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When the Map Precedes the Court: Padel Outfit and Simulacrum on Indonesian Instagram

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Abstract
The rapid proliferation of padel in Indonesia transcends an emergent fitness trend, constituting a cultural phenomenon closely tied to how images circulate on social media. Central to this dynamic is a shift in the signification of padel outfit, from functional sportswear to an artificially constructed lifestyle symbol on Instagram, frequently divorced from actual sporting practice. Crucially, this phenomenon is participatory in character: content is produced not by media institutions or sporting brands, but by ordinary users who simultaneously consume and generate visual signs, constructing their own lifestyle narratives. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard's theory of Simulacra and Simulation, this qualitative study examines how padel outfit content generates simulated reality within Indonesia's digital ecosystem. A corpus of 15 Instagram posts was collected through hashtag sampling (#padelindonesia, #padeloutfit, and #padellife) and analyzed using Roland Barthes' three-tiered semiotic framework before being mapped onto Baudrillard's four stages of the image. Findings indicated that most posts in the corpus operate at the third and fourth stages of simulacrum, wherein polished visual aesthetics and sign systems obscure the physical reality of the sport itself. The recurring visual patterns are consistent with algorithmic culture and participatory media practices, which the study treats as interpretive context rather than a tested mechanism, since platform recommendation, ranking, and user adaptation were not examined. These findings suggest that users act not merely as passive subjects but as co-producers of simulacrum, with implications for visual communication design, critical media literacy, and digital cultural studies in Southeast Asia.

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Introduction

Within only a few years, padel has moved from a niche racket sport into one of the most rapidly expanding physical activities in the world. The International Padel Federation reports that the number of courts has multiplied several times over since the early 2020s, with the sport now played across more than a hundred countries (International Padel Federation, 2024). In Indonesia, this expansion has been especially visible in large urban centres such as Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Bali. Yet the Indonesian enthusiasm for

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padel can hardly be explained by athletic motives alone. As Rahmadiana & Wahjono (2025) observe, padel in Indonesia has emerged less as a competitive sport than as a lifestyle marker bound up with premium venues, fashionable attire, and carefully curated self-presentation on social media. In other words, padel arrived in Indonesia not merely as a game, but as an image, and that image circulates most intensely on Instagram.

A particularly telling site of this transformation is the padel outfit. Sportswear has long carried meanings that exceed its technical function, but recent scholarship on the *fashionization* of athletic clothing shows how garments originally designed for performance have been absorbed into everyday style, personal expression, and identity work (Chung & Ha, 2025). What was once chosen for grip, ventilation, or freedom of movement is increasingly selected for how it photographs and for what it signals about the wearer. On Indonesian Instagram, the padel outfit frequently operates in exactly this way: coordinated colours, branded rackets, and aesthetically arranged courtside poses function as signs of taste, modernity, and social distinction (Rahmadiana & Wahjono, 2025). The outfit, in this sense, can become detached from the act of playing padel at all, many posts foreground the look of the sport while the sport itself recedes into the background.

This drift from function to image is easier to read once the platform is taken into account. Studies of algorithmic culture describe how engagement-driven ranking systems encourage users to converge on recognisable, repeatable aesthetics, so that what "looks good on the feed" gradually comes to shape what people do offline (Brown et al., 2024). Work on Instagram adds that algorithms structure behaviour without determining it. Influencers treat visibility rules as a game they interpret and play, drawing on influencer discourse about authenticity and entrepreneurship as well as on the algorithm (Cotter, 2019). Together these studies give the present one its context. It does not test the mechanism. The posts examined here share a recurring grammar of bright courts, glass walls, athletic poses, and stylised outfits. Algorithmic visibility could explain that sameness, but so could imitation, shared conventions, influencer culture, or users' own aesthetic preferences, and the corpus cannot tell these apart.

Crucially, this aesthetic is not dictated from above by media institutions or sportswear brands. It is produced, circulated, and refined by ordinary users themselves. Long before the current platform era, Jenkins (2006) described a participatory culture in which audiences no longer simply receive media content but actively create and recirculate it. Contemporary research on influencers and creators extends this insight, showing how everyday users negotiate platform affordances to craft their own lifestyle narratives and visual identities (Bhatia et al., 2025). In the case of padel, those who generate the sport's visual meaning are largely the players-as-posters: at once consumers of an aspirational image and producers of new instances of it. They are, in effect, co-authors of the very sign system that determines what padel "looks like" in Indonesia.

Indonesian communication research has recently examined how digital actors build reality rather than simply reflect it. Studying buzzer techniques during the 2024 presidential election, Bramantyo et al. (2026) show how coordinated framing and priming manufacture a version of reality that audiences absorb as fact, turning them into consumers of an engineered narrative. Padel posting is a gentler, self-organised relative of the same process, where the shared picture of the sport is assembled by the very people who play it.

To analyse how such a sign system comes to stand in for reality, this study turns to Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation. Baudrillard (1994) argues that signs pass through successive stages in which they progressively loosen their bond with the real, until at last they no longer mask reality but conceal that there is no underlying reality at all,

a condition he terms *hyperreality*. In this schema the image passes through four orders: first it reflects a basic reality, then it masks and distorts that reality, then it masks the absence of any reality, and finally it bears no relation to a reality at all and becomes a pure simulacrum. The account is inseparable from his reading of consumption. In *The Consumer Society,* Baudrillard (1998) argues that objects are consumed less for their use than for what they signify, so that goods work as markers within a system of differences, a point that recalls Bourdieu's (1984) reading of taste as social distinction. A padel outfit, read this way, is bought and posted for the position it grants the wearer inside a desirable code, not for the play it enables. Social media has proven fertile ground for this argument: research on Instagram has demonstrated how self-presentations operate as simulacra, where polished images construct a reality that exists only on the platform (Sembada et al., 2021). To move from this broad diagnosis to the close reading of specific images, the study also draws on Roland Barthes's semiotics. Barthes (1972) distinguishes denotation, connotation, and myth, offering a method for tracing how a plain photograph of clothing accumulates cultural and ideological meaning. Denotation names the literal content of a sign, connotation its cultural and emotional associations, and myth the level at which a particular meaning comes to feel natural and self-evident. Work in Cakra Communico shows how far this reading extends into clothing itself. Munandar (2026) traces the ceremonial dressing and undressing of Brussels's Manneken Pis through Barthes's three levels and shows how garments turn a small bronze statue into a shifting sign of civic identity. Recent Indonesian studies confirm the continued usefulness of this layered approach for decoding Instagram self branding and advertising imagery (Agustia et al., 2025; Xiao & Linuwih, 2025). Taken together, Barthes supplies the tools to unpack each visual sign, while Baudrillard situates those signs within a larger movement towards the hyperreal. The two operate at different scales. Barthes reads the single sign and ends at myth, while Baudrillard reads the whole sign system and asks what happens once such myths circulate densely enough to replace the reality they describe. Barthes's third level becomes the hinge between them, since the mythic meaning drawn from each padel post is then placed within Baudrillard's four orders to judge how far the image has drifted from the sport as a physical practice.

Although padel has begun to attract academic attention, existing work has concentrated either on its physical and performance dimensions or, more recently, on its commodification and personal branding functions (Rahmadiana & Wahjono, 2025). The specifically simulacral dimension of the padel outfit, the way its visual representation may displace the sporting reality it ostensibly depicts, remains largely unexamined, particularly within the Indonesian digital context. This study addresses that gap by asking how padel outfit content on Instagram generates a simulated reality, and at which stage of Baudrillard's schema that reality predominantly operates. To test whether such content has moved well beyond mere representation towards the higher, hyperreal stages of simulacrum, the analysis combines Barthes's three-tiered semiotic reading with Baudrillard's four stages of the image. In doing so, the study aims to contribute not only to the cultural analysis of an emerging sport, but also to wider conversations in visual communication design, critical media literacy, and digital cultural studies in Southeast Asia, where platform logics and participatory image making are part of everyday visual life.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive design suited to questions about meaning rather than measurement. Because the phenomenon lives natively on social media, the research uses qualitative digital visual analysis of public Instagram posts (Rose, 2022), in which the researcher reads posts within the setting where they circulate. It does not claim to be a netnography, since the study involved no sustained observation of an online community, no interactions with users, and no analysis of comment threads. The aim is not to count visual features but to read images closely and situate them within the theoretical frame established above.

The data consist of a purposive sample of fifteen Instagram posts. Posts were located through hashtag searches on #padelindonesia, #padeloutfit, and #padellife, three tags Indonesian users apply to padel-related content, with five posts drawn from each. Posts under each hashtag were screened against three criteria. First, the padel outfit or overall look had to be clearly foregrounded, rather than match play alone. Second, the account and post had to be public and identifiably situated in an Indonesian context. Third, the post had to be image-led, since the study concerns visual signification. Duplicates were not systematically checked. The number of posts screened and set aside was not recorded, so the selection cannot be reproduced exactly. Fifteen posts, five per hashtag, offered enough depth for close reading and covered the range of ways the sport appears in Table 1. The study does not claim saturation. The resulting corpus spans influencer and private accounts, with follower counts from about two thousand to over four hundred thousand. The unit of analysis is the post. A post may be a single image or a carousel, and all of its frames were read together as one unit. P6 includes a boomerang and a short video clip, which were read as frames of that post. Motion and sound were not analysed, and stand-alone reels were excluded. Data collection took place over a defined period in March 2026.

The design has a selection effect. Because the outfit had to be foregrounded and because #padeloutfit gathers posts that already file padel under appearance, the corpus consists of outfit-centred content by construction. The study therefore makes no claim about how much of Indonesian padel content on Instagram favours display over play and none of its counts describe that wider population. What the sample can support is narrower. It allows a reading of how posts that do foreground the outfit treat the sport itself, whether as practice or as a prop. The posts retained vary on exactly this point, from a tournament photo to posts showing no play at all.

Analysis proceeded in two stages that mirror the conceptual framework. In the first stage, each post was read through Barthes's (1972) three levels: the denotative description of what the image literally contains, such as clothing, court, pose, and setting; the connotative meanings these elements evoke, such as taste, exclusivity, confidence, and belonging; and the myth they help to naturalise, for instance the notion that padel is, in essence, a lifestyle of refined leisure. Signs that recurred across posts were then grouped by the part of the image that carries them, giving four clusters: outfit and racket, court, body and pose, and caption and hashtag. The grouping organises the reading and does not classify posts, which happens only in the second stage.

In the second stage, the mythic reading of each post was mapped onto Baudrillard's (1994) four orders of the image, in order to assess how far its representation had moved from the sport as a physical practice and thus which stage of simulacrum predominates across the corpus.

To strengthen the trustworthiness of an interpretive analysis of this kind, the reading was carried out iteratively, revisiting posts and comparing interpretations across the corpus to check for consistency, while remaining aware that the researcher is an Indonesian user of the same platform and reads these images from inside that culture. Because the study draws solely on publicly available posts, no private or restricted data were accessed; identifying details of individual users are minimised in reporting, and the analysis is directed at visual conventions and sign systems rather than at evaluating particular persons.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 maps the 15 posts that make up the corpus. A first reading of this inventory shows how the sport appears in posts that foreground the outfit, as the sampling criterion required. In most of them, display outweighs play. Most posts centre on pose and outfit, while only a few, chiefly P3, P4, P9, and P14, place the act of playing at the centre. Indeed, six of the fifteen posts (P1, P5, P7, P8, P11, P12) show no play at all, for example, the racket and the court are present, but as photographic props rather than as an arena in use. Even in carousel posts, the frame that shows actual play is often only one among a series of posed photographs.

Table 1. Inventory of the Corpus of 15 Padel Posts on Instagram (source: Instagram, processed by the authors)

Code	Account Type	Hashtag	Salient Visual Elements	Play Shown (Yes/No)
P1	Influencer (15.3K)	#padelindonesia	Monochrome outfit, racket raised, branded-rack backdrop, hijab.	No
P2	Influencer (73K)	#padelindonesia	Coordinated outfit, branded racket, on-court group shot, posing to hit.	Yes
P3	Private (5,636)	#padelindonesia	Coordinated outfit, hijab, team photo with trophy and displayed score.	Yes
P4	Private (2,875)	#padelindonesia	Coordinated dark outfit, arm sleeves, mid-swing hitting a ball.	Yes
P5	Influencer (18.6K)	#padelindonesia	Bright coordinated outfit, branded bottle and racket, hijab, camera pose.	No
P6	Influencer (414K)	#padeloutfit	White coordinated outfit, hijab, group shots, one short play clip.	Yes
P7	Private (5,207)	#padeloutfit	Blue top and white skirt, rackets and balls arranged, seated posing.	No
P8	Private (3,286)	#padeloutfit	Pink jacket and cap, centre-court pose, “ROCKET PADEL” group shot.	No
P9	Private (2,450)	#padeloutfit	Multiple coordinated outfits, overhead centre-court poses.	Yes
P10	Private (5,263)	#padeloutfit	Off-white top, black skirt, net poses, walking the court.	Yes
P11	Influencer (43.8K)	#padellife	Jacket, hijab, sunglasses, seated by the net, group photo outside court.	No

P12	Private (2,267)	#padellife	Tournament backdrop, purple top, group posing with rackets.	No
P13	Private (2,091)	#padellife	Sunglasses, hijab, coordinated sleeves and leggings, mid-swing pose.	Yes
P14	Influencer (143K)	#padellife	Black outfit, jumping and hitting a ball, final smiling pose.	Yes
P15	Influencer (77.9K)	#padellife	Green top and bag, phone-call pose, family shot, closing play frame.	Yes

Two further details from Table 1 reinforce this reading. First, every account in the corpus is personal—both influencer and ordinary private users—across a wide range of followers, from around two thousand to several hundred thousand. This padel image, in other words, is produced not by brands or sports media but by ordinary users. Second, the salient visual elements are strikingly uniform across posts: coordinated outfits, glass-walled courts, bright lighting, and static poses facing the camera recur from one account to the next. This sameness suggests shared conventions, and we return to it in the final subsection. What matters here is that even the hashtags through which the corpus was gathered already encode the shift: #padeloutfit and #padellife file padel under appearance and lifestyle rather than athletic practice. Within the corpus, display therefore outweighs play, though the criteria and the hashtags make that expected. What the sample can show is how the posts handle the sport, which calls for the deeper reading of meaning undertaken next.

Semiotics Reading of the Padel Outfit

Before turning to the layered reading of meaning, it helps to see what the corpus looks like. The fifteen posts are not reproduced here, so Table 1 describes them and Figure 1 shows four of them, each standing for one way the sport appears: playing (P3), ending on a smiling pose (P14), posing with a racket (P1), and sitting on the court (P11). The four were chosen to cover that range, not because they are statistically typical. Read in order, they also fall at the first, second, third, and fourth stages of Table 3.



Figure 1. Four Ways Padel Appears in the Corpus: playing (P3, top left), ending on a smiling pose (P14, top right), posing with a racket (P1, bottom left), and sitting on the court (P11, bottom right) (source: Instagram, processed and anonymised by the authors, 2026)

What the four posts share is the outfit, which stays in view whether the person is playing, ending on a smiling pose, posing, or sitting. That shared focus is not merely stylistic; it is where meaning is produced.

Table 2. A Barthesian Semiotic Reading of the Padel-Outfit Sign Clusters (source: Authors Analysis, 2026)

Sign Element/ Clusters	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
Branded Outfit and Racket	Black-and-white outfits, bright tops with dark bottoms, racket raised in a pose, branded rackets, white socks and shoes, white and dark hijabs, racket held while posing, racket used as a backdrop, pleated skirts, leggings.	Neat, bright, and stylish; coordinated, evidently curated clothing signals self-grooming and aesthetic taste. Branded rackets and gear act as markers of status and purchasing power, while the sporty hijab links piety with modernity. The clothing reads as photogenic, expressive attire rather than merely functional.	Wearing the right padel "uniform" reads as belonging to an active, modern, tasteful urban set framed as affluent. Clothing and brands become signs of belonging and status rather than tools for playing a sport.
Court (Glass Walls, Lighting)	Bright lighting, a position at the centre of the court with the net in the background, balls arranged nearby.	A clean, bright, modern, and exclusive space; "Instagrammable" lighting turns the court into a stage or photo studio. The arranged balls and the net function as props signalling "this is padel", serving more as an aesthetic frame than as traces of play.	The padel court becomes a lifestyle stage whose very existence is made to signal urban affluence and modernity. Being there is enough to look like participation in a prestigious urban trend, regardless of whether play actually takes place.

Body and Pose	Stylised poses facing the camera, poses not looking at the camera, poses from behind at the centre of the court, stylised poses with the racket, slim bodies, seated postures smiling at the camera.	Confident, feminine, and effortless-looking; the slim body reads as an ideal of fitness and attractiveness. Camera aware poses facing, turning away, or sitting casually, show an awareness of the gaze and an intent to perform, with the racket as a posing prop rather than a playing tool.	Padel becomes a vehicle for self-presentation : what matters is not athletic performance but how the body and pose look attractive and shareable. Playing padel is understood as appearing as an active, slim, confident figure.
Text/Caption and Hashtag	Ready to play while holding a racket, padel as an enjoyable game, padel with a partner, still learning to play, wishing for a month of blessings, padel to break a sweat, declaring oneself in one's own "padel era", playing in the cool air of Bandung, joining a tournament with friends, padel as a "healing" pastime.	Relaxed, personal, and emotional rather than competitive in tone. Words such as "healing", "fun", and togetherness with a partner or friends frame padel as a social and therapeutic experience; "my padel era" and English-Indonesia n code-mixing signal a cosmopolitan, trend-following identity.	Padel is naturalised as a joyful, healing, socially connective lifestyle, a marker of a self that is "moving up" and enjoying quality leisure, rather than a competitive sport demanding skill.

All four clusters converge on a single overarching myth: padel as a tasteful, healthy, happy, and visible urban lifestyle coded as affluent. This is a claim about what the images signify. The corpus holds no data on the income, occupation, or class position of the people in the posts, so affluence here belongs to the signs and not to the users. At this level, wearing, posing, and captioning "padel" matters more than playing it; outfit, court, body, and text together naturalise padel as a lifestyle image rather than an athletic practice. This myth is what the next subsection tests againts Baudrillard's four orders.

This convergence matters because it shows that the lifestyle meaning is not carried by a single stray element but built redundantly into the whole image and the repetition is what makes the myth feel natural. Read through Bourdieu (1984), the myth is legible as a claim

to distinction: taste functions as a marker of class position, and to wear the right "uniform" on the right court is to present oneself as part of an active, well-resourced urban set. The claim lives in the image. Whether the people posting actually hold that position is a question these data cannot answer. The migration of sportswear into a marker of style, documented in work on the fashionization of sportswear (Chung & Ha, 2025), supplies the material vocabulary for that claim. Here the study both departs from and extends Rahmadiana & Wahjono (2025), who read Indonesian padel content as commodification and personal branding. Our findings do not contradict theirs, but commodification describes how padel is turned into a sellable sign of taste and stops short of asking what becomes of the sport once the sign takes over. Bainotti (2024) bridges the two by showing that, on Instagram, conspicuous display is no idle showing off but a productive act through which users actively construct status. The padel post, in this sense, is a small piece of status work and, as the next subsection argues, that work gradually hollows out the reality it claims to represent.

From Image to Hyperreality: Mapping the Stages of Simulacrum

If Barthes lets us name the myth, Baudrillard lets us ask how far it has travelled from the real. The myth identified in each post was therefore mapped onto Baudrillard's four orders of the image, with the results summarised in Table 3.

Applying the four orders to photographs requires deciding what counts as the real. Here it is padel as a practice, something people do with their bodies on a court. Each post was classified by how it stands toward that practice: documenting it (first order), staging it for display (second), keeping padel's attributes in frame while the playing itself is largely missing (third), or reducing padel to a backdrop or label for outfit and lifestyle props (fourth). Visible play is therefore evidence, not the whole criterion. What decided the order was whether the myth read in Table 2 still pointed to the practice or only to other signs. The mapping is an interpretive heuristic, and a different reader might move a borderline post to a neighbouring order.

Table 3. Distribution of Posts across Baudrillard's Four Stages of Simulacrum (source: Authors Analysis, 2026)

Stage of Simulacrum	Characteristics in This Corpus	Example Posts (Code)	Posts (n)
Stage 1. Reflection of Reality	The image documents padel as a sport/competition that genuinely takes place: a match, a championship certificate, and a displayed score, with minimal aesthetic staging.	P3	1 of 15

Stage 2. Distortion	Play genuinely takes place (swinging the racket, hitting the ball), but it is packaged with coordinated outfits, smiles at the camera, and staging to look attractive; the reality of play is present but polished.	P2, P4, P9, P14	4 of 15
Stage 3. Masking the Absence of Reality	All the attributes of padel are present (court, racket, arranged balls), sometimes with a single play frame, but the emphasis falls on pose and appearance; play barely happens, so the image masks its absence. It still points toward padel as a practice, but only through its props.	P1, P6, P8, P10, P13, P15	6 of 15
Stage 4. Pure Simulacrum	Padel shrinks into a backdrop or label; what is foregrounded is purely the outfit and lifestyle props (branded bottle, bag, sunglasses), even photos outside the court, with no connection to the act of playing. The signs refer to outfit, brand, and lifestyle, and not to the game.	P5, P7, P11, P12	4 of 15

Within this corpus, ten of the fifteen posts sit at the third or fourth stage, where the image either conceals the near-absence of play or abandons the sport altogether. These are counts from an interpretive classification of a purposive sample. They do not estimate how common such posts are on Indonesian Instagram. Only one post (P3), built around a tournament, a trophy, and a score, holds firmly to the first order. The contrast is telling: the most "real" post is the exception, while the largest group (P1, P6, P8, P10, P13, P15) gathers every signifier of padel around a body that is posing rather than playing. P1 makes the drift almost literal, the racket is raised in front of a retail display rack marked "FOR SALE," and the caption announces readiness to play a match the image never shows.

This is precisely the movement Baudrillard (1994) described as the slide toward hyperreality, where signs stop referring to a reality and begin referring only to one another. His earlier account of consumption sharpens the point: objects are increasingly consumed for what they signify rather than for what they do (Baudrillard, 1998), and a racket held as a prop but never swung is consumed in exactly this way. The pattern echoes Sembada et al's. (2021) finding that "Instagrammable" self-presentation builds a reality that exists only on the platform; this study's contribution is to show the same logic crystallising around one specific object, the padel outfit, and to locate the tipping point at Barthes's third level. Myth, then, is the hinge: once the connotations of taste and leisure harden into a self-evident "truth" about what padel is, the practice of the sport becomes optional, then absent, then beside the point.

Participatory Image-Making: Users as Co-Producers of the Simulacrum

One question remains: who drives this shift? The hyperreal padel image is assembled not by brands or media but by ordinary users, post by post, and two details from the corpus make this clear. First, the drift toward the third and fourth stages is not confined to large accounts; several of the most display-oriented posts come from private accounts with only a few thousand followers (for example P7, P8, and P12). This suggests that the padel visual code circulates well beyond large accounts, though the data say nothing about the motives behind it. Second, as noted in the first subsection, the hashtags users themselves apply already frame padel as appearance and lifestyle.

Two literatures help interpret this pattern. Work on algorithmic culture describes platforms that reward a narrow, repeatable aesthetic and so nudge users toward visual sameness (Brown et al., 2024). Work on participatory culture shows users as active makers who bend platform affordances to author their own images (Bhatia et al., 2025; Jenkins, 2006). The corpus is consistent with both but cannot separate them. It holds no data on ranking, recommendation, engagement, or how users adapt their posts, so the algorithm's part remains a plausible context. It is not a demonstrated cause. What the posts do show is that each one draws on the existing padel myth and renews it. In that sense users act as co-producers of a simulacrum in Baudrillard (1994) sense. The posts are silent on whether users see themselves that way. The displacement of the sport by the image, as read here, is what the posts add up to, and a reception study could test how users understand it.

These findings carry practical weight. For visual communication design, the padel case is a reminder that visual conventions are not neutral; a recognisable grammar of

colour, framing, and pose can quietly redefine what an activity is taken to be. For critical media literacy, audiences in Indonesia would benefit from tools to read images at Barthes's deeper levels to notice when a feed is selling a lifestyle rather than depicting a practice. And for digital cultural studies in Southeast Asia, the padel outfit offers a small case of how a global visual vernacular may take local forms. Six of the fifteen posts show a hijab worn as part of the outfit (P1, P3, P5, P6, P11, P13), and some captions mix English and Indonesian or wish for blessings, as Table 2 notes. These elements are consistent with a local articulation of a European sport. The corpus holds no non-Indonesian padel content for comparison, so it cannot show what is specifically Indonesian. The pattern deserves testing at larger scale.

Conclusion

This study set out to ask how padel-outfit content on Indonesian Instagram produces a simulated reality, and at which stage of Baudrillard's schema that reality predominantly sits. The analysis of fifteen posts gives a consistent answer. Because the corpus was built around posts that foreground the outfit, the finding of interest is not that appearance dominates. It is what the posts do with the sport once it does. The four sign clusters (clothing, court, body, and caption) converge on a single naturalised myth, namely that padel is a tasteful, modern, urban lifestyle rather than a sport to be played. When these myths are mapped onto Baudrillard's four orders, ten of the fifteen posts fall into the third and fourth stages, where the image masks the near-absence of play or severs its tie to the sport altogether. In these posts, the padel outfit has largely become a sign that circulates in place of the practice it once denoted.

The wider contribution of the study lies less in cataloguing this drift than in where the corpus locates its production. Every account in the corpus is personal, including small private accounts with few followers, and none belongs to a brand or a sports medium. In these posts the hyperreal padel image is assembled by ordinary users, each drawing on a shared visual code and each renewing it. The corpus is consistent with the algorithmic and participatory cultures described in the literature, though it cannot show how much each contributes. Read this way, hyperreality appears as a collective, bottom-up achievement and not as something imposed from above. That reading offers a starting point for visual communication design, critical media literacy, and the digital cultural study of Southeast Asia, where a global visual vernacular may take local forms.

These conclusions should be read against the study's limits. The corpus is small and purposive, built around posts that foreground the outfit: 15 image-led posts drawn from three hashtags at one moment in time and confined to a single platform. Stand-alone reels and other video formats, which carry their own dimensions of motion and sound, were deliberately set aside. The corpus also holds no data on platform ranking or engagement, so the algorithmic context discussed above remains an interpretation. It holds no non-Indonesian padel content either, so any local articulation is suggested and not shown. The mapping onto Baudrillard's stages is also interpretive, and other readers might place borderline posts differently. Future work could widen and diversify the corpus, extend the analysis to video and to platforms such as TikTok, and add the missing voice of the audience: how followers actually read, value, and act upon padel-outfit content. A reception study of this kind would test whether the hyperreality traced here is felt as such by the users who live inside it, and would clarify how far the displacement of sport by image extends beyond the frame of the post.

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