

## Sufi Hermeneutics of Serat Dewa Ruci in the Age of Information Overload

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### *Abstrak*

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menafsirkan kembali Serat Dewa Ruci sebagai teks simbolik-spiritual yang relevan bagi pemahaman problem literasi digital kontemporer, khususnya dalam situasi information overload, misinformasi, dan post-truth. Penelitian ini penting dilakukan karena kajian tentang Serat Dewa Ruci, sufisme Islam, dan literasi digital selama ini cenderung berkembang secara terpisah, sehingga belum banyak pembacaan integratif yang mempertemukan ketiganya dalam satu kerangka analitis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan unit analisis berupa teks Serat Dewa Ruci. Data dikumpulkan melalui studi dokumentasi terhadap sumber primer dan sekunder, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan hermeneutik dan semiotik untuk menafsirkan struktur simbolik, makna spiritual, dan relevansi kontekstualnya. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perjalanan Bima dibangun sebagai tahapan simbolik yang bergerak dari pencarian lahiriah menuju penyingkapan batiniah, sedangkan perjumpaannya dengan Dewa Ruci membentuk disiplin epistemik yang menekankan kerendahan hati, pendalaman diri, kemampuan menafsirkan tanda, dan kesiapan etis dalam menerima kebenaran. Dalam konteks kontemporer, struktur simbolik tersebut memiliki relevansi yang kuat bagi penguatan literasi digital karena menawarkan model pengetahuan yang menekankan kehati-hatian, verifikasi, kejernihan tafsir, dan tanggung jawab etis. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah perlunya pengembangan literasi digital yang tidak berhenti pada kecakapan teknis, tetapi juga mencakup dimensi hermeneutik, etik, dan spiritual. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada upayanya mempertemukan Serat Dewa Ruci sebagai teks budaya Jawa, sufisme Islam sebagai kerangka spiritual-epistemik, dan literasi digital sebagai problem pengetahuan kontemporer dalam satu pembacaan integratif.

**Kata Kunci:** Serat Dewa Ruci; sufisme; literasi digital; hermeneutika; epistemik.

### ***Abstract***

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This study aims to reinterpret Serat Dewa Ruci as a symbolic-spiritual text that is relevant to understanding contemporary problems of digital literacy, particularly in situations of information overload, misinformation, and post-truth. The study is significant because scholarship on Serat Dewa Ruci, Islamic Sufism, and digital literacy has largely developed in separate directions, with few integrative readings that bring these three domains into a single analytical framework. This research employs a qualitative library-based approach, with Serat Dewa Ruci as the primary unit of analysis. Data were collected through documentary study of primary and secondary sources and were analysed using hermeneutic and semiotic approaches in order to interpret the text's symbolic structure, spiritual meaning, and contextual relevance. The findings show that Bima's journey is constructed as a symbolic progression from outward searching to inward disclosure, while his encounter with Dewa Ruci forms an epistemic discipline that emphasises humility, inward deepening, the ability to interpret signs, and ethical readiness in receiving truth. In the contemporary context, this symbolic structure has strong relevance for strengthening digital literacy, as it offers a model of knowledge grounded in caution, verification, clarity of interpretation, and ethical responsibility. The implication of this study is that digital literacy should be developed not merely as a technical competence, but also as a hermeneutic, ethical, and spiritual practice. The originality of this research lies in its effort to bring together Serat Dewa Ruci as a text of Javanese culture, Islamic Sufism as a spiritual-epistemic framework, and digital literacy as a contemporary problem of knowledge within a single integrative reading.

**Keyword:** Serat Dewa Ruci; Sufism; Digital Literacy; Hermeneutics; Epistemics

## **Introduction**

The expansion of digital space has transformed the ways in which people access, produce, and trust knowledge. In 2024, the number of global internet users reached 5.5 billion, or approximately 68% of the world's population, indicating that social life is becoming ever more deeply intertwined with the rapid and extensive flow of digital information. Yet the expansion of access does not automatically lead to greater clarity of knowledge. The World Economic Forum identifies misinformation and disinformation as among the most serious short-term risks to social cohesion and governance, while UNESCO emphasises that media and information literacy is essential if societies are to assess, filter, and respond to information critically and ethically. In this context, the central problem facing digital society is not merely the abundance of information, but also the limited capacity to

distinguish knowledge from manipulation, sensation, and false certainty. This situation makes the search for ethical and epistemic models capable of addressing the overflow of information an urgent necessity, including through renewed engagements with cultural and spiritual sources that have not yet been widely connected to the problems of contemporary digital literacy.

Existing scholarship on *Serat Dewa Ruci* and related themes may be mapped into three broad tendencies. First, a number of studies approach *Dewa Ruci* as a Javanese literary-mystical text that narrates the human journey towards self-perfection, the discovery of the essence of life, and the symbolic relationship between Bima, *Dewa Ruci*, and the cosmos (Koentjaraningrat, 1994; Siswoharsojo, 1996; Padnobo, 2023). More recent developments also suggest that *Dewa Ruci* is no longer understood solely as symbolic heritage, but increasingly as a source of educational values that can be actualised through contemporary media, such as graphic narratives or comics, to support character education among younger generations (Murti, Gunarhadi and Winarno, 2020; Adi, 2023b; Adi and Mustafa, 2025). Second, other studies situate *Dewa Ruci* within the horizon of Islamic Sufism by emphasising concepts such as *suluk*, *tariqat*, *haqiqat*, *ma'rifat*, *wahdat al-wujud*, and the search for the *insan kamil*. Within this perspective, Bima's story is understood as an allegory of the inward journey towards self-knowledge, purification of the soul, and proximity to God (Nasr, 1989; Nasuhi, 2009; Rahayu, 2020). Third, there has been a growing body of scholarship on digital literacy, information overload, filter bubbles, misinformation, and post-truth, which positions digital space as a site of contemporary epistemic problems, where the principal challenge lies not simply in access to information, but in the ability to verify sources, read context, recognise bias, and act ethically within the circulation of digital knowledge (Pariser, 2011; UNESCO, 2011; Floridi, 2016; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

Although these three strands of scholarship provide an important foundation, the connections between them remain relatively weak. Studies of *Dewa Ruci* generally remain confined to literary, symbolic, educational, or mystical readings; Sufi studies tend to emphasise spirituality and cultural-religious harmonisation; while digital literacy scholarship has developed primarily within the frameworks of media studies, communication, and modern information ethics. As a result, there have been few explicit attempts to bring together *Serat Dewa Ruci* as a text of Javanese culture, Islamic Sufism as a framework of spiritual meaning, and digital literacy as a contemporary epistemic problem within a single integrated analytical framework. The research gap, therefore, lies not in the absence of studies on *Dewa Ruci*, Sufism, or digital literacy as separate fields, but in the absence of an

integrative reading that interprets Serat Dewa Ruci simultaneously as a symbolic narrative, a spiritual text, and an ethical-epistemic resource for addressing the challenges of knowledge in the digital age.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to reinterpret Serat Dewa Ruci through hermeneutic and semiotic approaches in order to explain its relevance as an ethical-spiritual framework for understanding the problems of digital literacy amid conditions of information overload and post-truth. More specifically, the study aims to map the symbolic stages of Bima's spiritual journey, analyse how Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci forms a particular epistemic discipline, and explain how this symbolic structure may be read contextually in response to the challenges of knowledge in contemporary digital space. Building on these aims, this article argues that Serat Dewa Ruci not only represents a mystical journey towards the highest form of knowledge, but also offers an ethical and epistemic model for how human beings ought to seek, filter, interpret, and receive truth. The structure of Bima's journey (from the search for tirta pawitra, through experiences of failure, the descent into the ocean, and finally the encounter with Dewa Ruci) demonstrates that true knowledge is not attained through rapid, superficial, and outward access, but through disciplined practice, inward deepening, symbolic interpretation, and inner transformation. On this basis, Serat Dewa Ruci may be read as a cultural-spiritual framework of continuing relevance for the cultivation of digital literacy, understood not merely as the technical ability to access information, but as a practice grounded in caution, verification, interpretive clarity, self-restraint, and ethical responsibility in the face of information overload, misinformation, and false certainty in the digital age.

Within the conceptual framework of this study, Serat Dewa Ruci is understood as a symbolic-spiritual narrative. A number of studies have shown that this text does not merely recount a wayang story, but also contains a profound symbolic and spiritual structure. Padnobo (2023) argues that the Dewa Ruci episode represents the individual human journey towards encountering God, while Setyawan (2018) demonstrates that the story of Dewaruci emphasises the importance of the inner self as the core of human existence and interprets the "water of life" as a symbol of union with the Divine. Within a broader horizon, Sahlan and Fatchan (2016) show that the Dewaruci story is the product of a synthesis between Javanese culture and Islamic Sufism. It therefore cannot be understood merely as a heroic tale, but rather as a symbolic medium containing teachings on disciplined conduct, knowledge, and the search for the meaning of life. Accordingly, Serat Dewa Ruci may be conceptualised as a text that conveys its teachings through characters, spaces, and events whose significance extends beyond their literal

function. As a concept, this symbolic-spiritual narrative encompasses the dimension of symbolic journeying, the figurative-symbolic dimension, and the teleological dimension — namely, a trajectory directed not towards the possession of material objects, but towards the transformation of the subject and the attainment of wisdom (Adi, 2023a; Aulia *et al.*, 2024).

The second concept underpinning this study is Sufism as a spiritual-epistemic framework. Sufism is generally understood as a spiritual path within Islam that emphasises purification of the soul, inward deepening, and the attainment of ma'rifat as a deeper form of knowledge of the self and of God. Within this horizon, knowledge is understood not merely as the accumulation of information, but as a process that transforms the knowing subject. Nasr (1989) argues that, within the spiritual tradition, knowledge is always related to the sacred and to self-perfection. In the context of Dewa Ruci, Setyawan (2018) shows that the story of Dewaruci emphasises the importance of the inner self as the essence of human existence, while Sahlan and Fatchan (2023) interpret it as a synthesis of Javanese mysticism and Islamic Sufism. Sufism is therefore understood here not simply as a body of mystical teachings, but as a framework for explaining how truth is sought, experienced, and received through suluk, tazkiyah, the deepening of interiority, and ma'rifat as transformative knowledge (Aulia *et al.*, 2024).

The third concept is digital literacy as an epistemic and ethical practice. Digital literacy can no longer be understood merely as the technical ability to use devices or access information, but must also be seen as the capacity to locate, evaluate, verify, interpret, and produce information critically and responsibly. UNESCO defines media and information literacy as a set of competencies that enables individuals to access, analyse, evaluate, and create information across multiple platforms, while also recognising bias, misinformation, and hate speech in digital spaces (UNESCO, 2011). This understanding is reinforced by Sirlin *et al.* (2021), who demonstrate that digital literacy is associated with the ability to make more accurate judgements about accuracy. In this study, digital literacy is understood through three principal elements: evaluative-critical capacity, interpretive capacity, and ethical-reflective capacity. In this context, information overload, filter bubbles, and post-truth may be understood as forms of contemporary epistemic crisis that require digital literacy to be conceived not merely as a technical competence, but as a critical, hermeneutic, and ethical capacity for responding to the flood of information (Pariser, 2011; Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

This study employs a qualitative method based on library research, with Serat Dewa Ruci as the unit of analysis, treated as a symbolic text and read in relation to Islamic Sufism and contemporary digital literacy. This method is

appropriate because the study is concerned with the interpretation of meaning, symbolic structure, and the conceptual relevance of the text, rather than with the measurement of empirical data (Creswell, 2013). The data sources consist of primary data in the form of the text of *Serat Dewa Ruci* and secondary data in the form of literature on the symbolism of Dewa Ruci, Sufism, hermeneutics, semiotics, and digital literacy. Data were collected through documentary study and subsequently analysed using a hermeneutic approach to interpret the meaning of the text contextually, alongside a semiotic approach to examine signs, symbols, and patterns of meaning within the narrative (Horngren, Datar and Foster, 2008). The analysis proceeded through the stages of identifying narrative and symbolic elements, interpreting their meanings, relating them to concepts in Sufism, and examining their relevance to the problems of knowledge in the digital age (Corak, 2013).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Symbolic Stages in Bima's Spiritual Journey**

The first finding of this study shows that Bima's journey in *Serat Dewa Ruci* is constructed as a gradual and symbolic structure of spiritual experience, rather than merely as the plot of a heroic adventure. Based on a reading of the text's narrative structure, the story unfolds through three principal sequences: the command to seek *tirta pawitra*, the encounter with Dewa Ruci together with the visionary experience within him, and the reception of the highest teachings concerning *Sukma* and *pramana* (Padnobo, 2023). This arrangement indicates that the narrative does not end with the motif of seeking holy water as an outward object, but is directed instead towards the disclosure of increasingly profound inner meaning. At the initial stage, Bima's orientation remains external: he carries out his teacher's command and understands *tirta pawitra* as something that must be found outside himself. However, the failure of his search on Mount Candramuka marks the fact that truth is not granted instantaneously, but must be approached through trial, correction, and the deepening of spiritual discipline. The shift of the journey towards the ocean signals an important change in its symbolic structure, since the ocean appears not merely as a geographical setting, but as a liminal space marking the transition from outward searching to inward knowledge. The culmination of this experience occurs when Bima encounters Dewa Ruci, enters into him, and then witnesses light, *pancamaya*, the ivory puppet, colours, and other cosmic elements that signify the disclosure of the essence of the self. In a Sufi reading, this experience no longer points to the search for a sacred object, but rather to the

journey towards self-knowledge and the deepening of inward awareness (Nasuhi, 2009). For this reason, the end of the story is marked not by the successful retrieval of a physical object, but by a transformation of perspective and the attainment of wisdom. Thus, the structure of Bima's journey reveals a consistent pattern of command, trial, deepening, disclosure, and transformation, so that *Serat Dewa Ruci* may be read as a representation of the spiritual stages through which human beings move from outward knowledge towards a more essential form of awareness.

To clarify this structure, the symbolic stages of Bima's journey may be mapped as follows. The table shows that the narrative development in *Serat Dewa Ruci* moves from the initiation of the quest to inward transformation, so that each stage functions not merely as an episode in the story, but as an interconnected layer of spiritual meaning.

Table 1. Symbolic Stages in Bima's Spiritual Journey

<b>Symbolic stage</b>	<b>Main narrative event</b>	<b>Textual indication</b>	<b>Analytical meaning</b>
Initiation of the quest	Bima receives Resi Durna's command to seek tirta pawitra	The narrative opens with the teacher's command and the task of seeking holy water	This stage indicates that the spiritual journey begins through authority, guidance, and discipline, rather than through spontaneous individual impulse
Initial trial and correction	The search on Mount Candramuka does not yield tirta pawitra and instead confronts Bima with obstacles	Initial failure forms part of the plot before disclosure occurs	Truth is not presented instantly; failure functions as a mechanism of testing, correction, and the deepening of spiritual discipline
Deepening towards the inner realm	The journey shifts from the mountain to the ocean	The ocean appears as a dangerous, deep, and liminal space	This spatial shift signifies movement from outward searching to inward depth; the ocean symbolises a domain of knowledge inaccessible to surface perception
Encounter with the centre of knowledge	Bima meets Dewa Ruci and enters into him	The encounter with a small figure resembling himself becomes the turning point of the journey	This stage marks the discovery that the object of the quest is no longer outside the self, but found through the inward journey
Visionary disclosure	Bima witnesses light, pancamaya, the ivory puppet, colours, and other cosmic elements	The narrative presents a visual-symbolic experience that is not materially ordinary	The knowledge obtained is not an object, but an experience of disclosure and a transformation in the way reality is perceived

Transformation and the attainment of wisdom	Bima receives teachings concerning Sukma and pramana, and returns without any physical object	The story ends with instruction and a new awareness	The purpose of the journey is self-transformation and the attainment of wisdom, not possession of a sacred object
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The table shows that Bima's journey is arranged progressively, moving from command, trial, and deepening towards disclosure and transformation. More specifically, this finding demonstrates that *Serat Dewa Ruci* constructs Bima's journey as a gradual shift from outward orientation to inward disclosure. At the beginning of the narrative, the search for *tirta pawitra* is still understood within an objective and external framework, as though truth exists outside the self and may be attained through the exploration of physical space. Yet the development of the story reveals a reversal of this orientation. Mount Candramuka, the ocean, and the body of Dewa Ruci function not merely as narrative settings, but as symbolic nodes marking successive levels of spiritual deepening. Accordingly, the central meaning of the story lies not in the successful acquisition of holy water as an object, but in the transformation of the seeking subject. In this sense, Bima's journey appears as a process of purification of orientation: from the search for objects to the search for meaning, from movement outward to movement inward, and from surface knowledge to a more essential awareness.

A reading of the textual data reveals at least four principal tendencies. First, the spiritual journey always begins with a structure of authority and guidance. Bima enters the path of seeking not through a wholly autonomous will, but through the command of his teacher. This indicates that the path towards knowledge is presented from the outset as a discipline requiring obedience, guidance, and readiness to undergo a process. Second, the narrative positions trial as the precondition of disclosure. The failed search on Mount Candramuka cannot be read as a mere incidental episode, but as a mechanism of inward formation that affirms truth is not available instantaneously. Obstacles, delay, and correction are integral to the journey towards deeper understanding. Third, there is a consistent pattern of movement from external space to internal space. The progression from mountain to ocean, and then into the body of Dewa Ruci, reveals a clear symbolic intensification: the further Bima moves, the deeper the field of experience he must enter. Fourth, the climax of the narrative is marked not by mastery over a sacred object, but by a visionary experience that transforms the mode of knowing. Light, *pancamaya*, the ivory puppet, colours, and *pramana* signify that the summit of the journey takes the form of disclosure rather than possession.

These four patterns indicate that Bima's journey is structured as a systematic model of spiritual initiation. The stage of command marks the beginning of disciplined practice; the stage of trial tests the readiness of the subject; the stage of deepening requires the courage to enter an uncertain realm; and the stage of disclosure produces a fundamental change in consciousness. For this reason, the structure of the story cannot be understood as a linear narrative about the search for a sacred object, but rather as a symbolic schema of self-formation. What changes in the course of the journey is not only the location of the search, but also Bima's epistemic position as seeker: from a subject who assumes that truth lies outside himself to a subject who experiences that true knowledge requires inward deepening.

The significance of this finding lies in the fact that *Serat Dewa Ruci* presents the search for truth as a process of spiritual transformation requiring discipline, trial, and a change in perspective. The text shows that the highest knowledge is not attained through the accumulation of objects or information, but through the maturation of the inner self that enables the subject to perceive reality more clearly. In this sense, Bima's journey may be read as a symbolic representation of the transition from outward knowledge to a deeper reflective awareness. This finding also affirms that *Serat Dewa Ruci* is not merely a symbolically rich Javanese mystical narrative, but also a text that systematically organises the stages of seeking, testing, disclosure, and transformation. On this basis, the results of this section provide an important foundation for the following analysis, namely that Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci is not only a mystical event, but also a moment in the formation of a more mature discipline of knowledge.

### **Dewa Ruci and the Formation of Epistemic Discipline**

The second finding of this study shows that Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci marks a fundamental change in the way knowledge is understood and attained. Whereas in the earlier stage the search was still oriented towards *tirta pawitra* as an object located outside the self, at this stage the narrative shifts the centre of the search from the external object to the formation of the subject deemed worthy of receiving truth. The textual data show that Bima does not receive an answer in the form of a sacred object that may be brought home; rather, he is brought face to face with Dewa Ruci, a small figure resembling himself, and is then permitted to enter into Dewa Ruci's body in order to witness light, *pancamaya*, the ivory puppet, colours, and *pramana* (Padnobo, 2023). This sequence indicates that the highest knowledge in *Serat Dewa Ruci* is not presented as literal information readily available to the seeker, but as a disclosure that requires transformation on the part of the one

who seeks. In a Sufi reading, this pattern accords with the view that true knowledge does not arise merely from the accumulation of information, but from purification of the inner self, self-knowledge, and readiness to receive truth gradually (Nasr, 1989; Nasuhi, 2009).

To clarify this structure, the elements involved in the formation of epistemic discipline in Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci may be mapped as follows.

Table 2. Elements in the Formation of Epistemic Discipline in Bima's Encounter with Dewa Ruci

<b>Symbolic element</b>	<b>Narrative event</b>	<b>Textual indication</b>	<b>Epistemic function</b>
Dewa Ruci as a small figure	Bima encounters a small figure resembling himself	Truth appears in a simple form, outwardly unremarkable	Indicates that true knowledge requires epistemic humility and a willingness to move beyond surface judgement
Entering Dewa Ruci's body	Bima is permitted to enter into Dewa Ruci	The direction of the search shifts from outside to inside	Marks that knowledge is attained not through mastery of external objects, but through inward deepening
Visionary experience	Bima witnesses light, pancamaya, the ivory puppet, colours, and other cosmic elements	Knowledge appears in symbolic form rather than as literal information	Shows that knowing requires inward clarity and the capacity to interpret meaning behind signs
Teaching concerning Sukma and pramana	Dewa Ruci imparts the highest teaching concerning the core of life	Truth is linked to the animating principle, not to an object to be possessed	Affirms that the highest knowledge is existential and transformative
Trial before disclosure	Bima reaches knowledge only after failure, danger, and guidance	The path to knowledge unfolds through process	Indicates that epistemic discipline requires patience, correction, and ethical readiness

The table shows that Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci cannot be understood merely as a mystical episode, but rather as a sequence through which a particular mode of knowing is formed. The central issue in this narrative is not simply where truth is located, but how the subject is prepared to receive it. Dewa Ruci does not merely give knowledge to Bima; he forms Bima into someone worthy of knowing. Thus, the essence of this experience lies not simply in what Bima sees, but in how he is guided into a new mode of knowing.

Across the data, at least four major patterns emerge. First, the narrative affirms the importance of epistemic humility. Bima, who in many parts of the story appears as a strong and heroic figure, reaches knowledge precisely through an encounter with a small figure who outwardly appears simple. This pattern shows that outward measures cannot serve as the primary basis for recognising truth. Second, true knowledge in this text is attained through the deepening of interiority. Bima's movement from the outer world into the body of Dewa Ruci signifies that the process of knowing requires a reversal of orientation: from mastery over the external world to recognition of the depth of the self. Third, the narrative presents knowledge through symbols and visions, not through flat and literal propositions. Light, *pancamaya*, the ivory puppet, colours, and *pramana* indicate that truth does not come as raw data, but as experience that must be read, interpreted, and inwardly appropriated. Fourth, the path to knowledge is built through trial, guidance, and ethical maturation. Bima does not attain disclosure instantly; he first passes through failure, threat, and direction, signifying that knowledge requires discipline rather than mere curiosity.

These four patterns show that *Serat Dewa Ruci* proposes a distinctive model of epistemic discipline. Knowledge is not understood as the accumulation of information or simply the addition of content to the mind, but as the result of the ordering of the knowing subject. In this model, the quality of knowledge is closely bound to the quality of the seeker's inner life. The more ordered a person's inward orientation, the more open that person becomes to receiving truth with clarity. Accordingly, Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci may be read as the moment when seeking is transformed into epistemic discipline: from merely searching for answers to the formation of a mode of knowing that is humble, reflective, and ready to receive disclosure.

The significance of this finding lies in the fact that *Serat Dewa Ruci* offers not only symbols of spirituality, but also an ethics of seeking knowledge. Truth is not available to the subject who is hasty, self-satisfied, or confined to the surface, but to the subject willing to undergo process, be guided through symbols, and be transformed through inward experience. On this basis, Dewa Ruci may be read not only as a mystical figure, but also as a figure who forms epistemic adab. This finding provides the basis for the next section, because once this epistemic discipline becomes visible in the structure of Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci, its relevance to the challenges of contemporary digital literacy can be explained more forcefully.

### **The Contemporary Relevance of Dewa Ruci for Digital Literacy**

The third finding of this study shows that the symbolic structure and epistemic discipline found in *Serat Dewa Ruci* have strong relevance for

understanding the challenges of contemporary digital literacy. This relevance arises not because the text speaks directly about technology, but because it offers an ethical and epistemic model of how human beings ought to confront the overflow of signs, information, and truth claims. If the previous section showed that Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci shapes a more ordered mode of knowing, this section shows that the same pattern corresponds closely to present-day digital problems, particularly the tendency to consume information rapidly, superficially, reactively, and without adequate verification. In this context, *Serat Dewa Ruci* may be read as a text that models the need for pause, discernment, depth, and self-restraint in the face of an abundant flow of information.

This correspondence is visible in several principal elements. First, Bima's initial search for *tirta pawitra* may be read as analogous to the tendency of the digital subject to seek "truth" as something immediately available outside the self, as though it need only be found, clicked, or taken from the surface. Second, the failure on Mount Candramuka shows that a search still grounded in outward orientation is easily led astray, which in the digital context may be aligned with vulnerability to misinformation, hoaxes, and claims that appear convincing but remain untested. Third, the shift of the journey towards the ocean signals the necessity of entering into depth, that is, the capacity not to remain at the surface of information. Fourth, Bima's experience of seeing light, *pancamaya*, colours, and *pramana* affirms that reality cannot always be read literally; it requires clarity, interpretation, and the ability to distinguish meaning behind signs. Thus, the relevance of Dewa Ruci for digital literacy lies in its capacity to provide a symbolic model for how subjects may confront the flood of information without drowning in surface appearances, speed, and false certainty.

To clarify this finding, the relationship between the symbolic structure of *Serat Dewa Ruci* and the challenges of digital literacy may be mapped as follows.

Table 3. The Relevance of the Symbolic Structure of Dewa Ruci for Contemporary Digital Literacy

<b>Element in Serat Dewa Ruci</b>	<b>Symbolic meaning</b>	<b>Related digital challenge</b>	<b>Implication for digital literacy</b>
Search for tirta pawitra	The impulse to seek truth or clarity	Rapid and instantaneous information seeking	Digital literacy requires awareness that not everything immediately available is identical with truth
Failure on Mount Candramuka	Misdirection in the early stage of the quest	Vulnerability to hoaxes,	Users need verification, correction, and

		misinformation, and surface-level bias	vigilance towards information that appears convincing
Ocean as liminal space	Depth, risk, and a domain beyond surface perception	Information overload and the complexity of information flows	Digital literacy requires the ability to filter, slow down responses, and enter context more deeply
Dewa Ruci as a small figure	Truth does not always appear in striking form	The dominance of appearance, sensation, and popularity in digital space	Users need to move beyond measures of virality, popularity, and outward packaging when assessing information
Visionary experience: light, pancamaya, colours, pramana	Knowledge comes through disclosure and interpretation	Digital information is often fragmentary, symbolic, and easily misread	Digital literacy requires interpretive clarity, reflection, and the ability to read meaning behind signs
Bima's transformation	True knowledge transforms the subject	Information consumption without change in attitude or ethics	Digital literacy should not end with access to information, but should cultivate wisdom in responding to it

The table shows that the relevance of *Serat Dewa Ruci* to digital literacy is neither artificial nor forced, but emerges from a correspondence of pattern between the symbolic structure of the text and the epistemic problems of the digital world. Bima's story shows that the search for truth is insufficient if conducted merely by moving quickly towards what appears nearest or clearest on the surface. Rather, such a search requires the ability to suspend response, to accept the possibility of error, to enter into depth, and to interpret signs with greater clarity. In the digital context, this pattern suggests that literacy cannot be understood solely as the technical ability to access information, but must also involve reflective and ethical qualities in one's treatment of information itself.

Across the data, at least four major patterns may be identified. First, there is a correspondence between the search for an object outside the self in the early stages of Bima's journey and the tendency of digital subjects to treat information as a commodity that need only be sought, collected, and consumed. This pattern shows that the central problem of digital literacy is not merely a lack of information, but rather the way information is understood as complete at the level of access alone. Second, the narrative of Dewa Ruci affirms the importance of verification through trial and correction. Bima's initial failure shows that the search for truth requires a corrective

process, which in the digital context means the need for a critical attitude towards hoaxes, misinformation, narrative manipulation, and unverified claims. Third, there is a strong emphasis on depth amid the overflow of signs. The ocean, light, colours, and *pramana* show that reality cannot be read only at the level of the surface. This corresponds to a digital environment filled with fragments of information, visual snippets, sensational headlines, and rapid flows that often strip away context. Fourth, the text shows that the ultimate goal of knowledge is the transformation of the subject, not merely the possession of information. Bima returns not with an object, but with wisdom; similarly, mature digital literacy should not stop at the quantity of information accessed, but should culminate in the capacity to respond wisely, with self-restraint and responsibility.

These four patterns indicate that *Serat Dewa Ruci* provides a symbolic framework relevant to understanding digital literacy as an epistemic and ethical practice. Knowledge in digital space cannot be safeguarded merely through speed of access or abundance of sources, but through the ordering of the subject who encounters information. In this model, the capacities to filter, suspend reaction, examine context, and read meaning behind representations become part of a discipline of knowledge. Accordingly, this finding shows that the values formed in Bima's journey, such as caution, depth, clarity, and self-transformation, may be read as cultural-spiritual foundations for strengthening digital literacy.

The significance of this finding is that *Serat Dewa Ruci* allows digital literacy to be understood beyond the mastery of technical skills. The text shows that the fundamental issue in confronting the flow of information is not merely how to access more of it, but how to know more truthfully. In this sense, Dewa Ruci offers an orientation in which clarity of knowledge requires inward discipline, caution in receiving signs, and readiness to be transformed through the process of knowing. Thus, the symbolic wisdom of *Serat Dewa Ruci* remains relevant in the contemporary situation, particularly when digital space is increasingly characterised by acceleration, false certainty, bias, and an overflow of information unaccompanied by depth of understanding.

### **Discussion: *Serat Dewa Ruci*, Epistemic Discipline, and Digital Literacy**

The findings of this study show that *Serat Dewa Ruci* may be read not only as a Javanese mystical narrative, but also as a symbolic structure that organises the stages of the search for truth, the formation of epistemic discipline, and its ethical relevance to contemporary digital literacy. The first finding demonstrates that Bima's journey is constructed as a symbolic progression moving from outward searching to inward disclosure. The

second finding shows that the encounter with Dewa Ruci shifts the centre of knowledge from the external object to the formation of the subject worthy of knowing. The third finding demonstrates that the symbolic structure and epistemic discipline within the story correspond strongly to the challenges of today's digital environment, particularly information overload, misinformation, filter bubbles, and post-truth. Taken together, these results affirm that *Serat Dewa Ruci* contains a model of knowledge that does not end with the search for information, but leads towards self-formation, clarity of interpretation, and ethical responsibility in receiving truth.

From an explanatory perspective, these findings emerge because the text of *Serat Dewa Ruci* operates through symbolic rather than informational-literal logic. Through a semiotic approach, elements such as *tirta pawitra*, Mount Candramuka, the ocean, the body of Dewa Ruci, light, *pancamaya*, and *pramana* may be read not merely as elements of the story, but as signs that organise a process of deepening meaning. Meanwhile, the hermeneutic approach allows the text to be read contextually, so that the spiritual meanings contained within it do not remain confined to the horizon of traditional Javanese culture, but may be brought into dialogue with the problems of knowledge in the digital age. Within the framework of Sufi theory, Bima's journey may be understood as a form of *suluk*, that is, an inward path requiring trial, purification of orientation, the deepening of interiority, and ultimately *ma'rifat* as a form of knowledge that transforms the subject. For this reason, the findings of this study show that the relationship between the symbolism of Dewa Ruci and digital literacy is not incidental, but structural. Both are concerned with the problem of how human beings move from surface to depth, from the desire to possess to the capacity to interpret, and from access to wisdom.

In comparison with previous research, the present findings reveal both continuity and novelty. Padnobo (2023), and Abbas et al. (2024) have shown that Dewa Ruci is a text rich in symbolic and spiritual meaning. Sahlan and Fatchan (2023) likewise affirm that the story of *Dewaruci* is a synthesis of Javanese culture and Islamic Sufism. On the other hand, studies by Adi (2023b) as well as Adi and Mustafa (2025) show that Dewa Ruci may be actualised in contemporary media as a source of character education. However, these studies generally continue to situate Dewa Ruci within literary, mystical, pedagogical, or cultural-religious horizons. The novelty of the present study lies in its effort to bring together a symbolic reading of *Serat Dewa Ruci*, a Sufi framework for the formation of knowledge, and the problem of digital literacy as a contemporary epistemic crisis. In other words, this article not only interprets Dewa Ruci as a cultural and spiritual text, but also develops it as an ethical-epistemic resource for understanding the problem

of knowledge in digital society. At this point, the study extends earlier research that tended to stop at the internal meaning of the text, by demonstrating its external relevance to contemporary public concerns.

From an interpretive perspective, the results of this study show that the deepest meaning of *Serat Dewa Ruci* lies in its reordering of the relationship between knowledge and the subject. In many modern settings, knowledge is often understood as the accumulation of data, the acceleration of access, or the capacity to obtain as much information as possible. Yet through a hermeneutic-semiotic reading within a Sufi framework, *Serat Dewa Ruci* shows instead that valuable knowledge is determined not by the number of objects successfully mastered, but by the quality of the inner life of the subject who receives it. Here the text makes a broader social and ideological contribution. It reminds us that the modern crisis of knowledge is not only a matter of false information, but also a matter of subjects whose orientation is hasty, shallow, and easily deceived by surfaces. In this context, Dewa Ruci offers an important epistemic reversal: truth does not always appear in forms that are large, viral, conspicuous, or immediately available, but often requires pause, deepening, and transformation of perspective.

From a reflective standpoint, the findings of this study have both constructive value and limitations that must be acknowledged. Their positive contribution lies in the fact that *Serat Dewa Ruci* may serve as a source of local-spiritual wisdom that enriches the discourse of digital literacy, especially by emphasising caution, epistemic humility, verification, self-restraint, and ethical responsibility. These values are highly relevant in a situation where digital users are often driven by speed, impulsiveness, sensation, and false certainty. Nevertheless, there is also a potential dysfunction if the findings are read in an overly normative or romanticised manner. Reading *Dewa Ruci* as an ethical-spiritual resource must not reduce digital problems to matters of individual morality alone, since the crisis of information is also shaped by structural factors such as algorithms, the attention economy, platform design, and the politics of information. Accordingly, the contribution of *Dewa Ruci* should be understood as strengthening the subjective and ethical dimensions of digital literacy, rather than replacing the need for regulation, media education, and fairer platform governance.

On this basis, the implications of this study may be directed towards several lines of action. First, digital literacy education should be developed not only as technical training in verifying information, but also as the cultivation of hermeneutic sensitivity and an ethics of receiving information. In the Indonesian context, this may be done by integrating cultural texts such as *Serat Dewa Ruci* into character education, religious education, and media

literacy programmes, so that learners do not merely study how to check information, but also learn how to suspend reaction, read meaning more deeply, and develop an inward responsibility towards knowledge. Second, efforts to strengthen digital literacy in society may draw upon local cultural approaches through the adaptation of narratives, comics, visual media, or digital content that translate the values of Dewa Ruci into a more accessible public language. Third, policy-makers and educational organisers need to view digital literacy as an interdisciplinary agenda involving media education, ethics, culture, and spirituality, rather than merely technological skill. In this way, the findings of this study affirm that a more sustainable strengthening of digital literacy requires a combination of technical competence, interpretive capacity, the ordering of the subject, and cultural sources of value that remain alive within society.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Serat Dewa Ruci* may be read not only as a Javanese mystical narrative of the quest for self-perfection, but also as a text that systematically organises the stages of the search for truth, the formation of epistemic discipline, and an ethical orientation towards the reception of knowledge. The principal findings of this study affirm that Bima's journey moves from outward searching to inward disclosure, so that the highest knowledge is understood not as an object to be possessed, but as the result of trial, self-deepening, symbolic interpretation, and the transformation of the subject. Bima's encounter with Dewa Ruci shows that truth requires epistemic humility, ethical readiness, and inner maturation, rather than merely rapid access to information. In the contemporary context, this symbolic structure is highly relevant for understanding the challenges of digital literacy, particularly amid conditions of information overload, misinformation, and post-truth, because it offers a model of knowledge that emphasises caution, verification, clarity of interpretation, and ethical responsibility.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in its attempt to bring together three domains that have thus far tended to be discussed separately: *Serat Dewa Ruci* as a text of Javanese culture, Islamic Sufism as a spiritual-epistemic framework, and digital literacy as a contemporary problem of knowledge. Through hermeneutic and semiotic approaches, this study not only extends the symbolic reading of *Dewa Ruci*, but also shows that the text may be developed as an ethical-epistemic resource for understanding the problem of knowledge in the digital age. In this way, the study offers a conceptual contribution in the form of an integrative reading that positions

local symbolic wisdom not merely as cultural heritage, but as a productive reflective framework for strengthening digital literacy.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations, since it is based on library research and textual analysis and therefore does not yet address the empirical dimension of how the values of *Serat Dewa Ruci* are actually received, taught, or implemented in digital literacy practices within society. Nor has it directly examined how the text and its values might be translated into educational models, learning media, or operational digital literacy policies. Future research may therefore extend this study through empirical approaches, such as reception studies, digital ethnography, or educational research, so that the relevance of *Serat Dewa Ruci* to the formation of digital literacy may be tested in more concrete, contextual, and comprehensive ways.

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