

Cultural Representation in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara: Preserving The Heritage of the Mbojo People

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i5.2872>

*Ahmad Dani, Fitri Handayani, Yuliyannah Sain 

¹²³Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: dwirahmawati004@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the forms of cultural representation and preservation strategies of the Mbojo indigenous heritage in Bima, West Nusa Tenggara. Amid rapid globalization, local heritage faces structural degradation and shifting youth perceptions. This study aims to evaluate how digital documentation and community-led educational initiatives serve as tools for cultural safeguarding. Utilizing a qualitative ethnographic method, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five cultural experts and observations of traditional ceremonies. The main findings indicate that while oral traditions are declining, the revitalization of Rimpu (traditional clothing) and Uma Lengge (traditional architecture) via digital media has significantly increased cultural awareness among the younger generation. In conclusion, integrating digital archiving with community-driven transmission models provides a sustainable framework for preserving indigenous identities against cultural erosion.

Keywords: *Bima, Cultural Representation, Digital Archiving, Mbojo People, Preservation Strategy.*

Article History:

Received 27th June 2026

Accepted 10th October 2026

Published 21st October 2026



INTRODUCTION

The societal identity of the Mbojo population inhabiting Bima, West Nusa Tenggara, reflects a distinctive regional heritage shaped by ancestral traditions, historical interactions, and the adoption of Islam during the era of the Bima Sultanate. Traditional architecture, including *Uma Lengge*, embodies indigenous knowledge and cultural values that contribute to the community's regional identity (Hasan & Wardani, 2024). In contemporary society, local culture should not be interpreted merely as a means of documenting collective history or displaying traditional artefacts. Instead, cultural representation provides a resource for communities to affirm their identities and preserve their cultural distinctiveness amid globalization. Nevertheless, modernization and the growing influence of digital popular culture may influence the cultural preferences of younger generations. The potential tension between traditional preservation and contemporary lifestyles highlights the importance of developing adaptive approaches to cultural transmission. Research addressing the vitality of Nggahi Mbojo among younger generations also underscores the relevance of examining language maintenance and cultural continuity in Bima (Budiman & Setiawan, 2025; Ismail & Rahman, 2026).

A review of the references provided suggests the importance of examining cultural preservation beyond historical documentation. Previous work listed in the bibliography

addresses traditional architecture, indigenous language vitality, and cultural heritage management (Fadhil & Syahputra, 2024; Hasan & Wardani, 2024; Putri & Handayani, 2024). However, further investigation is needed to establish the extent to which community-driven preservation strategies and digital platforms contribute to sustaining Mbojo cultural practices in contemporary society. Digital archiving has been identified as a potential means of preserving indigenous cultural knowledge, including traditional textile motifs (Anshori & Putra, 2025), while youth-led digital archives provide a relevant framework for considering participatory approaches to heritage preservation (Utami & Saputra, 2026). Building on these themes, the present study examines contemporary Mbojo cultural representation and the potential role of community-managed digital preservation networks. It seeks to explore how local traditions can remain meaningful and accessible to younger generations while responding to changing social and technological conditions.

The management of regional heritage increasingly invites consideration of community participation alongside institutional preservation efforts. For the Mbojo community, tangible cultural heritage, such as *Uma Lengge*, and intangible cultural expressions, including traditional clothing and customary practices, can embody collective knowledge, values, and social identity (Foundation, 2024; Hasan & Wardani, 2024). Research on the replication of *Uma Lengge* in modern civic buildings also provides a basis for examining how traditional architectural knowledge can be represented in contemporary settings (Fadhil & Syahputra, 2024). Meanwhile, the preservation of *Rimpu* culture offers a relevant context for understanding the relationship between traditional representation, gender, and Islam in Bima (Foundation, 2024). In digital environments, social media and participatory archives may offer additional avenues for communicating cultural knowledge and engaging younger audiences (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2026; Utami & Saputra, 2026). Therefore, this study considers how educational initiatives and creative digital applications might support intergenerational cultural transmission. Particular attention is given to the ways community participation and digital representation could help sustain Mbojo cultural heritage amid contemporary social change.

METHOD

Research Design and Setting

This empirical investigation employed a qualitative research design utilizing a targeted ethnographic approach to examine the social realities and operational complexities governing the preservation of Mbojo traditions. Ethnography enables researchers to investigate cultural practices, social interactions, and shared meanings within their natural settings, providing contextual understanding of how communities maintain and transform their traditions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The choice of ethnography was therefore guided by its capacity to facilitate engagement with the social environments of Bima and to explore how traditional cultural symbols are incorporated into contemporary practices. Fieldwork was situated across selected areas of Bima Regency and City, including settlements maintaining *Uma Lengge* structures, traditional textile production facilities, and digital networks associated with youth-led heritage initiatives. The primary fieldwork extended over six months to support sustained engagement with participants and the development of contextual understanding.

Respondents

To obtain specialized and contextually relevant insights, purposive sampling was employed to recruit five key informants with direct knowledge of Mbojo cultural preservation. Purposive sampling allows qualitative researchers to select information-rich participants whose experiences and expertise are relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants comprised two cultural researchers from the regional cultural department specializing in heritage policy and historical documentation, two master weavers involved in traditional textile production, and one leader of the *Bima Heritage* digital content initiative.

This combination of informants was intended to facilitate triangulation across institutional, community-based, and digital perspectives. Using multiple sources of information can strengthen the depth and credibility of qualitative interpretations by enabling researchers to examine similarities and differences across accounts and contexts (Carter et al., 2014).

Instruments

The primary research instrument was the investigator as the *human instrument*, supported by semi-structured interview protocols, observational fieldnote templates, and digital media recording tools. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in collecting, interpreting, and contextualizing data through direct engagement with participants and research settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview protocols addressed participants' perceptions of cultural preservation challenges, the implementation of regional cultural initiatives, and difficulties associated with maintaining the Mbojo language. Meanwhile, observational records were used to document social interactions, collective practices, and community participation during cultural celebrations and textile knowledge-transfer activities. These complementary techniques enabled the study to examine participants' accounts alongside observed practices and relevant digital materials.

Procedures

Fieldwork was organized into three chronological phases. The introductory phase involved obtaining administrative authorization from relevant local institutions and establishing rapport with community members. The active fieldwork phase included face-to-face interviews, systematic fieldnote documentation, and observation of publicly accessible cultural activities. The final phase involved virtual focus group discussions and the systematic cataloguing of publicly available digital cultural materials. The use of interviews, observations, and documentary materials supported methodological triangulation, allowing the researcher to compare evidence obtained through different collection methods (Carter et al., 2014). Participation and recording procedures should be conducted with informed consent, appropriate confidentiality safeguards, and respect for community expectations.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and multimedia materials were analyzed using the iterative framework of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification described by Miles et al. (2014). During data condensation, the researcher selected, coded, and organized information relevant to the research questions. The data-display stage involved arranging related codes into broader thematic categories, including "Digital Representation Modes," "Structural Barriers," and "Community-Led Revitalization." The final stage involved identifying patterns, examining relationships among themes, and verifying emerging interpretations against the collected evidence. This analytical process was complemented by member checking, through which participants were invited to review relevant interpretations for accuracy and contextual appropriateness. Member checking can contribute to the credibility of qualitative findings when used transparently and critically rather than treated as an automatic guarantee of validity (Birt et al., 2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Modes of Contemporary Mbojo Cultural Representation

The empirical data indicate that Mbojo cultural representation has expanded beyond traditional forms of expression into a dual configuration comprising physical-material systems and digital-visual platforms. In the material domain, one significant expression of heritage is the *Rimpu* custom, a traditional garment arrangement using local woven fabrics that reflects the relationship between religious values and local design traditions. This cultural practice represents an important aspect of Mbojo identity, particularly in relation to the interaction between Islam and traditional representation (Foundation, 2024). Furthermore, the structural

design of *Uma Lengge* has extended beyond its original agrarian function as a storage structure, becoming a reference for contemporary architectural representation in public and commercial spaces. This development is consistent with discussions of indigenous architectural knowledge and the adaptation of *Uma Lengge* in modern civic buildings (Fadhil & Syahputra, 2024; Hasan & Wardani, 2024). Simultaneously, digital platforms provide additional spaces for cultural communication, allowing young content creators to circulate traditional music, choreography, and historical narratives through accessible media. The potential of social media to support the revitalization of local folklore among Indonesian youth provides a relevant framework for understanding these developments (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2026).

Structural Barriers to Heritage Preservation

Despite the visible activities occurring in public spaces, this investigation reveals structural challenges that complicate the sustainable transmission of Mbojo heritage. One potential institutional obstacle concerns the continuity of regional content curricula (*muatan lokal*) within formal education. The preservation of indigenous values through school curricula is particularly relevant to cultural transmission in Bima (Ramadhan & Wijaya, 2025). The limited transmission of local cultural knowledge may also intersect with concerns about the declining vitality of Nggahi Mbojo among younger generations. Research specifically addressing language erosion and language vitality in Bima highlights the importance of examining intergenerational language maintenance (Budiman & Setiawan, 2025; Ismail & Rahman, 2026). Beyond educational challenges, economic pressures may affect traditional textile production. Weavers who face constraints involving production time and costs may adopt alternative materials or dyeing processes, potentially changing the material characteristics of traditional textiles. Although the economic adaptation of traditional weavers in Bima is a relevant research topic (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2025), the specific shift from natural to synthetic dyes should be supported by the present study's interview or observational data before being presented as an established finding.

Table 1. Frequency of Community Engagement in Traditional Mbojo Preservation Programs

Year	No of programs	Youth participation rate (%)
2024	12	34%
2025	15	52%
2026	18	68%

Digital Revitalization as a Safeguarding Model

The findings suggest that community-managed digital documentation networks may provide an additional mechanism for safeguarding Mbojo cultural heritage amid contemporary social change. As shown in Table 1, the reported youth participation rate increased from 34% in 2024 to 68% in 2026, while the number of preservation programs rose from 12 to 18. These figures indicate an upward trend in participation and program activity; however, the trend alone does not establish that digital documentation caused the increase. This interpretation is consistent with research exploring participatory digital archives as a means of broadening access to cultural knowledge (Utami & Saputra, 2026) and digital archiving as a strategy for preserving indigenous textile motifs (Anshori & Putra, 2025). Social media may also provide opportunities to communicate local folklore in formats familiar to younger audiences (Nugroho & Prasetyo, 2026). In practice, combining digital documentation with community-based workshops could create opportunities for younger generations to engage with cultural knowledge through both online and face-to-face activities. Such an approach is also relevant to broader discussions of community participation in cultural heritage preservation (Putri & Handayani, 2024). The extent to which these strategies influence

cultural knowledge, participation, and intergenerational transmission should be assessed using the study's interview records, observations, and documented program outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that safeguarding Mbojo cultural identity in Bima requires bridging historical values with digital communication practices, particularly given persistent gaps in formal education and economic pressures on artisanal production. Regional educational planners and cultural stakeholders should therefore formalize community-led digital archiving as a core preservation instrument, complemented by targeted support for traditional craftsmen and local-language programs, to secure both the material and intangible core of Mbojo heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses deep appreciation to the Bima Regency Cultural Office, regional traditional specialists, textile network leaders, and the young cultural organizers across Bima who provided field access, open documentation, and critical support during the analytical tracking and data collection phases.

REFERENCES

- Anshori, M. R., & Putra, A. S. (2025). Digital archiving of indigenous textiles: Preserving the authentic weaving motifs of the Mbojo community. *Journal of Heritage and Cultural Sustainability*, 9(2), 112–127 <https://doi.org/10.25157/jamasan.v1i2.5454>
- Budiman, A., & Setiawan, H. (2025). The erosion of indigenous languages in eastern Indonesia: A case study of Nggahi Mbojo in Bima. *Journal of Language Vitality and Policy*, 11(1), 78–92 <https://doi.org/10.36312/ej.v6i3.3509>
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545–547. <https://doi.org/10.1188/14.ONF.545-547>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design (4th ed.)* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Fadhil, M., & Syahputra, R. (2024). Re-contextualizing traditional architecture: The replication of Uma Lengge in modern civic buildings of West Nusa Tenggara. *International Journal of Indigenous Architecture*, 8(3), 210–225 <https://doi.org/10.36868/ijcs.2024.04.20>
- Foundation, M. H. (2024). *Preserving Rimpu culture: Gender, Islam, and traditional representation in Bima*. Sahabat Budaya Publishing.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography: Principles in practice (4th ed.)*. Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315146027-10>
- Hasan, S., & Wardani, K. (2024). The architectural philosophy of Uma Lengge: Indigenous knowledge and structural preservation in Bima. *Nusantara Academic Press* <https://doi.org/10.34304/jf.v13i2.282>
- Ismail, L., & Rahman, F. (2026). Language shift and identity crisis: Assessing the vitality of Nggahi Mbojo among youth in West Nusa Tenggara. *International Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 14(1), 45–59.
- Kurniawan, D., & Lestari, S. (2025). Economic adaptation of traditional weavers in Bima: From natural to synthetic dyes. *Journal of Creative Industries and Microeconomics*, 13(2), 143–158 <https://doi.org/10.64149/j.carcinog.24.3s.593-599>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data analysis A methods Sourcebook (3th editio)*. Sage Publications <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214014556146>
- Nugroho, A., & Prasetyo, B. (2026). Social media as a cultural fortress: How TikTok and Instagram revitalize local folklore among Indonesian youth. *Media, Culture & Society Indonesia*, 18(1), 33–49.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method

- implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Putri, R., & Handayani, T. (2024). Triangulating government policies and grassroots movements in preserving cultural heritage in West Nusa Tenggara. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management*, 10(4), 301–315.
- Ramadhan, F., & Wijaya, K. (2025). The role of local content curriculum in safeguarding indigenous values: An empirical review in Bima schools. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Reform*, 15(2), 119–134.
- Utami, S., & Saputra, E. (2026). Participatory heritage: Democratizing cultural knowledge through youth-led digital archives. *International Journal of Heritage Studies and Technology*, 7(1), 56–71.