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The Representation of Riau Malay Traditional Music in the SUNO AI Application: A Post-Reality Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how traditional Malay music is represented through the Suno AI application and to understand this phenomenon using Jean Baudrillard's post-reality perspective. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with digital experimentation techniques and in-depth interviews. Data were obtained from AI-generated Malay music (zapin, joget, and langgam), which was then compared to original traditional music, supported by the views of informants with expertise in Malay music. The findings indicate that AI is capable of presenting musical similarities at the surface level, such as rhythm, tempo, and the distinctive Malay nuance. However, the music produced tends to lose essential elements such as feeling, spontaneity, social interaction, and cultural meaning. From the post-reality perspective, this condition shows that AI music has entered the stage of simulation and simulacra, where culture is represented as sound signs detached from its original reality. Moreover, AI music can create hyperreality, a form of culture that appears neater and more perfect, but lacks depth of meaning. The presence of AI is not as an agent that changes the way culture is understood and represented in the digital era. AI-generated Malay music becomes a cultural representation that is simulational and has the potential to shift society's understanding of the authenticity of traditional culture.

KEYWORDS

Cultural Representation
Malay culture
Post-Reality
Simulation
Suno AI

INTRODUCTION

In cultural studies, representation means forming meaning through symbols, language, and media, determining how a culture gets displayed and reinterpreted. Traditional music represented through digital technology no longer simply reproduces sound. It results from cultural signs selected, processed, and re-displayed in a new medium (Natonis et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023). Culture shapes patterns of thought, attitude, and behavior within a community, letting individuals express shared values and transmit social identity across generations (Enekwe, 2024; Sauma et al., 2023). Digital technology has changed how communities produce, use, and interpret art and culture (Zahreddine, 2023).

Artificial Intelligence marks one of the clearest shifts, emerging as a new medium for creating music. AI now functions as a creative force that imitates, reproduces, and even generates music resembling specific cultural traditions, not merely a technical tool (Pons et al., 2025; Zhao, 2025). We now inhabit what scholars call Hyperreality, reality after reality, closely tied to the concept of Post-reality (Barroso & Garcia, 2022; Malik, 2024). Evolving cultures inevitably enter this post-reality condition. AI music applications now include SUNO AI, AIVA, Sound Full, Music Gen, and others, each capable of producing music in

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seconds from a prompt (Kumar & Kumar, 2023; Wei et al., 2025). This study focuses on traditional Riau Malay music, a cultural expression rich in aesthetic, symbolic, and identity value (Haidar et al., 2024; Pratama et al., 2023). born from social practice, ritual, and cultural experience passed down through generations. Digital media and AI now re-represent this music through data-based computing, algorithms, and digital patterns, producing music that sounds "traditional" while detached from the social and cultural context that created it.

Malay music extends beyond entertainment into social, cultural, and religious life, taking forms such as zapin, joget, ghazal, dendang, and kompang or rebana accompaniment. Zapin carries strong Middle Eastern influence, paired with lively yet modest dance (Hidayatullah et al., 2024; Triyani et al., 2020). Ghazal favors a soft, romantic, poetic tempo, while joget moves faster, suited to social gatherings and folk festivals. Malay music serves varied social functions: traditional ceremonies such as weddings and tepuk tepung tawar, welcoming honored guests, religious activities like Maulid Nabi celebrations and zikir events, and entertainment at cultural festivals and folk art performances. Its lyrics teach values, inviting the community to understand Malay norms, ethics, and identity (Hidayatullah et al., 2024; Riadi et al., 2025). Malay music represents the community's social and cultural life, not just musical sound.

AI applications can now produce traditional Riau Malay music with ease, a phenomenon closely tied to Post-reality, where the boundary between reality and non-reality blurs and grows ambiguous. Culture faces not just technological pressure here, but an existential question: how can the Malay community preserve its values, meaning, and identity amid digital simulations that blur the line between authentic and fake? (Riadi dkk., 2025; Simatupang dkk., 2025). This study uses SUNO AI to generate Malay music such as zapin. Suno AI creates music and songs purely from descriptive text (Fitria, 2025), for instance turning a prompt like "happiness in the rainy season" into a complete Malay song, melody, vocals, lyrics, and instrumentals, within seconds. As a generative AI, it builds music from scratch based on user commands. The platform recorded tens of millions of visits per month in 2025, reflecting rapid growth since its 2024 launch.

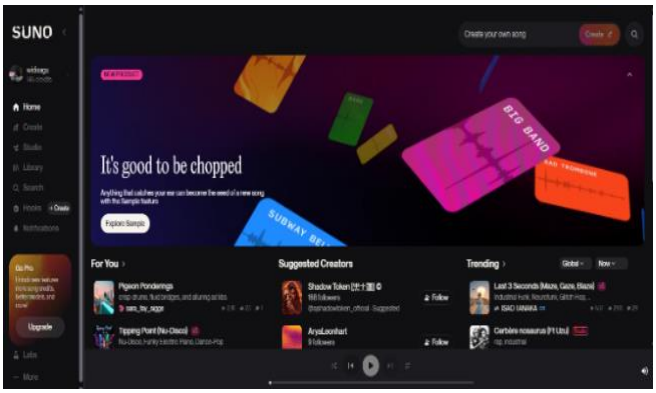

Figure 1. Initial display on the SUNO AI application

This study examines AI's reshaping of art, aesthetics, and cultural identity through a post-reality perspective, focusing on how AI's ability to produce traditional Malay music instantly aligns with post-reality's core idea the blurred boundary between reality and non-reality. It asks how post-reality helps explain AI-generated Malay music, how digital media transform traditional Riau Malay music through AI, and what aesthetic value results. Post-reality describes technology-created work that feels authentic despite being a replica. AI-generated music resembling traditional music in melody, rhythm, and tone sounds like a

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living traditional work (Keskin & Keskin, 2025; Tirkey & R, 2024), yet it emerges purely from data and computation, without cultural experience or social interaction, blurring the line between authentic and artificial. The music stays beautiful and feels authentic, but its meaning shifts because it no longer grows from the community that sustains it (Zhao, 2025).

This concept traces back to Baudrillard's ideas on simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality. Baudrillard argued that in a media-saturated society, reality appears only through constantly produced representations (Kessel et al., 2025). Simulation imitates reality through signs and systems until the unreal appears real. For Baudrillard, simulation doesn't just imitate reality. It replaces reality itself (Barroso & Garcia, 2022). Simulacra emerge from simulation copies or representations that no longer reference original reality, standing alone as a new "reality." Simulacra aren't imitations of something real. They're signs repeated so often they lose their origin. When simulations and simulacra dominate social life through media, advertising, politics, and popular culture, hyperreality emerges, a state where the boundary between real and represented blurs, and false realities can feel more real than reality itself. In hyperreality, people trust images, media narratives, and symbolic constructions more than direct experience (Barroso & Garcia, 2022; Bayu Aji Wicaksono et al., 2025; van Kessel et al., 2025).

Post-reality happens when signs or representations detach from their original references. AI-generated traditional Riau Malay music, with sound patterns, melodic structures, and musical nuances resembling tradition, works as cultural simulation. It sounds beautifully authentic, yet doesn't emerge from the Riau Malay community's social practices, rituals, or cultural experience (Eraslan, 2025; He et al., 2025). What emerges is a digital representation standing alone as a new reality, marking the shift from cultural reality to post-reality, where tradition becomes a media and technology construction rather than a living practice. This study positions AI-generated traditional Malay Riau music as simulation that creates a new cultural reality, offering a way to understand how technology represents culture while redefining authenticity, identity, and aesthetic experience in the digital age.

Academics have studied SUNO AI music extensively, covering traditional karawitan music, music education, and questions of musical originality through various multidisciplinary approaches (Wicaksono et al., 2025; Fattah et al., 2023; Heriyanto & Makmur, 2025; Sari et al., 2023; Sudirga, 2020). None of these studies examine AI-based Malay music through Baudrillard's post-reality lens. This gap defines the study's novelty: analysing post-reality in AI-generated traditional Riau Malay music, examining how digital media transform this music through AI, and identifying its aesthetic value.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with digital experiments as the main data collection technique (Grashinta et al., 2023), aiming to interpret how AI represents traditional Malay Riau music through Jean Baudrillard's post-reality perspective. We generated music using Suno AI V5.5 (Casini et al., 2025), focusing on three types of traditional Malay Riau music: zapin, langgam, and joget (Firmansyah & Dede, 2022; Waruwu, 2023), selected for their diversity in rhythm, tempo, and structure and their continued popularity in the Malay Riau community. Primary data consists of AI-generated music from Suno AI; comparative data comes from authentic recordings and videos of traditional music performed by Malay musicians

The experimental procedure followed three stages (Hartono, 2019): designing prompts with keywords tied to Malay music (gambus, marwas, accordion, traditional rhythm), generating compositions through Suno AI, and documenting the resulting music along with

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prompt details and musical characteristics. We also conducted in-depth interviews with music producers, experienced Malay musicians, and traditional music practitioners to capture their perspectives on AI's role in modern music and its relationship to traditional authenticity. Data collection combined observation, documentation, and interviews conducted in person and online. We analysed the data by comparing AI-generated music against authentic traditional music, focusing on rhythm, tempo, melody, sound texture, and instrumental representation (gambus, marwas, rebana, accordion), then interpreted these findings through Baudrillard's concepts of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality to assess whether AI-generated music represents Malay cultural reality or functions as digital simulation detached from its social and cultural context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher explains three comparisons between original Malay music and that produced by Suno AI. The explanations are as follows:

1. Zapin Malay Music

The gambus and marwas instruments give Zapin Malay music its distinctive character, producing a rhythm found nowhere else (Muhammad & Ardipal, 2025). For an example of original Zapin Malay music, we use the song "Zapin Meskom," recently performed en masse at an event organized by the Riau Provincial Department of Culture and awarded a MURI record. This dance uses only the gambus and marwas, played directly by Malay artists. We draw on a video from the YouTube channel Sri Elvidila Roza, a colleague of the researcher, for comparison against the Zapin music Suno AI produced.

To create Zapin music with Suno AI, we entered a specific prompt that included the instruments "gambus" and "marwas." We used ChatGPT to help craft a prompt aligned with authentic Zapin music, building it around the keywords "marwas and gambus" as the core of Zapin sound. The prompt read:*"Authentic traditional Malay Zapin instrumental in its purest form. Only two instruments are used: the gambus as the main melodic lead and the marwas as the rhythmic percussion. Gambus plays expressive, flowing melodic lines with traditional Malay ornamentation and plucking techniques. Marwas provides tight, repetitive, and syncopated rhythmic patterns characteristic of Zapin dance. No additional instruments, no vocals, no modern or electronic elements. The tempo is lively, danceable, and consistent with traditional Zapin rhythm. The sound must feel raw, acoustic, intimate, and culturally authentic, reflecting original Malay heritage performance."* We entered this prompt into Suno AI and pressed create. Suno AI immediately generated two music references, offering these as a comparison to determine which one most closely resembled the original zapin music. Suno AI also auto-generated the song title: "Gambus Marwas Zapin."

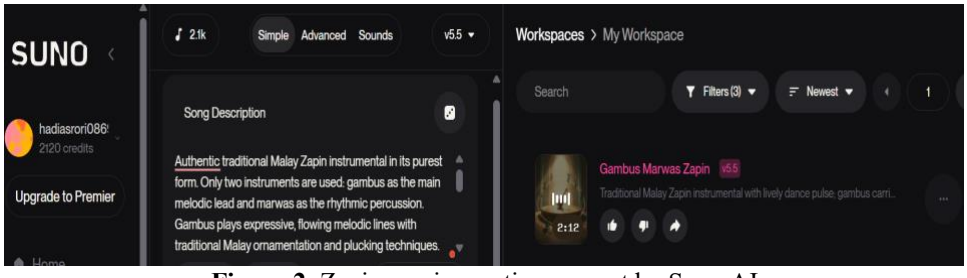

Figure 2. Zapin music creation prompt by Suno AI

Suno AI generated this music on 06/05/2026. The Suno AI zapin sounds like zapin on

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
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the surface: it carries a Middle Eastern nuance, a relatively fast tempo, and a recurring rhythmic pattern. It falls short of authentic zapin, though. The gambus doesn't dominate the music. In authentic zapin, the gambus stands as the melodic center, the soul of the music. In the AI result, the gambus sits in the background, sounding less expressive, it doesn't "tell a story." The music ends up feeling like generic Arabic-themed music rather than zapin with a distinct identity.

Interviews with traditional Malay musicians reinforce this observation. One informant explained:

"The key to Zapin is absolutely in the duet of Gambus and Marwas. The Gambus is a plucked instrument that plays the main melody with a Middle Eastern character but with Malay poetry. Meanwhile, the Marwas is a small drum that sets the rhythm tightly, quickly, and dynamically. AI often provides percussion sounds that are too generic, whereas Marwas has a 'syncopated' beat that strikes to guide the dancers' steps. Without an accurate Gambus-Marwas combination, Zapin will only sound like ordinary desert music" (Interview, March 12, 2026).

Table 1. Comparison between Traditional Zapin Music and Suno AI-Generated Zapin

Aspect	Original Malay Zapin	Suno AI Version of Zapin
Rhythm	Lively, dynamic, and feels “flowing” because it is performed by humans	Tends to be rigid, repetitive patterns, feels mechanical
Structure	Naturally flowing (has an opening, core, and closing)	Follows a template pattern, feels artificial
Melody	Full of feeling, with variation and improvisation	Imitative, but tends to be flat and less expressive
Atmosphere	Religious, warm, and culturally rich	Feels empty or merely “imitates” the atmosphere
Expression	Influenced by the performer’s emotions	Has no emotion, purely a simulation
Musical Vitality	Feels alive and interactive	Feels digital and static

The marwas pattern also feels less "alive." Original Zapin marwas plays in layers that fill each other in, interlocking, while the Suno AI version's rhythm falls flat, missing any "dialogue" between beats. This matters: without a lively marwas, Zapin loses its energy. The feel falls short too. Original Zapin carries an urge to dance, a rhythm that seems to "invite the body to move." The Suno AI version feels played back rather than performed. Suno AI captures only the surface elements of Malay Zapin, tempo and Middle Eastern nuances, without fully rendering the marwas rhythm and gambus expression that carry the music's core. The result leans simulational, losing the feel, interaction, and cultural function that mark original Malay Zapin. A music producer echoed this finding: "More or less, the Malay pattern has been captured, but there are still weaknesses, especially in terms of feel and aesthetics. AI is too perfect in its playing. In original traditional music, there is usually a bit of off-key or human improvisation (human touch)" (Interview, January 16, 2026).

Baudrillard's concept of simulacra describes signs reproduced without a direct relationship to their original reality, signs that replace that reality rather than represent it. AI-produced Zapin displays elements that appear authentic on the surface, fast tempo, Middle Eastern musical nuances, sounds resembling gambus and marwas. These elements function only as signifiers, detached from the cultural meaning that once grounded them. In Suno AI's

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music, gambus and marwas reduce to mere digital sound representations. The rhythmic patterns repeat without the spontaneous interaction found in traditional practice. The melodies sound flat, lacking the ornamentation that reflects a player's individual expression. AI music, in this sense, has moved past representing reality into simulating it.

Baudrillard argues that at the stage of simulation, reality stops serving as the main reference. What remains is the endless reproduction of signs, repeated without deeper meaning. This produces hyperreality: a state where simulation feels more real, more orderly, more "perfect" than reality itself. AI-generated Zapin often sounds technically cleaner, free of mistakes or imperfections. Yet those very imperfections carry traditional music's authenticity, holding human expression, emotion, and social context within them. AI Zapin, in this framework, works as cultural dissimulation: it retains culture's outward form while losing its meaning and function. The music becomes a "Zapin image," produced algorithmically. AI technology doesn't just reproduce culture. It also risks reshaping what we consider authentic.

Table 2. Comparison of Traditional Malay Zapin and AI-Generated Zapin Based on Post-Reality Concepts

Key Concept	Original Malay Zapin	AI Version of Zapin (Suno AI)
Representation	The music still reflects authentic culture (traditions and community life)	Does not truly reflect culture, only imitates the sound
Simulation	Almost absent, as it is performed directly by humans	Highly dominant, as it is created from imitated musical patterns
Simulacra	Still has a real reference (original Zapin culture)	Becomes an imitation with no strong connection to cultural reality
Hyperreality	Does not occur	Occurs, the music sounds good but lacks cultural meaning

Based on analysis using Jean Baudrillard's theory, Zapin music produced by Suno AI has entered the stage of simulation that results in hyperreality. Although on the surface the music resembles Malay Zapin, it loses essential dimensions such as human expression, social interaction, and cultural meaning. Thus, AI-generated Zapin is more appropriately understood as simulacra, namely an imitation without a complete reference to reality, which ultimately presents a form of culture that appears real but is actually devoid of meaning. In essence, original Zapin belongs to cultural reality, while Suno AI Zapin belongs to cultural simulation. In Jean Baudrillard's view, when music only imitates form without cultural experience, it has already entered into simulacra and hyperreality.

2. Malay Joget Music

Malay joget music draws its character from the accordion, gong, rebana, violin, and gambus. It expresses joy through three elements: lively movement, fast-paced music, and a festive atmosphere (Inge, 2021). For an example of authentic Malay Joget, we draw on the YouTube channel Riau_Magz's "Joget Lambak Pucuk Pisang, Riau." This lets us compare it against Suno AI's version and observe the instruments played live by musicians.

Here is the prompt entered to create Malay Joget music to be produced by Suno Ai: *Create an authentic traditional Malay Joget instrumental with a fast tempo, lively rhythmic*

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patterns, and a joyful festive atmosphere. Feature accordion as the dominant melodic instrument, supported by rhythmic gambus, expressive Malay violin ornamentation, energetic rebana percussion, and deep gong accents marking transitions and musical phrases. The music must feel cheerful, vibrant, playful, and highly danceable, inspired by traditional coastal Malay folk celebrations and Joget dance performances. Use energetic rebana grooves, fast-moving accordion melodies, swinging Malay rhythmic patterns, and dynamic instrumental interaction that encourages lively partner dancing. Focus on traditional Indonesian Malay Joget authenticity only. Avoid EDM, electronic synths, rock elements, cinematic orchestra, trap beats, or modern pop production. Instrumental only, no vocals, high-energy traditional Malay folk dance music, festive cultural atmosphere, rich traditional textures, fast and agile movement feel.

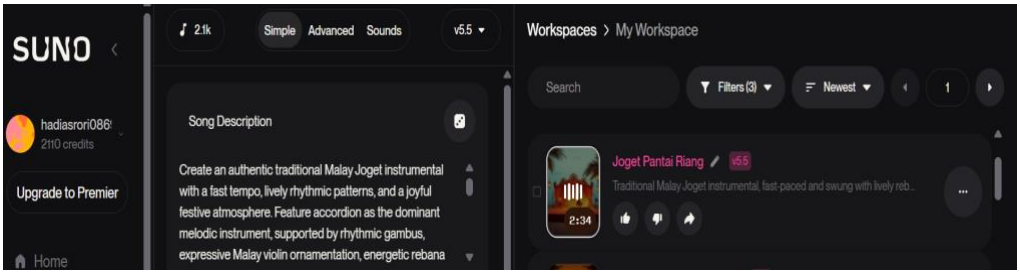

Figure 3. Prompt for creating Joget Melayu music by Suno AI

Suno AI generated this music on 07/05/2026. This music successfully captures several core identities of Joget Melayu: the atmosphere of folk entertainment, and a relaxed, cheerful, open, easily enjoyable character. This character defines Joget Melayu, historically used for community entertainment, folk parties, cultural events, and social interaction. Suno AI captures the "joyful Malay vibe" fairly well.The rhythm section stands out as the strongest element. It carries a steady beat, repetitive groove, fast-to-medium tempo, and swinging rhythmic patterns, fitting well with Malay joget's main function of moving the body and creating a festive atmosphere. The AI-generated result, though, still feels too precise, too digital, with minimal spontaneous variation. Authentic Malay joget looks different: percussion players improvise, tempo shifts slightly to follow the dancers, and players interact socially with each other, cheering each other on to keep the music lively.

A musician captured this gap directly: "When it comes to the feel and depth of the Zapin or Joget groove, AI is still groping" (Interview, April 27, 2026). A Malay practitioner added "During live performances, players read the audience's mood. If the audience is enthusiastic, the tempo can be increased. If the event is sacred, the performance is made calmer. There is spontaneous interaction between the players and the audience" (Interview, February 02, 2026).

Table 3. Comparison of Traditional Malay Joget and AI-Generated Joget

Aspect	Original Malay Joget	AI Version of Malay Joget
Rhythm	Fast, lively, and enjoyable for dancing	Also fast, but feels rigid
Structure	Flows naturally and relaxed, not rigid	Fixed pattern, clearly feels machine-made
Melody	Cheerful and easy to remember	Similar, but feels ordinary

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
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Atmosphere	Festive, joyful, and feels alive	Festive, but lacks a strong atmosphere
Expression	Contains the performer's emotions	No emotion, purely AI-generated
Musical Impression	Lively and enjoyable	Neat, but lacks "feeling"

The melody sounds light, easy to remember, and repeats continuously in a simple pattern, matching Malay joget's cheerful, danceable, entertainment-focused character. The AI-generated melody, though, feels too ordinary and lacks a strong distinctive character. The notes sound safe, similar to many other digital Malay music pieces. The music ends up feeling like an automatic AI-generated pattern rather than traditional music played directly by Malay musicians with improvisation and a livelier feel.

Percussion dominates the joget's energy, but its texture sounds very clean, with minimal natural resonance, as if produced through digital looping. Authentic Malay joget percussion sounds rawer, livelier, and acoustically busier. Suno AI succeeds in building the impression of a party atmosphere, a sense of cultural tourism. The culture that appears, though, stays surface-level symbolic. This music hasn't yet presented the Malay social context, human musical interaction, or the spontaneity of folk performances. What emerges is the Malay aesthetic, not the full Malay cultural experience. A musician informant put it directly: "AI does not really understand what Malay is. It only recognizes the characteristics that often appear in Malay music" (Interview, April 27, 2026).

Jean Baudrillard's perspective frames Malay joget music produced by Suno AI as a form of cultural simulation, showing how AI technology begins replacing authentic cultural realities with digital versions that appear more perfect. In the song "Joget Pantai Riang," AI creates sounds immediately recognizable as "Malay music." Listeners feel the atmosphere of a folk festival, the beach, joy, and Malay cultural nuances. Baudrillard's theory reveals something more interesting here: AI presents not the real Malay culture, but a depiction of how Malay culture appears on the internet and in digital data. AI doesn't understand the history of Malay joget, its social function, its cultural meaning for the community, or the emotional relationship between musicians and audience. It only learns sound patterns from thousands of musical data points considered "Malay," then rearranges them into new music. The resulting music sounds like Malay music while functioning as a digital imitation of the Malay image. Baudrillard argues that modern society lives in a world of simulation, filled with imitations of reality. This music doesn't present authentic Malay joget. It presents a simulation of Malay joget.

Several aspects reveal this. The music sounds too clean, too perfect. Original Malay joget performances carry unstable instrument sounds, minor player mistakes, spontaneous improvisation, tempo changes, and interaction among musicians. The AI-generated result, by contrast, holds very stable rhythm, neat sound, no mistakes, everything precise. The music loses the human element that gives traditional performances their soul. Baudrillard calls this hyperreality: when the imitation appears more perfect than the original reality. AI reduces Malay culture to sound colors, rhythmic patterns, and audio atmospheres. Malay culture extends well beyond musical sound into social interaction, traditional values, body movement, performers' expression, and social context. This music compresses Malay culture into an easily consumable "sound aesthetic." Listeners hear the gambus, fast rhythms, and beach nuances, and immediately label it Malay. AI has transformed culture into an instant audio symbol.

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
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Authentic Malay joget carries many variations, Riau Malay, Johor Malay, Bengkalis Malay, Siak Malay, and other Sumatran coastal styles. AI produces music that feels generically Malay instead, erasing local cultural detail and replacing it with a more global, stereotypical Malay identity. Baudrillard calls this the loss of original reality, replaced by mass representation. This music also shows how traditional culture transforms into a digital product, created quickly, instantly, without original musicians. AI generates joget music in seconds without understanding the culture, learning its traditions, or living within the Malay environment. Culture, as a result, shifts from social heritage to digital content.

Table 4. Comparison of Musical Characteristics between Traditional Malay joget and AI-Generated joget

Key Concept	Original Malay Joget	AI Version of Malay Joget (Suno AI)
Representation	The music still reflects authentic culture and serves as entertainment for the Malay community	Does not truly reflect the culture, only imitates Malay atmosphere and sound
Simulation	Almost absent, as it is performed directly by humans	Highly dominant, as it is created from imitated digital music patterns
Simulacra	Still maintains a connection with the original Malay Joget tradition	Becomes an imitation of Malay music without a strong cultural connection
Hyperreality	Does not occur, as the music remains natural and traditional	Occurs, the music sounds more polished and appealing than the original performance

From this analysis, it can be concluded that AI-generated Malay joget music is a form of hyperreality of Malay culture. AI creates music that sounds very Malay on the surface, but loses human spontaneity, social context, local identity, and authentic cultural experience. This music ultimately becomes a cultural simulation that is neater, cleaner, and easier to enjoy than real Malay joget performances. In this condition, modern listeners are likely to become more familiar with the "AI version of Malay" compared to the actual traditional Malay. This is what Baudrillard considers as the triumph of simulation over reality. This aligns with Baudrillard's view that in the modern era, cultural symbols are no longer valued for their original meaning, but for how appealing and easily consumable they are.

3. Malay Langgam Music

The distinctive characteristics of Malay langgam music are the presence of violin, accordion, bebano drum as the main instruments, and other musical components (Yusnelli & Herdianto, 2021). Sometimes, piano, kompang, and other musical instruments are also added. One of the song titles from the Malay langgam music genre is Dondang Sayang. In this case, the researcher uses an example of Dondang Sayang music from the YouTube channel Oesman Bengkalis titled Dondang Sayang with the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EhPkrDThfg&list=RD_Eh PkrDThfg&start_ radio=1. From this YouTube channel, the researcher directly observes the musical instruments played to accompany the song Dondang Sayang as a comparison to the music produced by Suno AI to avoid bias.

The process of creating this langgam music is the same as the explanation for the

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
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previous music. What differentiates it is entering the prompt into Suno Ai so that the music produced matches the desired genre. Here is the music prompt:*Traditional Malay Langgam music with soft and emotional melodies, featuring dominant accordion, expressive violin, traditional bebano drum rhythms, gentle piano accompaniment, and warm Malay musical atmosphere. Slow to medium tempo, romantic and nostalgic feeling, flowing rhythm, rich cultural Melayu identity, classic Dondang Sayang style, elegant and soulful instrumental performance, natural human feel, warm village celebration ambiance, authentic traditional Malay orchestration, smooth melodic improvisation, emotional and graceful mood.*

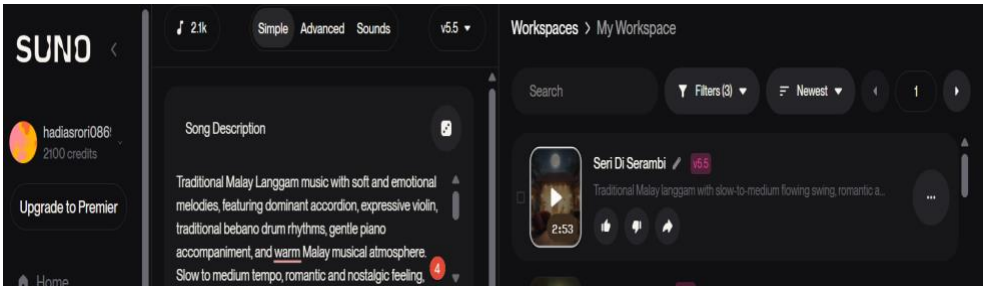

Figure 4. Prompt for creating Joget Melayu music by Suno AI

The process of music creation by Suno AI took place on 07/05/2026. The Malay-style song, with the title automatically given by Suno AI as "Seri Di Serambi," produced by Suno AI, conveys a gentle, calm, and nostalgic Malay atmosphere. When listened to, this music feels pleasant and carries a romantic impression reminiscent of old Malay music. The AI has been quite successful in capturing the general characteristics of the Malay style, especially through its slow melody, smooth rhythm, and the emotional atmosphere it builds. This explanation is reinforced by a traditional music practitioner who stated, *"The key to the langgam lies in the Gendang Bebano and Gong, along with the plaintive vocals. AI can imitate the tempo, but fails to capture the aesthetic 'soul' in its flow"* (Interview, March 12, 2026).

Table 5. Comparison of Musical Characteristics between Traditional Malay Langgam and AI-Generated Langgam

Aspect	Original Malay Langgam	Suno AI Malay Langgam
Rhythm	Soft, gently flowing, melodic, and relaxed	Stable but tends to be flat and less "flowing"
Structure	Flows naturally following the feeling and story of the song	Structured pattern, feels like following a template
Melody	Melodic, expressive, and rich in ornamentation	Imitates the style, but often feels simple and less profound
Atmosphere	Melancholic, romantic, and full of emotion	Feels like a simulated atmosphere, less touching
Expression	Strongly influenced by the emotions of the singer/performer	No real emotion, purely the result of programming
Musical Vitality	Alive, warm, and closely connected to human experience	Feels clean and neat, but lacks "soul"

In original dondang sayang, the music's strength lies not in melody or instruments, but in the "feeling" performers and singers create through pantun, call-and-response, and

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
Vol 10, No 1, (2026) Page 58-72
ISSN 2599-0594 (print) | 2599-0543 (online)
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emotional exchange. Because it's performed by humans, no two performances sound the same tempo slows to match emotion, melodies bend to feel more touching, as seen in the Dondang Sayang on the Oesman Bengkalis channel.Suno AI's version sounds too stable and orderly by contrast, every note "safe" and neatly patterned. A music producer explained: "In AI, that process does not exist. The music is created instantly without a journey. So there is indeed something missing, even though the sound is similar" (Interview, April 27, 2026). AI focuses on sound beauty rather than emotional experience, leaving the music feeling like background atmosphere rather than true cultural performance.

Traditional melody carries a flexible, emotional character, notes prolonged or played slightly off to evoke sadness or longing. AI-generated melody sounds too perfect and symmetrical instead, stripped of that emotional tension. A traditional music practitioner put it directly: "AI may be able to imitate the structure of Malay songs, select instruments similar to gambus or gendang, even create vocals with a Malay nuance. But authenticity is not just about sound. Authentic means born from cultural experience" (Interview, February 2, 2026). Traditional Malay music grows from the community's lived experience, expressing longing, communicating through pantun and syair, woven into custom and relationship. Suno AI transforms this into digital data instead. It doesn't understand longing in dondang sayang or why melodies get played with such feeling; it only reads patterns (slow tempo, gentle melody, nostalgic atmosphere) and recombines them into music that sounds "Malay." This is where Baudrillard's concept of simulation enters: AI-generated music becomes an imitation of the image of Malay culture, not the culture itself.

AI's results sound remarkably neat, so much so that modern listeners might find them more comfortable than original recordings with their noise and imperfection. Baudrillard calls this hyperreality: the imitation feeling more perfect than the original. But it's precisely the imperfections, missed notes, shifting tempo, spontaneous interaction, that keep traditional music feeling alive. AI erases them, replacing the culture with something sterile and controlled. This also shows Baudrillard's concept of simulacra: imitations that lose connection to original reality. The music sounds Malay, but the identity stays generic, unclear whether it comes from Siak, Bengkalis, Johor, or elsewhere. AI produces a "generic Malay" built from digital stereotypes, and this changes culture's function itself, Malay songs once served as social media and community identity; through AI, culture becomes an instant audio product, produced anytime, without the community's involvement. As Baudrillard's critique suggests, culture stops being understood through real experience and starts being understood through simulation.

AI can make listeners feel this music is Malay, but it cannot deliver the emotional and social connection of authentic performance. The result becomes cultural hyperreality: sounding very Malay, feeling very beautiful, while growing more distant from Malay people's true cultural life. In Baudrillard's view, this marks the point where simulation begins replacing reality, not disappearing culture physically, but gradually overshadowing it with something more practical and easy to consume. Across zapin, joget, and langgam, Suno AI functions as a producer of new cultural realities, presenting musical forms that sound close to authentic Malay music on the surface. That closeness exists only at the level of signs and sound images, not cultural experience, exactly where Baudrillard's post-reality operates. In zapin, Suno AI captures fast tempo, Middle Eastern nuances, and gambus/marwas sounds, but fails to capture the "musical soul": the emotional dialogue and interlocking rhythm between gambus and marwas that follows the players' and dancers' energy. AI's rhythm feels repetitive and mechanical instead, capturing only the outer sound code.

Joget shows a similar pattern. Suno AI creates a cheerful atmosphere and fast rhythm

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
Vol 10, No 1, (2026) Page 58-72
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but loses joget's social core, the spontaneous interaction, shifting tempo, and performers' cheers that build a collective atmosphere in traditional performances. AI's version produces a precise, sterile structure instead, an image of Malay that feels more perfect than the original while losing the human spontaneity that gives it authenticity. Langgam shows post-reality most strongly. Suno AI's music sounds romantic, gentle, and nostalgic like traditional langgam, but these emotions stay artificial: authentic dondang sayang emotion arises from musicians' life experience and social interaction, while AI reads slow melodic patterns and gentle harmonies as statistical data, producing a "Malay atmosphere" without the depth of Malay culture's meaning.

Overall, Suno AI collects fragments of Malay identity (gambus, accordion, joget rhythm, nostalgic nuance) and reassembles them into new music, without understanding the social function, customary values, or philosophical meaning behind the tradition. What emerges isn't authentic Malay culture but a Malay simulacrum, an imitation that appears authentic while staying disconnected from its original reality. This marks a cultural shift from reality to hyperreality: Malay music becomes a digital image, producible quickly and massively, potentially trusted as "Malay music" more than authentic performances because it sounds cleaner and easier to consume. Post-reality, then, frames this as cultural transformation toward digital simulation, traditions once lived through humans and emotional experience now reduce to sound signs producible without the original culture's involvement.

Digital media through AI shifts Malay music's cultural position from shared community experience to an object of digital simulation. Original aesthetics grow from the direct relationship between humans, culture, and social experience, value measured by feeling and interaction, not just sound. AI reduces this entire process to a data system, reading music as calculable, predictable audio patterns, and reducing Malay identity to surface elements like gambus sound and marwas rhythm. This shows clearly across the three genres. In zapin, gambus-marwas interaction once built togetherness between musicians and dancers; in Suno AI's version these become fixed, machine-made patterns, similar only in sound, not in cultural values or social experience. In joget, digital media erases the culture's participatory nature, the minor irregularities and improvisation that create a collective atmosphere, replacing it with precise, sterile output that loses the "human imperfection" giving traditional culture its life. In langgam, aesthetic value normally emerges from performers' emotional involvement and lived experience AI instead identifies surface patterns (slow tempo, gentle melody, nostalgic nuance) and reproduces them as a composition that merely sounds emotional, aesthetics born from algorithmic ability rather than human experience.

More deeply, digital media transforms the concept of authenticity itself. Traditional authenticity arises from the interconnection between music, society, custom, and local history. AI produces a "generic Malay" instead, erasing local identities like Bengkalis Malay or Siak Malay in favor of the most globally recognizable symbols, condensing complex culture into an easily consumable audio identity. This brings Malay music into cultural hyperreality: AI-generated music, sounding cleaner and more "perfect" than performances full of human imperfection, risks becoming more trusted than the actual cultural reality. Digital media, at this point, doesn't just represent culture. It sets a new standard for how culture should sound. Original Malay music's beauty arises from feeling, spontaneity, and social interaction small imperfections like shifting marwas beats or a violin's emotional tremble create its strong emotional feeling. Suno AI changes this: in zapin, the rhythm sounds fast but too stable, feeling machine-played and losing the natural energy that makes people want to dance, prioritizing neatness over feeling. In joget, AI creates a lively

Gondang: Jurnal Seni dan Budaya
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atmosphere that stays superficial, missing the direct interaction between musicians, dancers, and community that gives authentic joget its "soul." In langgam, AI produces soft, romantic music whose emotions feel "manufactured," lacking the deliberate imperfection that authentic performers use to heighten feeling.

AI, in effect, transforms Malay aesthetics into digital aesthetics: beauty no longer grows from human cultural experience, but from technology's ability to create sounds that merely resemble Malay culture, taking only the most recognizable elements and arranging them into music that sounds "very Malay" while imitating only its surface. This reveals AI music's aesthetic as fundamentally hyperreal, cleaner and more perfect than original music, and precisely because of that perfection, it loses the natural feel that gives traditional Malay music its strength. As one traditional Malay music practitioner put it: "Technology comes and goes, but people always seek meaning, warmth, and identity. Traditional music provides all of that" (Interview, 02 February 2026).

DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of Malay music produced by Artificial Intelligence demonstrates a shift in the way culture is understood in the digital era. Music emerges as a product formed from patterns of data. This explains why AI-generated music sounds like Malay music, yet does not fully present the true cultural meaning. AI works by recognizing patterns of sound, not by understanding the values, feelings, or social context behind the music. From Jean Baudrillard's post-reality perspective, this condition shows that Malay music has shifted from reality to simulation. Elements such as gambus, marwas, accordion, and their nuances become signs representing the "image of Malayness." When these signs are continuously reproduced without the involvement of cultural experience, what emerges is a simulacrum, a form of imitation culture that stands alone without a strong connection to its original reality. This is what makes AI music sound accurate in terms of sound, but lacking in depth of meaning.

Theoretically, this condition is related to the concept of hyperreality. AI-generated music often sounds neater, more stable, and cleaner compared to traditional music. However, this perfection actually indicates that music has lost its human element. In Malay music, beauty lies not only in harmonious sounds, but also in feeling, spontaneity, and interaction among players. When all these elements are replaced by an entirely regulated system, music becomes a product that only displays surface-level beauty. Thus, AI creates a version of culture that appears ideal, but in reality does not reflect the living cultural reality.

This change also impacts the function of culture itself. Malay music, which previously was part of social life, customs, and community interaction, has now become digital content that can be produced instantly. Culture is no longer understood as a process experienced together, but as something that can be made and consumed at any time. In this condition, digital media plays a major role in shifting culture from a collective experience to an object of consumption.

The implications are quite extensive. In the context of culture, this condition can lead to a reduced public understanding of the original meaning of traditional music. Society has the potential to become more familiar with the "digital version of Malay" compared to the actual cultural practices. In the academic context, this phenomenon shows that studies on AI need to be viewed not only from a technological perspective, but also from the perspectives of culture and meaning. Meanwhile, in the context of cultural preservation, efforts are needed to ensure that traditional music continues to be understood as a part of community life, not just as a digital representation. The presence of AI in Malay music brings fundamental

changes to the way culture is represented and interpreted. The music produced may indeed sound convincing, but at the same time it shows that culture has shifted towards a form of simulation that is increasingly distant from its original experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Malay Riau music produced by Artificial Intelligence shows that technology is capable of imitating the forms of cultural sounds quickly and convincingly, but it is not yet able to present the meaning, feeling, and social experience that are the essence of traditional music. From a post-reality perspective, this phenomenon indicates a shift from a living culture to a culture of simulation, where music becomes merely a representation of sound without a strong connection to its original reality. AI produces music that sounds neater and more perfect, but in fact loses the elements of spontaneity, emotion, and human interaction that are the main characteristics of Malay music. As a result, what emerges is no longer an intact Malay culture, but rather a digital version that is simulational in nature. Thus, the presence of AI not only changes the way music is produced but also shifts the way culture is understood, from a lived experience to a digital object that is easily consumed.

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