

# The Construction of Minang Cultural Identity in Singgalang Daily Newspaper

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## ABSTRACT

The living space in society breeds culture which is closely related to all identities in the social environment. This shows that culture can reflect the identity that belongs to a community group. The identity that is built socially is an image of the collective experience of cultural groups of people. The Minang community group has many identities which are also reflected in the dissemination of news through Singgalang Daily newspaper. The construction of the cultural identity of the Minang people in Singgalang Daily shapes the public perception that the Singgalang Daily is part of the Minang community. This paper discusses about the way Minang cultural identity appeared in the Singgalang Daily by dissecting the reflection of Minang cultural identity in Singgalang Daily based on the culture of the Minang community applying qualitative research with the approach of the theory of cultural identity proposed by Stuart Hall and the hermeneutic method proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey. The result reveals that: (1) visually, in the old publications the Singgalang Daily already tried to show Minang identity construction, and; (2) Singgalang Daily is a newspaper born from the collective experience of the Minangkabau culture.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Identity, Singgalang Daily, Minang's culture, Newspapers*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of newspapers can be one of the benchmarks in information dissemination in a region. The needs of newspapers in the community are closely related to the needs of knowing about the information happening within the lives of the people in the region. As a mean of conveying messages to the communities, newspapers have differences between one region and another. Each province, city, region, and district in Indonesia has its own newspapers with their respective characteristics. Some of the regions in Indonesia has a diverse number of newspapers to choose from. One of that regions is Minangkabau. Before the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, newspapers in Minangkabau has already existed and became a medium for disseminating information to the Minang's community. Early news in Minangkabau was an oral culture that existed and continued to develop in West Sumatra. Oral culture is

transformed into a writing culture, and newspapers are published which provide information to the public at large. One of the earliest newspapers published in Minangkabau is Singgalang Daily. Singgalang Daily is a daily newspaper based in the city of Padang, West Sumatra. The first edition of Singgalang Daily was published on December 18, 1968 [1]. Understanding cultural identity that shape the lives of the people can be done through observing their daily life as well as the construction of ideas and identity rooted in their everyday lives. Cultural identity can be a distinct identifier of the characteristics of a tribe or race which contributes to form the identity to be able to adapt to the global world that tends to equate themselves. The Global Era that consumes local cultural identity is a common phenomenon to this day. Many distinct cultural identifiers have extinct and eventually forgotten although the shape of this long forgotten cultural identity can be traced by looking at the cultural artefacts circulating within the society. One of such artefacts is the mass media which is published and circulated in a timely manner. Starting from oral culture to writing culture, the

news in the community is disseminated. The distribution of newspapers in an area can become a strong identity marker. Cultural characteristics are attached to these newspapers and will be preserved as long as the newspaper is properly circulated to the community, such as the Minang's culture which was disseminated through Singgalang Daily. The forms of Minang's culture are arranged structurally as well as through the meaning behind the visuals shown in the publication of Singgalang Daily. The identity of Minang's culture found in Singgalang Daily is the object of research discussed in this paper. The interrelated patterns of cultural identity between the publications of Singgalang Daily and Minang's culture are reflected through special characteristics visually. Thus, this research will study about how the cultural identity was shown in the publication of Singgalang Daily.

**2. METHOD**

The approach used in this study is a cultural approach. The approach to this study emphasizes Minang's culture as the main culture that exists in the Singgalang Daily, which to this day is circulated to the society. The research method used in this paper is the Hermeneutic method proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey. This method will be used to interpret Minang's identity in Singgalang Daily using qualitative research to explain in detail the existence of Minang's culture found in Singgalang Daily. To help explain the Singgalang Daily, it will be discussed using the theory of Cultural Identity proposed by Stuart Hall.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Singgalang Daily is a National newspaper whose focus is the news coming from the Minangkabau land in West Sumatra. The news column, as well as the contents of the Singgalang Daily, are dominated by the news surrounding the Minang's culture itself. When discussing about Minang's culture, there is also a need to discuss about the way the people of Minangkabau think, their mentality, in their daily life. Thus, the news from Singgalang Daily becomes crucial to be observed in order to understand the construction behind the mentality of the people of Minangkabau. The daily life of the Minang community raises a visual identity that contributes to the cultural identity of the Singgalang Daily.

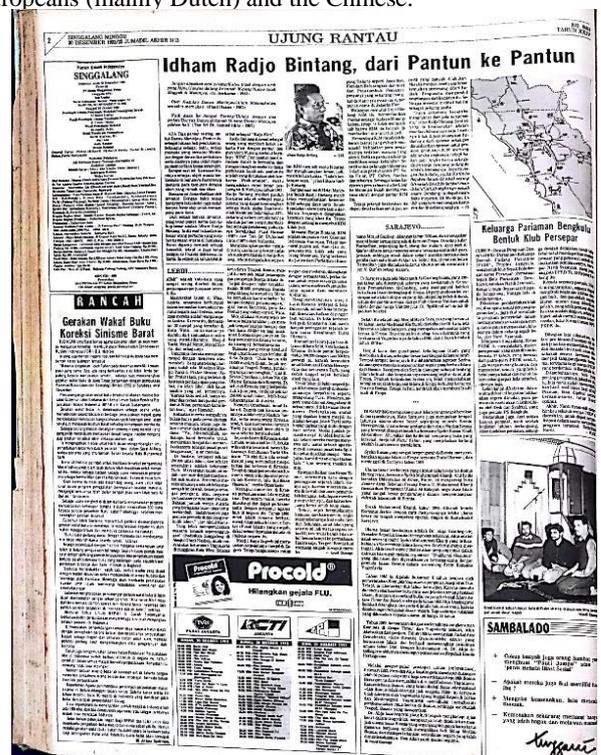
**3.1. Cultural Identity**

Identity can be seen by referring to special characters of individuals or members of society with certain social categories [2]. This means that identity is a construction that inherently attaches to an entity that is related to its social environment. Cultural identity is a basic awareness that a person has regarding of the specific characteristics of a group in terms of life habits, customs, language, and values [2]. Cultural identity is a term used by social scientists to define cultural roots inherent to the entity and have special characteristics to define themselves as part of their original culture. Cultural identity is a breakdown of the characteristics or features of a culture that is owned by a

group of people with clear boundaries that define distinct differentiation compared to the characteristics or features of another group. Cultural identity is the points of identification, both conscious and unconscious, which are made with discourses influenced by history and cultural roots. Cultural identity is not an essence but a position which is deliberately put to fulfil that position [3]. The Singgalang Daily has quite clear identification points which reflect Minang cultural identity within Singgalang Daily.

**3.2. Singgalang Daily represent Minang's Culture**

The uniqueness of the mass media in recent Minangkabau, West Sumatra, is an inseparable part of the tradition of writing that have long existed in Minangkabau through its Islamic tradition based on *surau* (Islamic assembly building used for worship and religious instruction). The speech culture or oral culture carried by the narrators there are translated into books in the *surau* and this prompts the appearance of the early newsletter in Minangkabau. The proverbs, poems, and verses are an inseparable part of the contents of the newsletter which has marked the new era of the people in the Minangkabau. According to Ahmat in Sunarti [4], the city of Padang is one of the most important cities in the growth of the mass media in Sumatra, especially newspapers, in the second half of the 19th century besides Palembang, Medan, Sibolga, and the City of Raja in Aceh. Padang's position was important because of the rapid commercialization managed by the Europeans (mainly Dutch) and the Chinese.



**Figure 1** One of Pages in Singgalang Daily from The fifth Saturday edition of December, 1972.



Fig 2 One of Pages in Singgalang Daily from The fifth Saturday edition of December, 1972



Fig 3 One of Pages in Singgalang Daily from The fifth Saturday edition of December, 1972

appeal to the emotion so that it is possible for every cultural member of Minang culture, both who lives in the native land of Minang as well as *urang rantau* which refers to the migrants living far from the native land, to be able to always remember their identity. Singgalang Daily carried out the mission of "connecting the migrants with their hometown," presenting typical information about the Minang community, both to those living in West Sumatra and those who were overseas. There is also the Newspaper for the Village (*Koran Masuk Desa* or KMD) which was published since the 1979/1980 fiscal year which was distributed around the area of District 50 Kota and the Municipality of Payakumbuh. As it turned out, after 5 years of running, the KMD of Singgalang Daily was assessed by the Indonesian Ministry of Information as an established KMD together with 19 other KMDs in Indonesia.

The first edition of Singgalang was published on December 18, 1968. What makes Singgalang Daily unique was the way it presents the information that prioritized the news about the people and the area of West Sumatra. The mission carried out by this newspaper is "fostering self-esteem for the welfare of the country and the nation" especially the Minangkabau. Its distinctive character, among others, is full of jest and healthy jokes which comes from Minang, making Singgalang Daily known to the migrants coming from Minang as "the only *urang awak* newspaper in Indonesia". *Urang awak* refers to concept of the people of Minangkabau. These two words refer to people who have the Minangkabau blood. Minangkabau people will call themselves as *urang awak* or *orang kita*. When Singgalang Daily got the recognition that it was the only *urang awak* newspaper in Indonesia, it meant that the newspaper represented the identity of the Minangkabau people. Thus, when people read the Singgalang Daily, they will come to an understanding of the characteristics of Minangkabau society.

The character of Minang's culture is very visible in the logo used by Singgalang Daily. The shape of *Rumah Gadang*, the traditional house from Minangkabau, is the key in Singgalang's logo representation of the culture. The shape of the horn is very dominant, so the identity of Minang's culture is very visible. The visual realm that shows the representation of Minang's culture can be seen from how the Singgalang Daily used this logo in 1972 which can be seen in figure 2. Logo as a part of visual communication that plays a role in the dissemination of information can be the main point in brand recognition within the society [5]. Minang's identity was represented by showing the silhouette of *Rumah Gadang*, becoming one of Singgalang's weapons to characterize itself as a part of the Minang community.



Fig 4 Singgalang Daily's Logo at 1984

The Singgalang Daily tries to appeal to the emotions of its readers through the Minangkabau peculiarities which are used as the basis for compiling a newspaper. It is trying to



Fig 5 Singgalang Daily's Logo at 1972



Fig 6 Singgalang Daily's Logos at 1972

Another visual that conveys the Minangkabau characteristics in the Singgalang Daily newspaper is the selection of the font design for the newspaper title. Figure 2 shows that the font used for the title in Singgalang Daily is the same with the logo design, forming the shape of *Rumah Gadang*, a traditional Minangkabau house. The Singgalang company itself used this visual in their own with the exact same font [6]. The visual form that became the symbol of the Singgalang Daily logo shows the representation of Minang's culture in Singgalang Daily.

Singgalang daily chose to use *Rumah Gadang* form in the logo because it is like the heart of Minangkabau, the thing that reveal how Minangkabau people live. Structure of the house represents their relation to the God and nature. For that sharp shape of the roof refers to relation to the God and the side wall, made of plaited strips of bamboo, tells about the strength and utility of community. That last part of the previous sentence is the reason why Minangkabau people get together in a larger community. It always better to stand side by side rather than alone [7].

The attachment between the Singgalang Daily and the Minang's culture is also clearly seen from how the Singgalang Daily has a news section that is dedicated to communicate the state of Minangkabau land. Thus, Singgalang Daily which was born from the spirit of the Minang's culture will become a cultural artefact that continues to preserve the Minang's culture. If made into a chart, then the relationship between Minang cultural identity and Singgalang Daily can be pictured as seen in figure 7.

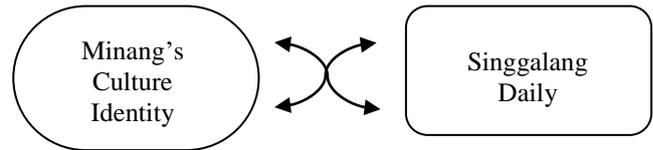


Fig 7 The chart showing the interconnectednes relations between Minang culture and SInggalang Daily.

The Singgalang daily was born from a writing culture in Minangkabau, and the commitment of Singgalang Daily to bring about Minang's culture was also continuously held, so it could be seen that the correlation between Minang's cultural identity and Singgalang Daily was interrelated.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Singgalang Newspaper is one of the mass media in the form of newspapers and lives in the land of Minang. The Singgalang Daily Newspaper spread in the city of Padang and its surroundings shows the existence of the Minang's culture. The cultural identity built by Singgalang shows that Minang's cultural identity is strong in terms of substance and technicality. Seeing the tenacity of the publisher's efforts to make Singgalang Daily to become "Extremely Minangkabau" even embedding the status of "the only *urang awak* newspaper in Indonesia" in the newspaper provided evidence that Singgalang was born for the people of Minangkabau land.

The construction of the cultural identity of the Minang people in Singgalang Daily shapes the public perception that the Singgalang Daily is part of the Minang community. This construction revealed two implications. First visually, in the publications of Singgalang Daily already had Minang identity construction and showed that Secondly, Singgalang Daily was a newspaper born from the very spirit of Minangkabau culture.

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