can also be explained through Bhabha's perspective on the nation as a constantly negotiated narrative. National identity is never entirely fixed, as it is continually reshaped through the encounter between tradition and social change. Creative works that blend local elements with global aesthetics demonstrate a process of hybridisation, affirming that contemporary Indonesian identity is not built through cultural purification, but through the capacity for adaptation and negotiation.

Creative practitioners tend not to reproduce traditional culture in its entirety, but select specific elements which are then reinterpreted in line with the nature of the medium, consumer needs, technological developments, and the tastes of the contemporary generation. Traditional motifs can be transformed into minimalist designs, regional musical instruments combined with electronic elements, folk tales developed into animations, whilst traditional foods are packaged using visual strategies that align with modern consumer culture. These practices demonstrate that cultural nationalism need not be built through the conservation of culture in a static form. On the contrary, culture gains vitality precisely when it can enter new spaces and negotiate with change.

The process of hybridisation within Indonesia's creative economy bears similarities to the development of cultural economies in various countries, yet produces distinct configurations due to the historical structures and cultural diversity of each society. South Korea, for example, illustrates how popular music, film, drama, fashion, cosmetics and cuisine can be developed as part of a cultural branding strategy that strengthens national appeal on a global scale.

Japan has also long been building its cultural representation through anime, manga, design, cuisine and the digital gaming industry (Mimler & Imamura, 2026), whilst the UK has developed its creative industries with an emphasis on design, music, film, advertising and cultural heritage as part of a knowledge-based economy (Kalfas et al., 2024). In this context, culture functions not merely as heritage, but as a creative resource that enhances a country's position within global economic and communication networks. However, Indonesia's character is distinct because its cultural nationalism is built upon a high degree of traditional pluralism. Whilst some nations have been relatively successful in constructing a centralised national cultural image through a few dominant products, Indonesia's representation is more polycentric, as 'Indonesianness' is formed through the convergence of various local identities. This situation means that Indonesia's creative economy is not merely an instrument of national branding, but also a space for negotiation between local and national identities.

This comparison demonstrates that the strength of Indonesia's creative economy lies precisely in its ability to translate local pluralism into a national language without completely homogenising differences. Creative practitioners tend to bring regional identities into a broader sphere whilst still linking them to the Indonesian identity. Thus, the cultural nationalism that emerges does not negate local distinctiveness, but rather one that derives its meaning from diversity. This relationship can be understood through the framework of glocalisation, the process by which local elements are preserved whilst being adapted to global formats and networks. Within the creative economy, regional culture can undergo glocalisation when local narratives are presented through digital technology, contemporary branding strategies, a global audiovisual language, or product forms that are accessible to consumers across regions. This process enables local culture not only to survive, but also to acquire a new context and become part of the construction of Indonesian identity in the global sphere.

The transformation of culture into a source of the creative economy does not always automatically result in the strengthening of nationalism. In some practices, the use of cultural elements is driven by the need to create product differentiation and visual appeal; consequently, there is a risk that cultural symbols may be reduced to mere ornamentation without an understanding of their accompanying social significance. This situation can be explained through the concept of cultural commodification, whereby the symbolic value of a tradition is translated into exchange value and produced to meet market demands. Commodification does not always carry negative connotations, as it can generate income, create jobs, enhance cultural visibility, and provide economic incentives for preservation. Problems arise when the process of commercialisation detaches a symbol from its owning

community or transforms culture into merely a consumable image without recognition of the history, knowledge and social relations that shape it.

Digitalisation broadens public access to Indonesian culture, but at the same time accelerates the processes of reproduction, modification and dissemination of symbols, making it increasingly difficult to maintain control over the cultural context. Social media algorithms tend to give greater visibility to content that is easily recognisable, visually appealing and has viral potential. Consequently, culture may be simplified to fit the logic of the platform. Cultural narratives in product promotion are often packaged through short stories, striking visuals and easily identifiable symbols. This approach is effective for increasing reach, but it can reduce cultural complexity to a few representative signs.

This issue can be understood through a 'cultural economy' approach, which views the economy and culture not as two separate spheres, but as mutually constitutive. The value of a creative product stems not only from its material function, but also from the stories, identity, authenticity, symbols and social associations attached to it. Consumers purchase creative products not merely out of functional necessity, but also because these products enable them to express who they are and the communities with which they wish to be associated. Within the framework of cultural nationalism, the consumption of culture-based creative products can take the form of symbolic consumption, that is, the use of commodities as a medium to demonstrate a connection to Indonesian identity.

Cultural nationalism is not shaped by creative practitioners alone, but through the interaction between producers, consumers, cultural communities, the state, the market, and digital infrastructure. The state provides a regulatory framework, promotional programmes, intellectual property protection, and narratives regarding the creative economy as a national strength. Creative practitioners select and interpret cultural elements; cultural communities provide knowledge and symbolic resources; and digital platforms determine the mechanisms of distribution and visibility. Meanwhile, consumers interpret the resulting representations. Therefore, the relationship between the creative economy and cultural nationalism should not be understood linearly, as if the use of culture in a product directly produces nationalism. This relationship is more accurately understood as a circular process involving production, representation, distribution, consumption and reinterpretation.

2. The Hybridisation of Local and Global Cultures in the Creative Industries

The hybridisation of local and global cultures within the creative industries demonstrates that the success of Indonesia's creative economy is not determined by the ability to preserve culture in a static form, but rather by the ability to transform cultural heritage into a creative language that is acceptable to the global community without losing its connection to the local context (Fikriah et al., 2026). Practitioners in the creative economy across the sub-sectors of fashion, crafts, gastronomy, film, music, design and digital content consciously do not view culture as an artefact to be replicated in its entirety, but rather as a source of inspiration that can be reinterpreted in line with technological developments, consumer preferences and the dynamics of the international market.

A variety of creative products display similar patterns, namely the use of traditional motifs in minimalist designs, the fusion of regional musical instruments with electronic arrangements, the reinterpretation of folk tales into films, animations or digital games, and the presentation of traditional cuisine through a modern visual identity. Digital documentation also reveals that these cultural representations are produced to reach cross-national audiences via social media platforms, digital marketplaces, streaming services, and various digital economic ecosystems.

The relationship between local and global cultures is not dichotomous, but rather unfolds through a process of cultural hybridisation. From Homi K. Bhabha's perspective, hybridity constitutes a third space that enables the emergence of new meanings through the

encounter between various cultural systems without erasing their respective identities (Amoamo, 2011). Culture does not operate according to a logic of preserving purity, but is constantly undergoing negotiation, adaptation and reinvention in accordance with the historical and social contexts that surround it. In Indonesia's creative industries, this hybrid space is evident when elements of local culture are translated into the language of global design without entirely severing their symbolic roots.

Woven motifs, traditional carvings, the scripts of the Nusantara, folk tales, traditional rituals and local musical expressions no longer appear merely as representations of the past, but as creative elements that take on new meaning in fashion, product design, popular music, film, digital games and social media content (Aragon & Leach, 2008). This hybridisation does not erase cultural identity, but rather broadens how that identity is understood by a society that is increasingly connected through global digital networks. This phenomenon exhibits characteristics distinct from those of several countries that have successfully developed culture-based creative economies.

South Korea is an example often cited in the development of the creative economy due to its ability to integrate the entertainment industry, digital technology and state policy into the Hallyu, or Korean Wave, strategy (Santos & Marques, 2022). Korean popular music, dramas, films, games, cosmetics and cuisine serve not only as economic commodities but also as instruments of cultural diplomacy that shape the nation's global image (Rose et al., 2025). However, South Korea's success is underpinned by a relatively more homogeneous construction of cultural identity, supported by a nationally integrated industrial system. Conversely, the findings of this study indicate that Indonesia faces a more complex situation, as its national identity is built upon thousands of local cultural expressions, each with distinct histories, languages and symbolic systems.

Another point of comparison can be found in Japan, which has developed its 'Cool Japan' strategy through anime, manga, games, character design, cuisine and popular culture. Japan's experience demonstrates that traditional cultural elements are not preserved in a conservative form, but are combined with high technology, modern aesthetics and the entertainment industry, thereby creating a cultural identity that is easily recognisable globally. Nevertheless, Japanese popular culture generally draws upon national symbols that already possess a relatively uniform identity. Conversely, the findings of this study indicate that Indonesian creative economy actors tend to curate the diversity of local cultures before translating them into an identity that is acceptable both nationally and internationally.

The UK's experience through the concept of 'creative industries' also demonstrates that the development of the creative economy relies heavily on innovation, intellectual property rights, design, media, music and cultural heritage as sources of knowledge-based economic growth. The UK approach largely positions culture as an economic asset supported by a creative industries system, an innovation ecosystem, and robust legal protection (Virani, 2023). In this context, cultural heritage forms part of a strategy to enhance national competitiveness through creativity and innovation. However, the findings of this study suggest that the orientation of Indonesia's creative economy cannot be fully understood solely through the logic of the creative industries as developed in the UK.

China's experience also offers an interesting comparative perspective. Over the past two decades, China has actively developed cultural industries as part of a strategy to strengthen national identity whilst simultaneously enhancing global influence through film, the performing arts, digital museums, digital games and domestic technology platforms (Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). Unlike Indonesia, this strategy is driven to a greater extent by robust state policies and control over the national cultural narrative (Riyanto et al., 2023). Conversely, the findings of this study show that the representation of Indonesian culture is largely shaped through collaboration between the state, creative practitioners, cultural communities, digital platforms and consumers. Whilst the state does provide regulation,

facilitation and promotion, the cultural meanings circulating in the digital sphere are largely constructed through public participation.

This comparative analysis demonstrates that cultural hybridisation within Indonesia's creative economy possesses distinctive characteristics. Unlike South Korea, which relies on the homogenisation of national cultural identity. Japan, which exports popular culture as a national symbol. the UK, which positions creativity as a knowledge-based industry. China, which integrates the cultural industry through a state-led approach. Indonesia, on the other hand, builds the strength of its creative economy through its ability to connect the plurality of local cultures into a dynamic national representation.

This uniqueness demonstrates that Indonesia's national identity is not constructed through the unification of cultures into a single dominant form, but rather through the ability of various local cultures to retain their distinctive characteristics whilst interacting within the same creative space. This situation reinforces the relevance of the concept of glocalisation, a process whereby local values are preserved whilst simultaneously being adapted to global dynamics through technological innovation, design, digital media and contemporary communication strategies.

The process of cultural hybridisation is not without its challenges, given the concerns of creative practitioners regarding the tendency of the digital market to prioritise visual appeal over the depth of cultural meaning. Social media algorithms and digital platforms encourage the production of content that is fast, brief and easy to share, meaning that cultural symbols risk being reduced to mere decorative elements lacking an adequate historical narrative (Sun, 2026). Various promotional materials demonstrate a tendency to use batik motifs, woven textiles, traditional houses, traditional dances and folk tales as visual identities that effectively attract consumers' attention; however, these are not always accompanied by an explanation of the philosophical values or the cultural communities that gave rise to them. This phenomenon illustrates that cultural hybridisation is constantly caught in a tension between creative innovation and the risk of cultural simplification.

Cultural hybridisation is not synonymous with the loss of cultural authenticity. On the contrary, when the process of reinterpretation is carried out through the involvement of cultural communities, respect for local knowledge, and the responsible use of technology, hybridisation actually becomes an adaptive mechanism for preservation. Cultural products are not preserved as artefacts that exist solely in museums or ceremonial spaces, but are given new life through the creative industries (Istvandity et al., 2024), which enable younger generations to discover, utilise and redevelop their cultural heritage within a context relevant to their own era.

The relationship between the creative economy, cultural representation and cultural nationalism cannot be explained solely through the perspectives of economics, cultural preservation or national identity in isolation. The hybridisation of local and global cultures is the primary mechanism linking these three dimensions. Local culture serves as a source of creative innovation; the creative industries act as a space for cultural translation and representation; whilst digital technology expands the circulation of symbols, thereby shaping a new experience of nationhood.

Cultural hybridisation is a social process involving creative practitioners, cultural communities, the state, the market, digital platforms and consumers in constructing a representation of Indonesianness that is constantly being negotiated. Consequently, contemporary Indonesian cultural nationalism is no longer understood as an effort to preserve culture in a static form, but rather as the ability to transform cultural diversity into a national identity that is adaptive, inclusive and globally competitive, whilst remaining rooted in local cultural values.

3. The Creative Economy as an Instrument of Soft Power and Cultural Resilience

The power of culture in international relations no longer depends solely on a state's formal diplomacy. Still, it is increasingly determined by a society's ability to produce cultural works, symbols, lifestyles, narratives and experiences capable of shaping public perception beyond its territorial borders. In the Indonesian context, local cultures that become part of the creative economy ecosystem not only acquire new economic value, but also have the potential to shape Indonesia's image through more persuasive and affective channels.

Film, music, fashion, crafts, cuisine, design, games, animation and digital content enable people abroad to recognise Indonesia not primarily through foreign policy or institutional representation, but through cultural experiences consumed voluntarily (Astuti, 2025). In this process, the creative economy operates in two directions simultaneously. Outward, by building Indonesia's appeal and recognition on the global stage; and inward, by strengthening the circulation, realisation and sustainability of culture within society itself. This two-way relationship is crucial because soft power that is not underpinned by domestic cultural resilience risks producing an image that is disconnected from its social base, whilst cultural resilience that lacks the capacity to communicate globally may lose its relevance in an increasingly competitive transnational cultural landscape.

The concept of soft power developed by Joseph S. Nye (2011) emphasises a nation's ability to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. Within this framework, culture becomes a key source of power when it is capable of generating interest, emotional connection and legitimacy. However, the findings of this study point towards a broader understanding that, within the digital creative economy, the sources of soft power are not entirely produced by the state.

Creative practitioners, cultural communities, start-ups, musicians, filmmakers, designers, game developers, craftspeople, culinary practitioners, and even digital consumers all play a part in shaping the national image. This situation reflects a shift from state-centred cultural diplomacy towards a form of networked cultural power, that is, cultural power generated through a network of state and non-state actors. Consequently, Indonesia's appeal on the global stage is determined not only by official cultural diplomacy programmes, but also by the creative ecosystem's ability to translate Indonesia's cultural diversity into forms that can be understood, appreciated and consumed across cultural boundaries.

France offers a different model, as its cultural resilience is largely built through policies protecting language, film, the arts, cuisine, fashion, museums and the cultural industries as part of the national interest. The French approach demonstrates that soft power is not merely a matter of exporting culture, but also the ability to maintain domestic cultural production capacity in the face of global industrial dominance. The concept of cultural exception, which has developed within French cultural policy, essentially stems from the view that cultural products cannot be treated entirely in the same way as ordinary commodities, as they carry identity, values and collective memory.

This perspective is highly relevant to Indonesia. If the creative economy is positioned solely as a market sector, then the measure of its success will tend to be limited to growth in turnover, exports, investment and employment (Rembulan et al., 2025). From the perspective of cultural resilience, an equally important question is whether such growth strengthens society's capacity to produce its own culture, ensures the sustainability of local knowledge, provides space for regional languages and symbols, and prevents excessive dependence on global cultural formats.

India also serves as a significant point of comparison as it illustrates the relationship between cultural pluralism, the creative industries, the diaspora, and soft power (Thussu, 2019). The Indian film industry, particularly Bollywood, has long functioned as a medium for disseminating language, music, fashion, dance, family values, and images of Indian life to various regions. The presence of the diaspora expands this process, as Indian cultural products

are not only consumed domestically but also serve as a link to identity amongst transnational communities.

In the Indonesian context, India's experience is significant because both countries share a diversity of languages, traditions, religions, cuisines and strong regional identities. However, there are differences in the level of consolidation within the cultural industries. India has been relatively successful in creating several centres of cultural production with international reach, whilst Indonesia's creative ecosystem remains more fragmented. From this comparison, it can be understood that pluralism is not an obstacle to soft power, provided there is distribution infrastructure, promotional networks, intellectual property protection, and production capacity capable of bringing local expressions to wider markets.

China provides a different point of comparison as it demonstrates a model of soft power that is relatively more strategic and state-coordinated (Zhang et al., 2026). The development of the film industry, the digital sector, the performing arts, museums, cultural centres, the Mandarin language, and various cultural exchange programmes illustrates how the state seeks to link the cultural industries with geopolitical interests and national image. This model has strengths in its ability to mobilise resources, but also reveals limitations when cultural appeal is too closely tied to institutional narratives.

Compared to this pattern, the findings of this study indicate that Indonesia's soft power potential is more organic and polycentric. The state plays a vital role in regulation, facilitation, cultural diplomacy, funding and the protection of intellectual property; however, Indonesia's appeal largely stems from the creativity of its people, which is not always shaped by state strategy. This situation can be a strength, as the resulting cultural image feels more authentic and participatory. Still, it can also be a weakness if there is a lack of coordination capable of linking various creative initiatives into a sustainable national strategy.

This comparison demonstrates that soft power based on the creative economy can be shaped through various avenues. South Korea relies on the integration of cultural industries and policy support; Japan strengthens its appeal through popular culture and innovation; France emphasises the protection of domestic cultural capacity; India utilises cultural pluralism and diaspora networks; whilst China employs strong state coordination. Indonesia does not fully align with any single model. Indonesia's character, in fact, calls for a model that combines market openness, community participation, cultural protection, state facilitation and digital innovation (Dellyana et al., 2023). In this regard, Indonesia's soft power should not be built through cultural homogenisation, but through the ability to present pluralism as a national strength.

The relationship between soft power and cultural nationalism becomes increasingly clear when the creative economy is understood as a mechanism of representation. Creative products not only bear Indonesia's name but also determine which aspects of Indonesia are visible and which remain invisible to the global public. When batik, woven textiles, spices, regional cuisine, folk tales, traditional music, tropical landscapes or traditional symbols are featured in films, fashion, design, games and digital content, a process of representational selection takes place.

Such choices can broaden understanding of Indonesia, but may also result in oversimplification if only easily marketable symbols are repeatedly featured. Therefore, soft power must be distinguished from mere nation branding. Nation branding tends to emphasise easily recognisable and marketable images, whereas sustainable soft power requires deeper cultural legitimacy. Cultural appeal will lose its power if the public views such representations as commercial constructs with no connection to actual cultural practices.

It is at this point that cultural resilience becomes an inseparable dimension of the creative economy. Cultural resilience does not mean closing culture off from change, but rather a society's ability to maintain the capacity to reproduce, interpret, develop and pass on cultural values when faced with the pressures of globalisation, technological change and market

dominance. Based on a thematic analysis, cultural resilience within the creative economy can be understood through several intertwined relationships: the sustainability of cultural knowledge, the ability to adapt to new media, the involvement of the younger generation, recognition of source communities, the protection of intellectual property rights, and the existence of a market that enables cultural practitioners to derive economic benefits. If any one of these elements is missing, the creative economy may generate growth without cultural sustainability.

The creative economy can thus strengthen cultural resilience by providing economic and social reasons for a tradition to continue to be practised and studied. When craft skills gain access to new markets, younger generations have an incentive to learn techniques that were previously at risk of being abandoned. When traditional music finds its way onto digital platforms, its instruments and repertoire reach a wider audience. When folk tales are adapted into films, animations or games, cultural memory gains a medium of transmission suited to the consumption habits of the new generation. In this context, commercialisation need not be at odds with preservation.

The creative economy can serve as a mechanism for adaptive preservation, that is, preservation that occurs through adaptation rather than stagnation. (Nurizka et al., 2025) Culture remains alive because it can enter new contexts without entirely losing its value and social connections. However, this positive relationship does not occur automatically. An analysis of documentation and digital representations reveals that market logic can drive cultural selection based on popularity. Cultures that are easily visualised and commercialised tend to receive greater attention, whilst traditions that are complex, less photogenic, or difficult to translate into digital formats risk becoming increasingly marginalised. This situation demonstrates that the creative economy can result in cultural representation inequalities.

Some cultures gain national and global visibility, whilst others remain outside the mainstream. If left unmanaged, the soft power built through the creative economy may actually produce a narrow and disproportionate image of Indonesia relative to its true cultural wealth. In addition to issues of representation, cultural resilience also faces the threat of appropriation and the detachment of cultural values from their source communities. The greater the economic value of a symbol, the greater the likelihood that it will be utilised by actors with no connection to its original knowledge or community.

Cultural resilience is not merely about protection against foreign influences. An approach that views global culture solely as a threat is ill-suited to the nature of the contemporary creative economy. Findings from the previous discussion indicate that local and global interactions result in hybridisation that can broaden a culture's relevance. The main issue is not whether Indonesian culture must be free from global influences, but rather whether cultural practitioners and communities possess sufficient capacity to negotiate on an equal footing with these global currents. Culture becomes vulnerable not because it undergoes change, but when external markets, global platforms, or economic actors with greater capital entirely dictate that change.

In the digital ecosystem, this issue takes on a new dimension because technology platforms act as the primary intermediaries between producers and consumers of culture. Algorithms determine visibility, monetisation models influence production methods, whilst platform standards shape how works are presented. Consequently, Indonesia's soft power in the digital age depends not only on the quality of its creative works but also on the position of creative practitioners within a global infrastructure that is largely beyond domestic control. Dependence on external platforms can create a paradox: Indonesian culture achieves global distribution, yet the distribution mechanisms lie beyond national control. Consequently, digital cultural resilience also requires platform literacy, data capacity, local distribution ecosystems, fair monetisation capabilities, and policies that prevent creative practitioners from

merely becoming content providers for the global digital economic infrastructure (Rahmani et al., 2023).

From the perspective of cultural nationalism, this situation demonstrates that the creative economy can strengthen a sense of national identity when society is not merely a consumer of global culture, but also possesses the capacity to produce and circulate its own representations. Cultural resilience is ultimately linked to a nation's representational capacity. A nation that loses the capacity to produce its own films, its own music, its own digital narratives, its own designs, and its own interpretations of its history and traditions will become increasingly dependent on representations produced by others. Conversely, a society with a strong creative ecosystem can continue to define its identity through various new media. In this context, the creative economy holds significance that extends beyond economic value-added, as it serves as the symbolic infrastructure for the sustainability of national identity.

The creative economy is not merely a sector that generates economic value, nor is it simply a vehicle for cultural promotion. It is a space where economic value, representations of identity, cultural resilience and international appeal are produced simultaneously. When creative works circulate within national and global spheres, they generate at least three forms of value simultaneously: economic value through transactions and the creation of industries; symbolic value through the representation of identity; and strategic value through the creation of cultural appeal and influence. These three forms of value reinforce one another when the development of the creative economy remains connected to cultural communities and national interests, but may conflict with one another if market-oriented approaches neglect cultural sustainability.

From a comparative analysis across nations, it can be concluded that Indonesia's creative economy soft power model should ideally not be built by imitating the models of South Korea, Japan, France, India or China, but rather through a pluralistic model suited to Indonesia's cultural structure. This model is based on the ability to transform diversity into a portfolio of national attractions, to link tradition with digital innovation, to strengthen the capacity of cultural practitioners and communities, and to integrate creative economy policies with cultural diplomacy and heritage protection. In such a model, the state is not the sole producer of the national narrative, but rather a facilitator of an ecosystem that enables various communities to articulate their identities whilst simultaneously contributing to Indonesia's collective image.

The government acts as an enabler that builds the ecosystem, whilst the private sector serves as the driving force behind innovation and production. Japan demonstrates a relatively similar approach through its 'Cool Japan' strategy, in which the promotion of popular culture is combined with policies on tourism, trade, investment, education and public diplomacy (Claro et al., 2023). Conversely, the UK has developed its creative industries by strengthening the innovation ecosystem, nurturing creative talent, protecting intellectual property rights, and fostering collaboration between universities, industry and local government. This comparison demonstrates that the success of the creative economy does not stem from stand-alone sectoral policies, but rather from a governance framework that integrates culture, education, technology, industry and international relations in a cohesive manner.

In the Indonesian context, the need for such integration is all the more urgent because Indonesia's cultural character is far more pluralistic than that of these other countries (Murthi et al., 2025). The cultural diversity spread across various regions precludes a development approach that is overly centralised or uniform. The results of the thematic analysis show that creative practitioners actually derive their innovative strength from their ability to develop local cultural identities in accordance with the distinct character of each region. Consequently, the governance of Indonesia's creative economy requires a multi-level approach that connects the central government, local governments, indigenous communities, higher education

institutions, business actors, financial institutions, digital platforms and civil society within a single collaborative ecosystem. This approach aligns with the concept of collaborative governance, which prioritises the resolution of public issues through cross-actor cooperation, rather than solely through government intervention. In the creative economy, such collaboration is vital because cultural representation cannot be produced unilaterally by the state or the market, but is the result of ongoing interaction between various stakeholders.

Digital transformation has altered the governance of the creative economy. Previously, the distribution of cultural products relied more heavily on formal institutions such as galleries, television stations, production houses or publishers. Now, digital platforms enable creative practitioners to distribute their work directly to a global audience. On the one hand, this situation broadens the scope for the democratisation of cultural production as distribution barriers are lowered. On the other hand, however, the dominance of global platforms also means that the visibility of cultural products is heavily influenced by algorithms, monetisation mechanisms, and digital market preferences that do not always align with the interests of cultural preservation.

The European Union's experience with the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act demonstrates that states are beginning to strive to balance the power of digital platforms with the public interest, including the protection of cultural diversity and healthy business competition (Colangelo, 2023). Although the regulatory contexts differ, this experience offers the lesson that strengthening Indonesia's creative economy also requires digital governance capable of creating a fairer competitive environment for local creative practitioners (Karimullah, 2024).

Cultural resilience within the creative economy is determined not only by the existence of cultural products, but also by the sustainability of the knowledge ecosystem that gives rise to them. Many creative practitioners draw inspiration through direct interaction with indigenous communities, traditional craftspeople, local artists, or cultural practices passed down through generations. Should these communities face marginalisation due to economic pressures, urbanisation or social change, the wellspring of creativity within the creative economy will also be weakened. Consequently, investment in cultural communities is just as important as investment in the creative industries.

New Zealand's experience in developing creative industries based on Māori culture demonstrates that the successful commercialisation of culture must be accompanied by recognition of the rights of indigenous communities, their involvement in the production process, and a proportional sharing of economic benefits (Afsari Bajestani et al., 2025). This approach demonstrates that the creative economy can serve as an instrument of cultural empowerment provided that the relationship between industry and communities is built on an equal footing.

Cultural nationalism is no longer understood merely as a symbolic expression of national identity, but rather as the collective capacity of a society to continuously create, develop, and represent its culture through productive economic activities. Within this framework, creative economy practitioners are not merely economic actors, but also cultural agents who play a role in shaping how Indonesia is understood by its own people and by the international community. This role becomes increasingly significant as digital technology enables every individual to act as both a producer and a distributor of cultural representations. Cultural nationalism in the digital economy era thus evolves through processes that are more participatory, decentralised and network-based compared to the patterns of nationalism in the era of conventional communication.

The sustainability of Indonesia's creative economy depends on the ability to integrate three key dimensions in a balanced manner: economic competitiveness, cultural sustainability and the strengthening of national identity (Sutisna et al., 2026). These three dimensions are inseparable as they mutually shape one another within contemporary creative economic

practices. Economic competitiveness provides incentives for innovation, cultural sustainability preserves authenticity and serves as a source of creativity, whilst national identity provides symbolic meaning that distinguishes Indonesian products amidst global competition. This synthesis demonstrates that the relationship between the creative economy, cultural representation and cultural nationalism is systemic and circular in nature.

The creative economy not only utilises culture as a source of added value but also reproduces national identity through cultural representation, whilst cultural nationalism provides the social legitimacy that reinforces the sustainability of the creative economy. Thus, these three elements form an interdependent ecosystem and serve as a vital foundation for Indonesia's development, one that is oriented not only towards economic growth but also towards strengthening national character amidst the dynamics of globalisation and digital transformation.

D. Conclusion

Indonesia's creative economy has evolved into a cultural infrastructure that not only converts creativity and cultural heritage into economic value, but also produces new forms of nationalism through an ongoing process of representation, hybridisation, digital circulation and symbolic consumption. These findings expand the study of the creative economy and cultural nationalism by situating the two within a single, coherent analytical framework. Local culture serves as a source of creative differentiation; the creative industries act as an arena for the translation of identity; digital technology expands the distribution and negotiation of meaning; whilst markets and society play a role in affirming, altering, or even obscuring representations of Indonesian identity. Within this configuration, cultural nationalism is no longer primarily produced through formal state institutions. Still, it is increasingly shaped in a distributed manner by networks of creative practitioners, cultural communities, consumers, digital platforms and public policy, thereby resulting in a form of nationalism that is more participatory, hybrid and adaptive to globalisation.

Theoretically, these findings shift the interpretation of the creative economy from a sectoral paradigm towards a symbolic ecosystem paradigm that links value creation, cultural resilience, national identity and soft power. In practical and policy terms, the implication is the need for measures of the creative economy's success that go beyond gross domestic product, exports and labour, by incorporating the sustainability of cultural knowledge, the involvement of source communities, the equitable distribution of benefits, representational capacity and digital cultural sovereignty. The study's limitations lie in its qualitative design, the selective coverage of sub-sectors, and the fact that audience responses and the influence of platform algorithms on meaning-making have not yet been measured. Consequently, future research should test this model through a comparative cross-national approach, digital network analysis, audience studies, and a mixed-methods design to explain more precisely how the creative economy can serve not only as an engine of growth but also as a strategic arena in which a nation maintains its cultural agency amidst global competition.

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