

Surak Kuantan: Representing the Cultural Identity of the Kuantan Singingi Community through Documentary Film

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Abstract

The documentary film Surak Kuantan portrays the cultural identity of the Kuantan Singingi community by centering its narrative on pacu jalur, a traditional longboat race that symbolizes collective pride and togetherness. Beginning with the community's preparations, the film illustrates how every stage of the tradition from selecting sacred wood for the boat to collaborative rowing practices reflects deeply rooted social values and spiritual beliefs. This study employs an ethnographic and documentary analysis to examine how the film constructs meaning through visual composition, symbolic elements, musical arrangement, and cinematographic choices. The results indicate that the documentary does more than depict the tradition; it demonstrates the community's strong intergenerational involvement, highlights the spiritual significance attached to each ritual, and showcases how teamwork serves as the core of cultural resilience. The film is found to effectively preserve local heritage, reinforce communal identity, and provide an accessible medium for transmitting cultural knowledge. Ultimately, Surak Kuantan emerges not only as a visual archive but also as a narrative of cultural continuity that connects historical practices with contemporary forms of expression.

Keywords: Cultural Representation; Documentary Film, Pacu Jalur; Surak Kuantan.

INTRODUCTION

The Pacu Jalur is one of the oldest and most deeply rooted cultural traditions in the life of the people of Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation for centuries and has become an integral part of the community's social identity. The Pacu Jalur originated from the daily activities of people living along the Kuantan River, who used jalur, long boats carved from a single tree trunk, as a means of transportation and inter-village communication. Over time, the function of the jalur transformed from a practical mode of transport into a competitive event imbued with social and spiritual values. Eventually, this practice evolved into a widely celebrated folk festival known as Pacu Jalur, which today stands as an important intangible cultural heritage and a symbol of pride for the Kuantan Singingi community.

The Pacu Jalur is not merely a long-boat racing event; it represents a manifestation of the social, spiritual, and symbolic values of the Malay Riau people. Each stage of the event, from tree felling and boat construction to the naming rituals and the race itself, embodies the principles of mutual cooperation (gotong royong), social solidarity, sportsmanship, and respect for nature and ancestors. As Koentjaraningrat (1980) explains, culture encompasses the total system of ideas, actions, and human creations acquired through a process of social learning. Based on this perspective, Pacu Jalur can be understood as a living cultural expression continuously reproduced and reinterpreted within the Kuantan Singingi community.

From a cultural anthropological perspective, traditions such as Pacu Jalur serve as a means of forming and strengthening collective identity. In this sense, Pacu Jalur can be seen as a cultural text rich in symbolism, depicting the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and their community. The tradition reflects the social structure of the Malay people, who uphold the values of togetherness, honor, and spirituality. Through this activity, the community not only demonstrates physical skill in competition but also reaffirms its cultural identity and collective spirit, which form the foundation of its social life. However, amid modernization and

globalization, the existence of local traditions such as Pacu Jalur faces numerous challenges. The shifting of values, technological advancement, and the penetration of global culture have the potential to diminish younger generations' interest in regional traditions.

One strategic effort to sustain this tradition is through the production of documentary films. Documentary films function not only as tools to record reality but also to interpret and represent social life from specific perspectives. Nichols (2010) emphasizes that documentary filmmaking is a representational practice that seeks to interpret the real world through narrative and visual expression. Therefore, documentaries can serve as effective educational media to introduce, interpret, and foster awareness of the importance of preserving local traditions among broader audiences.

Surak Kuantan is one of the oral cultural expressions of the Kuantan Singingi community in Riau Province. It has developed within the social context of the riverine communities along the Kuantan River. This tradition takes the form of rhythmic, collective shouting performed as a form of encouragement, especially during the Pacu Jalur festival, a traditional boat-racing event that serves as a key element of the community's cultural identity. Scientifically, Surak Kuantan can be examined through the perspectives of cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, and ethnomusicology, as it involves linguistic, musical, performative, and social structural aspects of the supporting community. The tradition functions not merely as entertainment but also as a social mechanism that strengthens solidarity and collective identity among the people of Kuantan.

The documentary film Surak Kuantan was produced using a visual ethnography approach, a method used to understand social and cultural phenomena through visual representation. In this context, Surak Kuantan not only depicts the Pacu Jalur event as a spectacle but also seeks to explore the social, ritual, and spiritual meanings embedded within it. Through a reflective and observational cinematographic approach, the film invites viewers to understand Pacu Jalur as a living and dynamic cultural heritage.

The production of this documentary aligns with UNESCO's (2003) perspective on the importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage through creative and participatory approaches. Cultural preservation cannot rely solely on textual documentation but must also employ visual media capable of reaching wider audiences and resonating with younger generations. Thus, Surak Kuantan is expected to serve not only as a visual cultural archive but also as an educational and social reflection medium that fosters public awareness of the importance of maintaining local cultural identity amid global change.

Pacu Jalur is a traditional long-boat race held annually on the Kuantan River in Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau Province, Indonesia. As one of the region's most deeply rooted traditions, it has become an integral part of the community's socio-cultural life and has been passed down through generations as an expression of the collective identity of the Malay Riau people. Beyond its role as a sporting and recreational event, Pacu Jalur embodies profound social, spiritual, and symbolic values that reflect the harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and their community, serving as a living cultural practice that unites the people of Kuantan Singingi in shared heritage, faith, and solidarity.

Each Pacu Jalur festival involves the active participation of various members of society, including rowers, spectators, traditional leaders, and organizing committees. The preparation process involves a series of customary activities with deep symbolic meanings, such as communal prayers, the selection and felling of trees for boat-making, the naming of boats, and traditional ceremonies before the race begins. All these stages reflect the values of mutual cooperation, togetherness, and gratitude to God Almighty.

Pacu Jalur also possesses a strong spiritual dimension. The customary rituals that accompany this event, such as the recitation of prayers and offerings to ancestors, reflect the local community's worldview that blends religious elements with traditional beliefs. These spiritual

values reinforce the understanding that Pacu Jalur is not merely a physical activity but also a means of affirming the relationship between humans, transcendent forces, and the surrounding natural environment. Thus, Pacu Jalur can be viewed as a form of religio-cultural expression that unites elements of tradition, belief, and social solidarity.

The documentary film Surak Kuantan serves as a medium that records and represents this cultural complexity. The film not only highlights the competitive aspects of the event but also portrays the accompanying social and ritual processes, including the values of togetherness and spirituality that form the essence of the Pacu Jalur tradition. Through a visual ethnographic approach, the film seeks to interpret the lives of the Kuantan Singingi people in depth, illustrating how a tradition can become a symbol of collective identity and pride in the context of modern life. In line with Nichols (2010), documentary films possess the power to “establish relationships between social reality and cultural meaning” through authentic narrative and visual expression. Therefore, Surak Kuantan functions not only as a cultural archive but also as a medium for learning and reflection on the importance of preserving local traditions.

Surak Kuantan represents the cultural identity and social values of the Kuantan Singingi community through its carefully crafted visual and narrative elements. As a documentary film, it goes beyond the mere presentation of facts or events, offering instead an interpretive space where meanings are constructed, negotiated, and reflected upon. Through its depiction of rituals, collective expressions, and everyday interactions, the film captures the essence of local wisdom and communal spirit, allowing viewers to perceive how tradition, belief, and identity are intertwined within the fabric of Kuantan Singingi society. In doing so, Surak Kuantan not only preserves cultural memory but also reshapes the way the community understands and values its own heritage.

This study aims to assess how documentary films can serve as tools for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage and for strengthening cultural identity awareness within local communities. This view aligns with UNESCO’s (2003) principle that intangible cultural heritage preservation should involve creative media capable of bridging generations and reinforcing attachment to local culture. Through these objectives, this research is expected to contribute academically to the study of documentary film and local culture while enhancing the understanding of the role of audiovisual media in sustaining the nation’s cultural heritage.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods combined with documentary analysis. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on understanding the meaning and cultural representation contained in the documentary film Surak Kuantan, rather than solely on its cinematographic techniques. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from the participants’ perspective, emphasizing meaning, context, and interpretation. In this context, ethnography is used to understand the Pacu Jalur tradition as a socio-cultural phenomenon of the Kuantan Singingi community, while documentary analysis is applied to examine how this phenomenon is visually and narratively represented in Surak Kuantan. The combined approach allows the study to proceed in two directions: first, field observation of the Pacu Jalur culture; and second, analysis of the documentary as a cultural text that reflects social meaning and local identity.

The research was conducted in Kuantan Singingi Regency, Riau Province, focusing on the Kuantan River area as the central site of the Pacu Jalur tradition and the primary visual setting of Surak Kuantan. The research subjects included local community members such as traditional leaders, race participants, and organizing committees; the filmmaker and narrator, who provide creative perspectives on cultural meaning construction; and local audiences, who offer insights

into the reception of the film's representation of their identity. Key informants interviewed were S., L., and R., each representing different roles: S. as a traditional leader, L. as a rower, and R. as a member of the Surak Kuantan production team. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and film documentation analysis. Participant observation involved attending all stages of the Pacu Jalur event, from preparation and racing to closing rituals while in-depth interviews explored participants' cultural interpretations and experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The visual analysis of Surak Kuantan reveals that its composition and cinematographic techniques go beyond documenting a cultural event; they construct deeper meanings about identity and collective values. In the opening scene, the wide and calm panorama of the Kuantan River accompanied by traditional Malay Riau music functions as an establishing shot that introduces not only the geographic setting but also the symbolic relationship between humans and nature. The river is portrayed as a source of life and the center of social activity. The natural brownish color of the water and the reflection of sunlight create a warm atmosphere, symbolizing the community's spiritual closeness to their environment. As Hall (1997) explains, cultural symbols represented through media serve to build collective meaning and reinforce social identity. Therefore, this opening scene acts as a visual prelude that affirms the cultural space and values explored throughout the film.

In the middle part of the film, medium shots dominate to depict the social interactions among race participants, committee members, and the surrounding community. Several scenes show young men working together to lift the long boats from the riverbank to the race site, accompanied by cheers and traditional music. These moments highlight the spirit of cooperation and social solidarity that define the Kuantan Singingi community. As noted by one of the cultural figures (S., 2024), the boat race is not merely a sporting competition but also a collective event that strengthens communal bonds regardless of social status. The stable camera movement that follows these collective activities emphasizes harmony between individuals and the community. This visual approach aligns with the concept of visual ethnography, which focuses on social observation within a group context (Friedman et al., 2024).

Close-up shots are used strategically to emphasize emotional expression and social attachment. These scenes capture intimate moments, such as rowers bowing in prayer before the race or tears streaming down spectators' faces when their favored boat wins. As one participant (L., 2024) stated, these moments reveal emotional depth related not only to competition but also to the honor of the village. The use of close-ups creates emotional proximity between the audience and the subjects, allowing the spirituality and social attachment to be deeply felt. According to Nichols (2010), this technique represents a performative mode in documentary film, where social reality is conveyed through emotional experience. Thus, close-ups in Surak Kuantan serve as a narrative and symbolic tool that evokes empathy and reflects the spiritual dimension of the community.

The film's visual composition further integrates symbolism and cinematic elements as bridges between reality and culture. The natural tones of the river, the texture of the wooden boats, and the traditional attire of the rowers serve as visual representations of cultural identity. Dominant earthy and green hues symbolize the community's connection with nature and ancestral heritage. Traditional Malay music and reflective narration reinforce the film's spiritual and cultural atmosphere. Cultural objects such as boats, water, rituals, and traditional clothing operate as cultural symbols: the boat represents cooperation, the rowing direction symbolizes collective goals, and the flowing river stands for the continuity of life that unites the people. These visual metaphors express the core values of Kuantan Singingi society spirituality,

solidarity, and collective identity. Recent studies have also highlighted the role of documentary film in preserving intangible cultural heritage, showing its potential as a medium for cultural conservation (Utami, 2024).

Overall, *Surak Kuantan* can be interpreted as a documentary employing a visual ethnographic approach that emphasizes the interconnection between humans, culture, and the environment. The film successfully combines visual anthropology with cinematic aesthetics, enabling audiences not only to see but also to feel the living values embedded in the tradition of *pacu jalur*. The cultural representation presented in the film is not merely factual documentation but a visual interpretation of the Kuantan Singingi people's identity bridging social reality, cultural symbolism, and artistic expression.

Surak Kuantan represents the cultural identity and social values of the Kuantan Singingi community through its carefully structured visual and narrative elements. The documentary captures not only the aesthetic dimensions of the *Pacu Jalur* tradition but also the deeper layers of meaning embedded in local rituals, symbols, and collective expressions. As a form of visual storytelling, it reflects how the community constructs, negotiates, and reaffirms its identity in the face of modernity and globalization (Utami, 2024).

Documentary films, as noted by Friedman et al. (2024), serve as powerful tools for visual ethnography, allowing audiences to experience and interpret cultural practices beyond textual descriptions. In the context of *Surak Kuantan*, the film becomes a medium through which the voices, emotions, and collective memories of the people of Kuantan Singingi are preserved and communicated. Through dynamic visual sequences and narrative framing, the documentary presents culture not as a static artifact but as a living and evolving form of expression.

Moreover, recent studies emphasize that cultural representation in documentary films often goes beyond the mere presentation of facts; it actively constructs meanings that influence how communities perceive themselves (Pecheranskyi et al., 2023). In this sense, *Surak Kuantan* does not simply record cultural events but mediates between tradition and contemporary interpretation. The film's portrayal of community collaboration, competition, and spirituality in the *Pacu Jalur* festival illustrates how visual narratives can both preserve and reshape local values.

As Sun and Ch'ng (2025) argue, immersive and participatory documentary experiences can enhance cultural engagement and strengthen identity awareness among younger generations. Similarly, *Surak Kuantan* contributes to cultural preservation by translating intangible heritage into accessible visual narratives that resonate across audiences. The film bridges generations, connecting traditional wisdom with modern storytelling techniques, and reinforces the importance of collective identity in sustaining cultural resilience.

Visual and Narrative Representation in *Surak Kuantan*

The visual analysis of *Surak Kuantan* reveals that its composition and cinematographic techniques go beyond documenting a cultural event; they construct deeper meanings about identity and collective values. In the opening scene, the wide and calm panorama of the Kuantan River accompanied by traditional Malay Riau music functions as an establishing shot that introduces not only the geographic setting but also the symbolic relationship between humans and nature. The river is portrayed as a source of life and the center of social activity. The natural brownish color of the water and the reflection of sunlight create a warm atmosphere, symbolizing the community's spiritual closeness to their environment. As Hall (1997) explains, cultural symbols represented through media serve to build collective meaning and reinforce social identity. This opening scene therefore acts as a visual prelude that affirms the cultural space and values explored throughout the film.

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Close-up shots are used strategically to emphasize emotional expression and social attachment. These scenes capture intimate moments, such as rowers bowing in prayer before the race or tears streaming down spectators' faces when their favored boat wins. As one participant (L., 2024) stated, these moments reveal emotional depth related not only to competition but also to the honor of the village. The use of close-ups creates emotional proximity between the audience and the subjects, allowing the spirituality and social attachment to be deeply felt. According to Nichols (2010), this technique represents a performative mode in documentary film, where social reality is conveyed through emotional experience. More recent scholarship supports this idea, emphasizing the affective power of documentary visuality in conveying local identity and collective emotion (Sun & Ch'ng, 2025). Thus, close-ups in *Surak Kuantan* serve as both narrative and symbolic tools that evoke empathy and reflect the spiritual dimension of the community.

The film's visual composition further integrates symbolism and cinematic elements as bridges between reality and culture. The natural tones of the river, the texture of the wooden boats, and the traditional attire of the rowers serve as visual representations of cultural identity. Dominant earthy and green hues symbolize the community's connection with nature and ancestral heritage. Traditional Malay music and reflective narration reinforce the film's spiritual and cultural atmosphere. Cultural objects such as boats, water, rituals, and traditional clothing operate as cultural symbols: the boat represents cooperation, the rowing direction symbolizes collective goals, and the flowing river stands for the continuity of life that unites the people. These visual metaphors express the core values of Kuantan Singingi society spirituality, solidarity, and collective identity. Recent studies have also highlighted the role of documentary film in preserving intangible cultural heritage, demonstrating its potential as a medium for cultural conservation and intergenerational transmission (Utami, 2024; Friedman et al., 2024).

Overall, *Surak Kuantan* can be interpreted as a documentary employing a visual ethnographic approach that emphasizes the interconnection between humans, culture, and the environment. The film successfully combines visual anthropology with cinematic aesthetics, enabling audiences not only to see but also to feel the living values embedded in the *pacu jalur* tradition. The cultural representation presented in the film is not merely factual documentation but a visual interpretation of the Kuantan Singingi people's identity bridging social reality, cultural symbolism, and artistic expression.

Close-Up: Emotional Expression and Social Attachment

Several scenes in *Surak Kuantan* use close-up shots to highlight the facial expressions of participants and spectators during the race. The camera captures with intensity the rowers bowing their heads in prayer before the start or the tears of spectators when their favorite boat wins. These scenes are not merely emotional moments but reveal the deep connection between the people, their tradition, and their village identity. As noted by participant L. (2024), such moments express emotions that transcend competition, embodying the communal pride and honor of the village.

Close-ups are employed strategically to create emotional proximity between the film audience and the subjects, allowing the spirituality and social attachment of the Kuantan Singingi community to become deeply felt. According to Nichols (2010), this approach represents a *performative mode* in documentary filmmaking, where social reality is experienced through

emotion and empathy. Recent studies also emphasize that close-up visuality can construct affective understanding and strengthen cultural representation, especially in ethnographic or heritage-based films (Sun & Ch'ng, 2025; Turner, 2023). In this context, *Surak Kuantan* uses the camera not only as a recording device but as a cultural mediator that translates lived experiences into visual emotions, enabling audiences to perceive the spiritual and collective energy embedded in the *pacu jalur* tradition.

Symbolism and Cinematic Elements

The visual composition of *Surak Kuantan* employs natural color palettes, the texture of wooden boats, and the traditional costumes of the rowers as symbolic representations of cultural identity. Dominant tones of brown and green signify the people's closeness to nature and their ancestral land. The film's traditional Malay music and soft voice-over narration reinforce a contemplative and spiritual atmosphere, guiding the audience to understand that *pacu jalur* is not merely a sport but a ritual of respect for ancestors and nature. As argued by Utami (2024), such audiovisual symbolism plays a crucial role in preserving intangible heritage by conveying cultural meanings through sensory and emotional channels.

In this context, the *jalur* (boat) serves as a metaphor for social life: cooperation in rowing symbolizes communal unity, the boat's direction reflects collective purpose, and the flowing river represents the continuity of life binding the community together. These cinematic metaphors illustrate the foundational values of Kuantan Singingi society spirituality, solidarity, and collective identity. This approach resonates with recent ethnographic documentary studies that show how visual media can embody community values through aesthetic representation (Friedman et al., 2024; Pecheranskyi et al., 2023).

The film demonstrates that visual ethnography can effectively merge social observation with cinematic artistry. *Surak Kuantan* allows audiences not only to see but also to *feel* the living traditions and moral values of the community. Thus, its cultural representation transcends factual documentation, serving instead as a visual interpretation of the Kuantan Singingi people's identity a bridge between social reality, symbolic meaning, and artistic expression.

Discussion

This discussion examines how *Surak Kuantan* effectively articulates the collective identity and cultural values of the Kuantan Singingi community through its visual, narrative, and musical composition. Foundational theory of cultural representation, which posits that meaning is constructed rather than naturally inherent, as well as more recent research on media representation and cultural identity production (Vitalis et al., 2024), the film emerges not merely as a documentation of the *pacu jalur* tradition but as a dynamic cultural text. By combining visual ethnographic methods with cinematic aesthetics, the documentary mediates between tradition, social practice, and contemporary identity formation — demonstrating that tradition is not a static relic but a living practice continuously reproduced through symbolic, social, and spiritual interaction.

1. Representation of Collective Identity in *Surak Kuantan*

The documentary *Surak Kuantan* represents the collective identity of the Kuantan Singingi community through visual, narrative, and musical constructions that are deeply embedded in cultural meanings. As an ethnographic documentary, the film does not merely record the *pacu jalur* (long-boat race) as a traditional competition, but also articulates the social, spiritual, and symbolic values that shape the community's identity. According to Hall (1997), meaning is not inherently attached to objects or events but is constructed through systems of signs, language, and symbolic practices. In this context, the film functions as a medium of representation that reinterprets the social reality of the Kuantan Singingi people. Through its visual imagery and narration, *Surak Kuantan* presents *pacu jalur* not only as a tradition but as a dynamic expression of cultural identity.

2. Collective Identity Representation

The collective identity of the Kuantan Singingi people is portrayed through recurring cultural symbols throughout the film. The long boat (*jalur*) serves as the central emblem representing unity and cooperation. The communal process of building and decorating the boat illustrates a strong sense of social solidarity, consistent with Geertz's (1973) concept of *thick description*, which emphasizes understanding the social meaning behind seemingly simple cultural actions. Through scenes of collective labor from carving the wood and decorating the boat to communal prayers, the film visualizes that cultural identity in Kuantan Singingi is grounded in collectivity, mutual cooperation, and social participation. These values are not only cultural hallmarks but also serve as social glue that sustains tradition across generations.

3. Social Values and Cooperation

The spirit of cooperation (*gotong royong*) emerges as the film's central social theme. The interactions between participants, organizers, and villagers highlight the communal nature of the *pacu jalur* event, where every individual contributes to the success of the race. Medium shots frequently capture groups working together, lifting boats, or cheering for their teams—visualizing a sense of shared effort and solidarity. These depictions affirm that *pacu jalur* is not merely an inter-village competition but a ritual manifestation of social cohesion. The collective rituals strengthen social consciousness and community integration. Thus, *Surak Kuantan* serves as a visual testament to how traditional cultural practices function as mechanisms for reinforcing social structures and communal harmony (Friedman et al., 2024).

4. Spiritual Values and Religious Symbolism

Spirituality also plays a central role in *Surak Kuantan*. Each stage of the event—from selecting the boat's wood to performing prayers before the race is accompanied by ritual offerings and traditional invocations. The soundtrack combines traditional Malay instruments with a gentle narrative voice, emphasizing the sacred dimension of the tradition. The close-up shots of the rowers praying and spectators shedding tears capture the depth of emotion and faith that intertwine in the event. In this sense, spirituality in *Surak Kuantan* symbolizes the harmony between humans, nature, and the divine, representing a worldview where life balance and gratitude are central cultural ethics (Utami, 2024).

4. Cultural Values and Heritage Preservation

Surak Kuantan functions as a medium for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Through detailed visual documentation and contextual narration, the film captures the rituals, social interactions, and cultural symbols of the Kuantan Singingi people. Ruby (2000) emphasized that visual anthropology serves as a powerful tool for safeguarding non-verbal cultural knowledge. The film encourages viewers not only to observe but to interpret the cultural meanings embedded in each gesture, sound, and symbol. By portraying the preparation, prayer, and racing sequences, *Surak Kuantan* acts as a “visual archive” that preserves ethnographic identity and fosters intergenerational continuity (Turner, 2023; Sun & Ch'ng, 2025).

5. Documentary Film as a Medium of Representation

From the perspective of documentary theory, *Surak Kuantan* aligns with the *observational* and *expository* modes proposed by Nichols (2010). The film observes the community's activities with minimal intervention while also employing narration to provide cultural context. This dual approach allows viewers to perceive social reality authentically while interpreting cultural values through both image and sound. In this way, the film operates not only as an aesthetic product but also as a representational medium that constructs cultural awareness and strengthens local identity (Pecheranskyi et al., 2023).

6. Contribution to Education and Cultural Awareness

As a cultural documentary, *Surak Kuantan* has significant potential in education and cultural awareness. It can be used as a contextual learning medium that introduces students to local

wisdom and the spirit of *gotong royong*. According to Rahman (2021) and Setiawan (2020), documentary films in Indonesia play an important role in reinforcing national identity and building cultural awareness among younger generations. In this regard, *Surak Kuantan* functions not only as a documentation of tradition but also as an educational medium that instills values of solidarity, spirituality, and pride in local heritage.

Surak Kuantan stands as a compelling example of how documentary film can serve simultaneously as cultural representation, heritage preservation, and educational medium. Through its ethnographic framing and cinematic approach, the film bridges aesthetic representation, cultural knowledge, and collective awareness reinforcing that tradition is a lived, participatory practice rather than a passive inheritance. As research on cultural representation in media continues to emphasise the role of local agency, symbolism, and social context (Vitalis et al., 2024; Sun & Ch'ng, 2025), this study shows that *Surak Kuantan* not only preserves Riau Malay heritage but also reinforces cultural identity and facilitates intergenerational cultural education in a modernizing world

CONCLUSION

The documentary *Surak Kuantan* illustrates the significant potential of visual media as a tool for preserving, interpreting, and communicating local culture. By portraying the *pacu jalur* tradition, the film captures the multifaceted aspects of collective identity, spirituality, and social solidarity that define the Kuantan Singingi community. The combination of ethnographic observation and cinematic techniques enables the documentary to move beyond mere recording of events, presenting instead a rich narrative that embodies the lived values, rituals, and cooperative practices inherent in the tradition.

The study concludes that cultural documentaries are crucial in sustaining intangible heritage, enhancing cultural literacy, and fostering intergenerational knowledge transfer. In *Surak Kuantan*, the active participation of the community in production ensures authenticity, strengthens collective ownership of cultural representation, and reinforces communal pride. The film demonstrates that documenting cultural practices is not only about preservation but also about promoting awareness, social cohesion, and identity affirmation in a rapidly modernizing context.

Therefore, cultural documentaries like *Surak Kuantan* have the potential to serve as both educational tools and platforms for cultural advocacy. Future research and productions could build on this model by exploring new narrative techniques, interactive media, and collaborative approaches with communities to further strengthen cultural memory and facilitate sustainable transmission of local knowledge across generations.

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