Pertanika Proceedings 2 (2):19 - 28 (2026)

PERTANIKA JOURNALS

PERTANIKA PROCEEDINGS

Journal homepage: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/

Commodification of Wayang Wong Sriwedari: Preserving Traditional Communication in the Digital Era

Esty Wulandari*, Pawito, Mahendra Wijaya, and Sri Hastjarjo

Department of Doctoral Communication, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, 57126 Central Java, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

Wayang Wong Sriwedari is one of the traditional performing arts in Indonesia that continues to survive through the process of adapting to the development of digital technology and cultural tourism. This transformation encourages commodification that not only changes the form of performance, but also shifts the practices of cultural communication that accompany it. This study aims to analyze the commodification of Wayang Wong Sriwedari from the perspective of the political economy of communication by Vincent Mosco, focusing on the commodification of content, labor, and audience. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation analysis. The data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results of the study show that the commodification of content is realised through the adjustment of the play, the duration of the performance, and visual reinforcement according to the preferences of tourists and digital media. The commodification of labor can be seen from the expansion of the role of artists who not only function as performers, but also as content creators and supporters of digital promotion. Meanwhile, audience commodification shows a change in the position of the audience from a recipient of cultural communication to an economic asset that generates value through attention, interaction, and engagement on digital platforms. This study confirms that digitalisation does not eliminate the function of Wayang Wong Sriwedari as a cultural communication medium, but transforms it into a digital economy to support the sustainability of performing arts and cultural tourism.

Keywords: Commodification of communication, cultural communication, cultural tourism, digitisation, Wayang Wong Sriwedari

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 09 July 2026
Published: 21 September 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47836/pp.2.2.004

E-mail address:
estywulandari@staff.uns.ac.id (Esty Wulandari)
pawito_palimin@staff.uns.ac.id (Pawito)
mahendrawijaya@staff.uns.ac.id (Mahendra Wijaya)
sri.hastjarjo@staff.uns.ac.id (Sri Hastjarjo)
* Corresponding author

e-ISSN: 3083-9475

© Universiti Putra Malaysia Press

INTRODUCTION

Traditional performing arts are a form of intangible cultural heritage that functions as a medium of cultural communication, transmitting values, identity, history, and collective memory from one generation to the next. Through dialogue, music, dance, make-up, costumes, and performance symbols, people construct and reproduce cultural meanings that strengthen social cohesion. Therefore, the sustainability of performing arts is not only related to the preservation of artistic expression but also to the existence of a cultural communication system that supports people's identities. The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the way performing arts are produced, promoted, distributed, and consumed. Digitalisation expands people's access to the performing arts through various communication platforms, while opening up new opportunities for the development of the creative economy and cultural tourism. However, the changes also encourage the adjustment of forms, while opening up new opportunities for the development of the creative economy and cultural tourism (Mueser & Vlachos, 2018; Yuliati et al., 2023). However, the changes also encourage the adjustment of the form of the show to suit the characteristics of digital media and tourist preferences (Chhabra et al., 2003; Warto, 2019).

The integration between performing arts and cultural tourism has created opportunities for cultural preservation while increasing economic benefits (Grange et al., 2006; Suardana et al., 2018). Cultural performances are no longer positioned solely as a medium of value inheritance, but also as tourist attractions that must be able to provide an interesting cultural experience for visitors (Chhabra et al., 2003). As a result, various elements of the performance have undergone adaptation, such as simplifying the narrative, adjusting the duration, strengthening visual elements, and developing a digital media-based promotional strategy (Suprihono et al., 2022).

The transformation shows that digitalisation not only serves as a means of cultural preservation, but also changes the logic of cultural production towards a market mechanism. From the perspective of political economy and communication, the change can be understood as a process of commodification that transforms cultural use values into exchange values that have economic value (Fuchs, 2017; Mosco, 2009). Thus, traditional performing arts are in a position to balance the preservation of cultural values with the demands of commercialisation in the tourism industry and digital media (Alexandri et al., 2019; Ortner, 2006)

Various previous studies have examined the revitalisation of performing arts, cultural authenticity, the development of cultural tourism, and the use of digital media in the preservation of cultural heritage (Chen & Lo, 2013; Chhabra et al., 2003; Warto, 2019). Other research shows that the transformation of digital media has changed the production, distribution, and aesthetic models of traditional cultural products (Made et al., 2020;

Suprihono, 2006). However, most of the research still focuses on aspects of cultural preservation, tourism experiences, or promotional strategies, so although previous studies have discussed the preservation of performing arts, cultural authenticity, and digitization of cultural heritage, there is still limited research that explains how the process of cultural communication is transformed into a commodity through the relationship between the content of performances, art workers, and audience attention. In the context of the digital economy, audiences no longer only act as recipients of cultural messages, but become a source of value through attention, interaction, and participation that can be converted into economic value.

This gap has become increasingly important in the era of digital platforms because what is exchanged is no longer only performances as cultural products, but also attention, *engagement*, and audience participation that have economic value. This perspective is still relatively limited in the study of traditional performing arts in Indonesia and has not been widely used to explain the relationship between cultural communication, commodification, and cultural tourism.

Wayang Wong Sriwedari in Surakarta is one of the oldest traditional performing arts in Indonesia, which has been continuously performed since 1911 (Setiaji et al., 2023) Its sustainability shows that cultural preservation is not carried out through the preservation of static performance forms, but through the process of adaptation to social changes, the development of communication technology, and the dynamics of the tourism industry (Made et al., 2020; Suprihono, 2022). The use of social media, acting adjustments, and digital promotion strategies shows that Wayang Wong Sriwedari is negotiating between maintaining the function of cultural communication and meeting the demands of the digital economy (Mokgachane et al., 2021). Therefore, Wayang Wong Sriwedari is a relevant case to explain how the commodification of communication takes place in traditional performing arts in the digital era (Irianto et al., 2018; Mokgachane et al., 2021)

Based on this description, this study aims to analyse the commodification of Wayang Wong Sriwedari using the perspective of *the Political Economy of Communication* developed by Vincent Mosco (Fuchs, 2012a; Mosco, 2009). The analysis is focused on the three dimensions of commodification, namely content commodification, labour commodification, and audience commodification, as a framework to explain the transformation of cultural communication in traditional performing arts (Mosco, 2009). This research is expected to contribute to the development of cultural communication studies by showing that digitalisation not only transforms the form of performance, but also transforms audience attention and engagement into a source of economic value in the digital cultural tourism ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional Performing Arts as Cultural Communication

Traditional performing arts are not only understood as an aesthetic expression, but also as a cultural communication system that allows people to convey local values, identities, history, and knowledge through various elements of performance, such as narrative, dialogue, music, movement, and cultural symbols. The adaptation shows that the sustainability of the performing arts is not only determined by the ability to maintain traditional forms, but also by the ability to develop communication strategies that correspond to the changes in contemporary society (Made et al., 2020; Yuliati et al., 2023).

In the development of traditional performing arts, the adaptation process is an important part of maintaining cultural relevance in the midst of changing times. The transformation of the form of presentation, the use of technology, and the development of performance models show that traditional art is a dynamic cultural practice and continues to experience negotiations between heritage values and the needs of modern society (Made et al., 2020).

Communication Commodification: Mosco's Perspective

From the perspective of political and communication economics, commodification describes the process of changing something that has *a use value* to something that has *an exchange value* in the economic system. Mosco (2009) explained that commodification in the communication industry takes place through three main forms, namely content commodification, labour commodification, and *audience commodification*.(Mosco, 2009)

In traditional performing arts, content commodification occurs when cultural elements such as story, duration, language, visual aesthetics, and presentation formats are adapted to suit market needs and audience characteristics. Meanwhile, the commodification of labour shows a change in the position of artists who not only produce artistic works, but also become part of an economically oriented system of cultural production. In the context of the digital economy, audience commodification is becoming increasingly important because attention, activities, and audience engagement can generate economic value for cultural institutions and media platforms (Fuchs, 2012b, 2017).

Cultural commodification does not necessarily indicate a loss of cultural value, but reflects the negotiation process between the preservation of cultural identity and economic demands. Various studies show that traditional arts are under pressure to adapt to the tourism industry and cultural market, resulting in changes in the way culture is produced, presented, and consumed by people (Irianto et al., 2018; Mokgachane et al., 2021).

Digitalisation and Cultural Tourism

Digitalisation has transformed the way cultural heritage is produced, distributed, and consumed by presenting a variety of communication platforms that allow traditional performing arts to reach a wider audience. Digital technology not only serves as a medium for cultural preservation, but also forms new patterns in art production and consumption through increased visibility, interaction, and audience engagement. In the context of cultural tourism, digital transformation creates opportunities for performing arts to develop as a tourist attraction, but at the same time encourages adaptation to market needs and characteristics of modern audiences. Therefore, digitalisation needs to be understood as a negotiation process between the preservation of cultural values and the creation of economic value through digital communication (Mendoza et al., 2023; Mueser & Vlachos, 2018; Permatasari et al., 2020; Suprihono et al., 2022; Yuliati et al., 2023)

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to analyse the process of commodification of communication in Wayang Wong Sriwedari as a traditional performing art that has transformed in the context of digital and cultural tourism. The case study approach was chosen because it allows the research to understand cultural phenomena in depth in specific social, historical, and communication contexts. The research data were obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with actors who were directly involved in the production and sustainability of Wayang Wong Sriwedari, including directors, performers, dancers, musicians, and performance managers. The selection of informants was carried out purposively based on their involvement and experience in the production, presentation, and communication development of the show. Observations were made on the performance process, the pattern of interaction between art actors and the audience, and the use of digital media as a means of cultural communication. Documentation data includes performance archives, promotional materials, visual documentation, and digital content related to Wayang Wong Sriwedari. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consisted of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data were analysed using the perspective of Vincent Mosco's Political Economy of Communication by focusing on three dimensions of commodification, namely content commodification, labour commodification, and audience commodification (Mosco, 2009). Through this framework, this study identifies how cultural values, artists' work practices, and relationships with audiences are transformed into economic value in the digital performing arts ecosystem.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Content Commodification: Transforming Cultural Narratives into Market-Oriented Performances

The findings of the study show that Wayang Wong Sriwedari has experienced content commodification through the process of adapting to changes in audience characteristics, cultural tourism needs, and the development of digital media. The commodification can be seen through the adjustment of the play, the simplification of the storyline, the compacting of the duration of the performance, and the strengthening of visual elements such as stage layout, costumes, and makeup. These changes do not eliminate the main identity of Wayang Wong Sriwedari, but show an adaptation strategy so that cultural messages can still be accepted by contemporary society.

From the perspective of Mosco (2009), these changes show that the content of culture has undergone a transformation from use value to exchange value. Stories and cultural symbols that previously functioned as a medium for conveying philosophical values are now also produced as cultural experiences that have economic appeal for tourists. These findings show that content commodification is not just a commercialisation process, but a communication strategy to maintain the continuity of performance in a changing cultural environment.

This phenomenon is in line with research on traditional performing arts, which shows that adaptation to the tourism market and digital media often leads to changes in the presentation format, without always eliminating the inherent cultural meaning in it (Chhabra et al., 2003; Mokgachane et al., 2021). Thus, Wayang Wong Sriwedari shows that cultural sustainability can take place through a negotiation process between cultural authenticity and the need for communication with modern audiences.

Labour Commodification: Transformation of Artists into Cultural Producers

The commodification of labour in Wayang Wong Sriwedari can be seen from the change in the role of art actors in the contemporary performance ecosystem. Artists no longer only play the role of actors, dancers, or musicians who perform artistic functions, but are also involved in various cultural production activities such as promotion, digital content creation, interaction with audiences, and performance image development.

In Mosco's (2009) perspective, labour is commodified when human ability to produce communication products becomes part of the process of creating economic value. In the context of Wayang Wong Sriwedari, the artist's artistic skills not only produce performances, but also generate additional value through digital visibility and cultural tourism attraction.

These findings show a change in the position of artists from just cultural actors to cultural workers who play a role in the production chain of the creative economy. This transformation shows that the sustainability of traditional performing arts requires a new

form of work that combines artistic skills, public communication, and technological adaptation. This phenomenon reinforces the view that the digital cultural industry has expanded the concept of cultural labour, where art workers not only produce works, but also contribute to the production of value through communication activities and public engagement (Fuchs, 2017)

Audience Commodification: From Cultural Audience to Economic Asset

The most significant findings of this study show that the commodification of the audience is the most powerful form of transformation in the sustainability of Wayang Wong Sriwedari in the digital era. Before undergoing digital transformation, audiences were primarily positioned as recipients of cultural messages who enjoyed live performances. However, in the digital communication ecosystem, audiences experience a shift in position to become a source of economic value through their attention, interaction, and engagement with cultural content.

The presence of digital media causes the value of a show to be measured not only by the number of viewers physically present, but also by the level of audience engagement, such as the number of impressions, responses, comments, and content spread. Thus, the attention of the audience becomes a new form of commodity that has value in the digital economy system.

These findings expand on the concept of audience commodification of Mosco (2009) and Fuchs (2012), who explain that audiences in the communications industry can become commodities because their activities generate economic value. In the context of Wayang Wong Sriwedari, audiences not only consume culture, but also participate in the production of cultural values through their digital activities. This perspective makes a new contribution to the study of traditional performing arts because it shows that cultural sustainability in the digital age depends not only on the ability to sustain performance content or artistic labour, but also on the ability to manage relationships with audiences as cultural and economic resources.

Thus, digitalisation creates a fundamental change in the pattern of cultural communication: from a traditional communication model centred on the delivery of cultural messages to a digital communication model oriented towards interaction, participation, and shared value creation between artists and audiences.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the sustainability of Wayang Wong Sriwedari in the digital era does not only depend on the ability to maintain traditional forms, but also on its capacity to adapt cultural communication through the process of commodification. Using the perspective of Vincent Mosco's *Political Economy of Communication*,

this study found that commodification takes place through three main dimensions, namely the commodification of content through the adjustment of narratives and forms of presentation, the commodification of labor through the change in the role of artists as cultural producers, and the commodification of the audience through the transformation of audience attention and involvement into a source of economic value. These findings expand the study of the commodification of communication by showing that in the digital ecosystem, audiences no longer only play the role of recipients of cultural messages, but also become part of the process of value production through digital interaction and participation. Thus, digitalisation does not solely shift the cultural function of Wayang Wong Sriwedari, but creates a new negotiation space between cultural heritage preservation, digital communication, and the development of cultural tourism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the management, artists, performers, dancers, musicians, and staff of Wayang Wong Sriwedari for their valuable participation and support during the research process. The authors also acknowledge Departmen of Doctoral Communication Sebelas Maret University for its academic support in the completion of this study.

REFERENCES

Alexandri, M. B., Maulina, E., Chan, A., & Sumadinata, R. W. S. (2019). Creative industries: Existence of arts traditional industries in Indonesia. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, *18*(1), 1-12.

Chen, D. I. R., & Lo, W. Y. W. (2013). Internationalization or commodification? A case study of internationalization practices in Taiwan's higher education. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *14*(1), 33-41. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-013-9246-0

Chhabra, D., Healy, R., & Sills, E. (2003). Staged authenticity and heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *30*(3), 702-719. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(03)00044-6

Fuchs, C. (2012a). Dallas Smythe today - The audience commodity, the digital labour debate, Marxist political economy and critical theory. Prolegomena to a digital labour theory of value. *TripleC*, *10*(2), 692-740. https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v10i2.443

Fuchs, C. (2012b). The political economy of privacy on Facebook. *Television and New Media*, *13*(2), 139-159. https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476411415699

Fuchs, C. (2017). From digital positivism and administrative big data analytics towards critical digital and social media research!. *European Journal of Communication*, *32*(1), 37-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116682804

Grange, A. L., Chang, C. O., & Yip, N. M. (2006). Commodification and urban development: a case study of Taiwan. *Housing Studies*, *21*(1), 53-76. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673030500391114

Irianto, A. M., & Laksono, A. (2018). Traditional Art Strategy in Responding Capitalization: Case Study of Kubrosiswo Cultural Art Commodification. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research & Education*, *18*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v18i1.11363

Made, R. N., I Komang, S., & I Gede, Y. (2020). Tri Hita Karana as a foundation development of Wayang Wong millennial performance. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, *14*(5), 684-702. http://repo.isi-dps.ac.id/id/eprint/3776

Mendoza, M. A. D., De La Hoz Franco, E., & Gómez, J. E. G. (2023). Technologies for the preservation of cultural heritage - A systematic review of the literature. *Sustainability*, *15*(2), Article 1059. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021059

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.

Mokgachane, T., Basupi, B., & Lenao, M. (2021). Mokgachane, T., Basupi, B., & Lenao, M. (2021). Implications of cultural commodification on the authenticity of iKalanga music: A case of Domboshaba traditional music festival in Botswana. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, *19*(2), 153-165. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2019.1700989

Mosco, V. (2009). *Political Economy of communicat ion* (2nd ed.). Sage publication.

Mueser, D., & Vlachos, P. (2018). Almost like being there? A conceptualisation of live-streaming theatre. *International Journal of Event and Festival Management*, *9*(2), 183-203. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEFM-05-2018-0030

Ortner, S. B. (2006). *Anthropology and social theory: Culture, power, and the acting subject*. Duke University Press.

Permatasari, P. A., Qohar, A. A., & Rachman, A. F. (2020). From web 1.0 to web 4.0: The digital heritage platforms for unesco's heritage properties in Indonesia. *Virtual Archaeology Review*, *11*(23), 75-93. https://doi.org/10.4995/var.2020.13121

Setiaji, D. W., Widyastutieningrum, S. R., & Aminudin, A. (2023). Agus Prasetyo aktor dan rol Wayang Orang Sriwedari [Agus Prasetyo, actor and performer of the Sriwedari Wayang Orang]. *Lakon Jurnal Pengkajian & Penciptaan Wayang*, *20*(1), 19-31. https://doi.org/10.33153/lakon.v20i1.5450

Suardana, G., Darma Putra, I. N., & Bawa Atmaja, N. (2018). "The Legend of Balinese Goddesses": Komodifikasi seni pertunjukan hibrid dalam Pariwisata Bali ["The Legend of Balinese Goddesses": The commodification of hybrid performing arts in Balinese tourism.]. *Jurnal Kajian Bali (Journal of Bali Studies)*, *8*(1), 35-52. https://doi.org/10.24843/jkb.2018.v08.i01.p03

Suprihono, A. E. (2006). *Eksplorasi fotografis tari klasik gaya yogyakarta (Perancangan karya seni fotografi panggung)* [Photographic exploration of Yogyakarta style classical dance (Designing stage photography artwork)]. ISI Yogyakarta

Suprihono, A. E. (2022). Saving "Joged Mataram" via youtube: preservation and dissemination of local culture in the digital age. *International Journal of Humanity Studies (IJHS)*, *5*(2), 185-193.

Suprihono, A. E., Raharjo, T., Handoko, S., Setiana, & Mallaleng, H. R. (2022). Transmedia effects on business, aesthetics and production of a traditional cultural product on the example of shadow puppet shows in Indonesia. *Economic Annals-XXI*, *199*(9-10), 48-57. https://doi.org/10.21003/ea.V199-06

Warto. (2019). Regeneration of Sriwedari wayang orang art-observers: Opportunities and challenges. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *27*(2), 1261-1274.

Yuliati, D., Rochwulaningsih, Y., Utama, M. P., Mufidah, R., Masruroh, N. N., & Sholihah, F. (2023). Using social media for preserving the Javanese traditional arts: Adaptation strategy of Sobokartti in the Millenial Era. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, *10*(1), Article 2180875. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2180875