

## **Digital Hybridity and Ecological Advocacy in *Wayang Motekar* as a Cultural Communication Strategy**

**Atalia Praratya**

Program Studi Produksi Film dan Televisi, Universitas Widyatama,  
Bandung, Indonesia, 40125  
[atalia.praratya@widyatama.ac.id](mailto:atalia.praratya@widyatama.ac.id)

**Diah Sri Rejeki\***

Program Studi Perpustakaan dan Sains Informasi, Universitas  
Widyatama, Bandung, Indonesia, 40125  
[diah.sri@widyatama.ac.id](mailto:diah.sri@widyatama.ac.id)

**Ibrahim Adi Surya**

Program Studi Produksi Film dan Televisi, Universitas Widyatama,  
Bandung, Indonesia, 40125  
[ibrahim.adi@widyatama.ac.id](mailto:ibrahim.adi@widyatama.ac.id)

**Della Dwinanti Sumpena**

Program Studi Produksi Film dan Televisi, Universitas Widyatama,  
Bandung, Indonesia, 40125  
[della.dwinanti@widyatama.ac.id](mailto:della.dwinanti@widyatama.ac.id)

### **Abstract**

Traditional Indonesian performing arts have faced the challenge of low youth participation in the digital era, raising questions about cultural continuity. This research investigates the application of strategic communication to contemporary *Wayang Motekar*, a modernist version of Sundanese puppet theatre through which traditional cultural messages are conveyed to digital-native participants. The data were collected through 14 semi-structured interviews (with creators, production teams, cultural observers, and audiences), 8 live performances, and a systematic analysis of digital material from YouTube and Instagram. Three interlinked strategic dimensions were identified. 1) Message planning or the strategic recontextualization of environmental philosophy, which was framed in Sundanese as part of contemporary sustainability discourse, 2) media selection that included video-mapping, projection systems, and platform-differentiated digital distribution; and 3) participatory delivery methods focusing on aesthetic-

emotional co-creation rather than didactic instruction. This successful process of cultural communication is facilitated by symbolic-aesthetic involvement, multimodal translation between media platforms, and the positioning of the audience as super-active sense-makers, strategically moving strategic communication theorizing from organization to the sphere of cultural performance. While *Wayang Motekar* has succeeded in presenting traditional arts as contemporary and can be accepted by the younger generation, it is a matter of fact that success depends on the capability of digital technology literacy among youths, the availability of digital infrastructures, and socio-economic conditions. The study develops an overarching theoretical framework that conceptualizes aesthetic hybridity as instrumental communication, which allows for the empirical identification of the persistence of traditional modes of knowledge, considering digital change.

**Keywords:** *Wayang Motekar; Digital Media; Cultural Communication; Performing Arts*

## 1. Introduction

Traditional Indonesian performing arts, including *wayang kulit*, *ludruk*, and *ketoprak*, are facing a critical sustainability crisis in the digital era. Empirical studies document systematic declines in youth engagement with these heritage art forms. (Juwariyah et al., 2023; Sutiyono, 2020), driven largely by generational shifts in cultural consumption. Gen Z, born between 1995 and 2010, Indonesia's digital generation, will also be more interested in visually interactive and digitally expressed cultural experiences, as opposed to traditional forms of performance. This generational transition places traditional performing arts on the fringe of society, bringing forth the urgent need to postulate debate on the endurance of heritage-based art forms against an increasingly digitalizing social terrain.

The stakes extend beyond cultural loss. Cultural practitioners, heritage institutions, and policymakers urgently need evidence-based models demonstrating how traditional arts can sustain relevance in digital environments without sacrificing cultural depth. Without such models, adaptation efforts risk either abandoning tradition entirely or adopting technology superficially, producing a digital spectacle without cultural substance. Understanding how strategic communication principles can be applied within cultural performance contexts is, therefore, not merely an academic exercise; it is a practical necessity for those responsible for preserving Indonesia's living cultural heritage.

Strategic communication, as theorized within organizational and institutional settings, emphasizes the intentional and co-creative process of meaning-making through deliberate combinations of message

development, media selection, and audience engagement (Falkheimer & Heide, 2022; Van Ruler, 2018). Although strategic communication has been extensively applied in corporate and political contexts, its application to cultural performance remains limited. This limitation is partly conceptual: traditional performing arts operate within different communicative logics than institutional communication, favoring aestheticized experience over instrumental persuasion, symbolic over direct expression, and positioning audiences as co-creators rather than passive receivers. In wayang performance, for instance, the dalang functions as a cultural mediator, the performance itself serves as a moral-aesthetic vehicle, and audiences actively co-participate in cultural meaning-making through interpretation and embodied presence (Hartono et al., 2024).

Digitalization presents dual and contested implications for traditional performing arts. On one hand, conservation-oriented scholarship views digital technologies primarily as tools for documentation, archiving, and record-keeping, cautioning that performative adaptation risks eroding symbolic depth, ritual authenticity, and the irreplaceable quality of co-present embodied experience (Sutiyono, 2020). On the other hand, innovation-driven research repositions digital technology as a mediator of cultural revitalization, enabling traditional arts to transcend geographic and temporal boundaries through streaming platforms, social media, and interactive digital spaces, and to reach new publics, particularly younger, technology-savvy audiences (Boh & Adoka, 2024). Hybrid practices that combine traditional performance with visual and digital media have demonstrated effectiveness in creating immersive experiences that merge historical aesthetics with contemporary narrative sensibilities (Midyanti & Sukmayadi, 2021). Through such innovations, traditional performing arts are repositioned from artifacts of the past to living vehicles of cultural expression, social dialogue, and identity formation.

Indonesia's digital-native generation exhibits consumption patterns that are visually oriented, participatory, and multi-platform-based, which differ substantially from audiences studied in Western contexts (Ramadani et al., 2024). These characteristics suggest that generic digitalization strategies may be insufficient; culturally specific and strategically designed communication approaches are required to engage Indonesian youth with traditional performing arts in meaningful, rather than merely entertaining, ways.

Despite growing scholarly interest, three critical gaps constrain current understanding of how traditional performing arts can sustain cultural relevance in digital contexts. First, existing literature treats technological

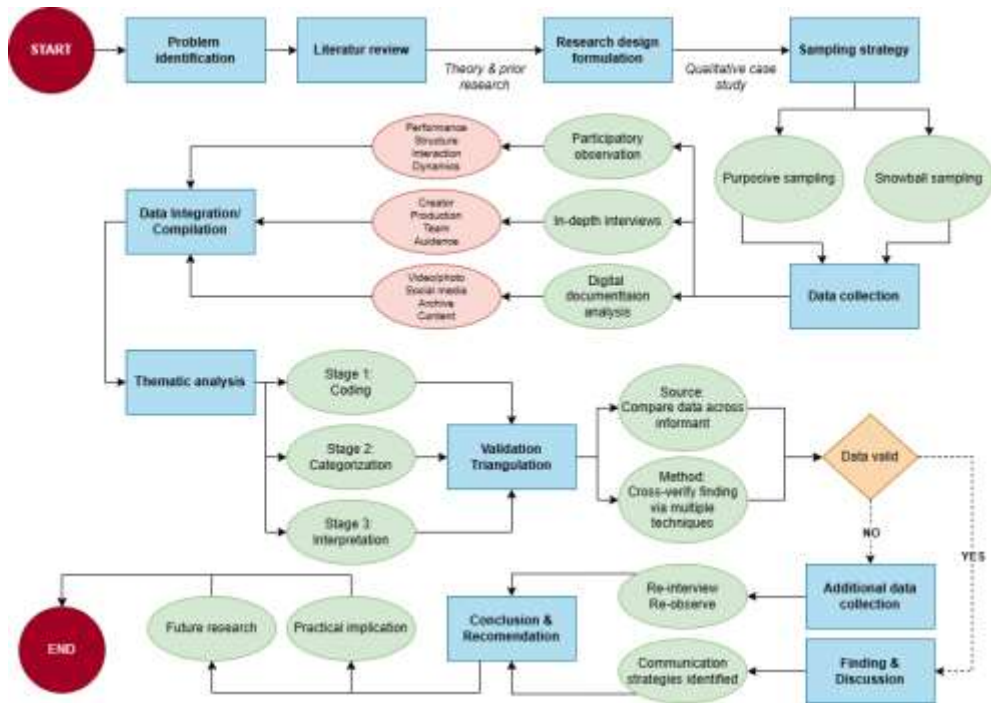
adoption and cultural messaging as separate phenomena, leaving practitioners without integrated models that address both simultaneously, yet sustainable digital adaptation requires strategic integration rather than a forced choice between tradition and innovation (Hermawan et al., 2025). Second, no substantial body of research systematically examines the strategic communication processes through which cultural practitioners deliberately combine message design, media selection, and audience engagement to sustain cultural relevance; studies focus either on technological features or cultural content in isolation, neglecting the communicative logic that links them. Third, empirical research on how digital-native audiences experience and construct meaning from hybrid traditional-digital performances remains scarce, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts. Practically, this means that cultural practitioners, educators, and heritage policymakers currently operate without evidence-based frameworks for sustainable cultural communication in digital environments, a gap that directly undermines effective heritage preservation efforts.

This study examines how *Wayang Motekar*, a modernized form of Indonesian puppet theatre developed by Sundanese artist Herry Dim, employs integrated strategic communication principles to transmit traditional Sundanese cultural values to digital-native audiences in contemporary Indonesia. Specifically, it investigates how message planning, media selection, and participatory delivery are combined to sustain cultural relevance, with the aim of developing an empirically grounded conceptual model applicable to cultural practitioners, heritage institutions, and policymakers working to preserve traditional performing arts in digital contexts.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This qualitative case study examines cultural communication strategies in *Wayang Motekar* performances (Hollweck, 2015). Case study methodology enables in-depth analysis of complex, context-dependent phenomena, prioritizing analytical transferability over statistical generalization. The study adopts an interpretive epistemological stance, recognizing cultural communication meanings as socially constructed through interactions among creators, performers, technologies, and audiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016).



**Figure 1.** Research Flow Diagram

As illustrated in Figure 1, this study followed a systematic process from problem identification through data validation. The research design integrated multiple data sources and analytical stages to ensure a comprehensive understanding of cultural communication strategies.

## 2.2. Research Context and Participants

Fieldwork was conducted in Bandung, West Java, from March to August 2024, involving observation of 8 live performances, 4 rehearsals, and systematic analysis of digital content. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2014) selected 14 informants based on three criteria: (1) direct involvement in *Wayang Motekar* production, (2) expertise in traditional arts or cultural communication, and (3) representation of digital-native audiences (aged 18-30).

Key informants included: Herry Dim (creator), 5 production team members (multimedia technology, lighting design, digital content, stage management), 2 cultural observers (academic experts), and 6 audience members (4 live performance attendees, 2 digital-platform users). Snowball sampling recruited 2 additional production assistants and 2 audience members. Potential selection bias was mitigated by recruiting cultural observers with critical perspectives and encouraging discussion of tensions and contradictions across all interviews.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Three instruments guided data collection: (1) semi-structured interview protocols developed through literature review, pilot testing with 3 cultural practitioners, and expert validation by 2 senior researchers; (2) structured observation protocols covering narrative structure, symbolic language, visual-technological integration, and audience engagement; and (3) a performance-element coding matrix with operational definitions for analyzing cultural communication strategies (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Research Informants and Characteristics

Category	Code	Age	Gender	Key Characteristics	Recruitment Method
<b>Creator</b>	CR-01	50s	M	Herry Dim: Conceptual designer, scriptwriter, primary dalang, visual communication innovator	Purposive
<b>Production Team</b>	PT-01	30s	M	Multimedia technology supervisor; lighting and visual designer	Purposive
<b>Production Team</b>	PT-02	20s	F	Digital content designer; social media manager	Purposive
<b>Production Team</b>	PT-03	30s	M	Stage manager; logistics coordinator	Snowball
<b>Production Team</b>	PT-04	20s	M	Video-mapping programmer	Snowball
<b>Production Team</b>	PT-05	30s	F	Production assistant; documentation specialist	Purposive
<b>Cultural Observer</b>	CO-01	40s	F	Academic researcher specializing in Sundanese performing arts	Purposive
<b>Cultural Observer</b>	CO-02	50s	M	Cultural communication scholar; heritage preservation expert	Purposive
<b>Audience</b>	AU-01	22	F	University student; attended 3 live performances	Purposive
<b>Audience</b>	AU-02	25	M	Working professional; digital-primary	Purposive

Category	Code	Age	Gender	Key Characteristics	Recruitment Method
<b>Audience</b>	AU-03	21	F	engagement (YouTube, Instagram) University student; first-time traditional performance viewer	Purposive
<b>Audience</b>	AU-04	28	M	Cultural enthusiast; hybrid live-digital engagement	Snowball
<b>Audience</b>	AU-05	23	F	Social media content creator; Instagram follower	Snowball
<b>Audience</b>	AU-06	26	M	Graduate student in media studies; critical viewer	Purposive

*Source: Research Results, 2024*

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using six-phase thematic analysis in NVivo 12 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and coding refinement. Initial coding generated 412 codes, which were organized into 17 candidate themes, then refined to 6 primary themes with 14 sub-themes through iterative review for internal homogeneity and external distinctiveness. All analytical decisions were documented in NVivo, creating a transparent audit trail of coding rationales, theme definitions, and theoretical connections.

## 2.5. Data Validity

Triangulation across data sources, methods, and researchers was employed to examine perspectives among creators, production team members, cultural analysts, and the audience. Where divergent readings occurred, they were interpreted as evidence of the complexity of cultural communication rather than dismissed as confusion.

Verification of the interview texts and an initial interpretation were carried out through member checking with six key informants. Researcher assumptions and positionality were noted in reflexive journals, and thick descriptions of performance contexts and production processes were used to enhance transferability. Finally, peer debriefing with senior academics in cultural communication provided external corroboration and validated the data's credibility.

### 3. Results

Thematic analysis revealed three interconnected strategic dimensions of cultural communication in Wayang Motekar: (1) Message Planning, (2) Media Selection, and (3) Delivery Methods. These dimensions work synergistically to transmit traditional cultural values to digital-native audiences. Additionally, cross-theme integration produces observable cultural communication effects, including both confirming and disconfirming evidence.

#### 3.1. Theme 1: Message Planning as Strategic Value Integration

All fourteen informants (14/14) identified message planning as central to effective cultural communication. This theme reflects how traditional values are strategically recontextualized within contemporary environmental discourse to transcend generational boundaries. Two sub-patterns emerged: strategic recontextualization (emphasized by the creator and production team, n=6) and symbolic communication (noted by all informants but interpreted differently).

##### 3.1.1. Strategic Recontextualization of Traditional Values

Creator Herry Dim, who has led Wayang Motekar's development since 2004 and serves as primary dalang, articulated a deliberate strategy of cultural adaptation:

*“I want to prove that wayang can still speak about current issues, but does not have to lose its soul. As part of the Sundanese worldview, destruction of the environment indicates that human beings have forgotten their earthly and nature-bound balance.”* (CR-01, Interview, May 2024).

This represents strategic recontextualization, translating the Sundanese philosophical concept of *tatali paranti karuhun* (ancestral harmony with nature) into accessible frameworks through environmental sustainability discourse. This process aligns with cultural communication scholarship emphasizing adaptive translation rather than static preservation (Baumann, 2018; Kurin, 2020).

Cross-informant analysis revealed consistent support for this strategy across stakeholder groups. Members of the production team (4/5) confirmed the intentional process of translating culturally specific values into universally legible messages, while cultural observers (2/2) assessed this approach as *“sophisticated cultural translation maintaining philosophical substance”* (CO-01). Among younger audiences, four of six participants successfully decoded the environmental messages but were unable to identify their specific cultural origins. This pattern indicates strategic success in achieving universal accessibility while also revealing a potential

limitation, namely, the erosion of explicit cultural attribution in audience interpretation.

### **3.1.2. Symbolic Communication over Didactic Instruction**

Twelve of fourteen informants characterized Wayang Motekar's communicative style as non-didactic, contrasting it with "preaching" approaches. Digital Content Designer (PT-02, age 23, responsible for social media strategy) explained:

*"We design messages to be visual, symbolic, not preachy. Environmental messaging is framed universally but expressed in Sundanese cultural language."* (PT-02, Interview, June 2024).

Systematic observation across eight performances conducted between April and July 2024 documented consistent symbolic patterns. Non-human protagonists were used as animal metaphors to represent human–environment relations, with characters such as a greedy monkey symbolizing overconsumption and a caring deer embodying ecological stewardship across all observed performances (8/8). Color coding functioned as an additional symbolic layer, with green and blue lighting signifying environmental balance (mean: 21 instances per 90-minute performance) and red or orange lighting denoting ecological destruction (mean: 15 instances). These symbolic elements were embedded within an allegorical narrative structure that consistently avoided explicit moral instruction, reinforcing indirect and interpretive modes of meaning-making.

Cultural Observer CO-01 (female academic, 40s, specializing in Sundanese performing arts) assessed this strategy's communicative effectiveness:

*"Animal protagonists provide psychological distance enabling audiences to examine their own behavior without feeling attacked. This is uniquely powerful communication."* (CO-01, Interview, June 2024)

This aligns with research on indirect communication, where metaphor minimizes psychological reactance while increasing receptivity.

However, symbolic openness yielded interpretive variation. While 12 informants valued non-didactic approaches, two younger audience members (AU-03, age 21; AU-04, age 28) expressed uncertainty: *"I enjoyed it but didn't always know what to take away"* (AU-03). This indicates that symbolic communication effectiveness depends on cultural literacy and interpretive competence, moderating universal accessibility claims.

**Table 2.** Strategic Message Planning Elements in Wayang Motekar

<b>Strategic Element</b>	<b>Empirical Evidence</b>	<b>Theoretical Interpretation</b>	<b>Cross-Informant</b>
<b>Cultural Re-contextualization</b>	Tatali paranti (Sundanese culture: philosophy of balance). In Sunda, it can be translated into an environmentally sustainable conservation talk.	Value translation: between times and cultures (Baumann, 2018; Kurin, 2020)	Confirmed by creator, production team (4/4), culture writers (2/2); acknowledged by viewership in general (4/6)
<b>Symbolic Density</b>	Animal similes, use of color (green/ blue is harmony; red/ orange is discord) over 8 performances.	Polysemy is the construction of sense that allows for different interpretations (Hall, 2019; Hoeken et al., 2018).	Programmed by authors; decoded to different extents by audiences (n=14)
<b>Universal–Particular Dialectic</b>	Context-based cultural principles within globally relevant environmental topics.	Cultural communication and ‘glocalization’ (Kraidy, 2018; Roudometof, 2019).	Intentional plan (creator, producers; good for 10/14 informants).
<b>Non-Didactic Pedagogy</b>	An allegorical narrative that emphasizes experience rather than direct moral messages.	Alignment with constructivist learning (Fosnot, 2018; Sawyer, 2019).	Received by 12/14 informants; 2 younger informants wanted explicit advice.

Source: Composite of interview transcripts (n = 14), observational notes (8 performances), and video recordings of performances (2 videos), 2024.

### **3.2. Theme 2: Media Selection as Technological (Traditional Synthesis)**

Thirteen of fourteen informants identified media integration as critical for scaling cultural communication reach. This theme encompasses both live performance enhancement through digital technologies and strategic digital distribution platform use.

#### **3.2.1. Multimodal Stage Enhancement**

Observational attendance at eight performances (March to July 2024) consistently documented the use of video mapping, LED projection systems, transparent layered screens, and programmable lighting. Multimedia Supervisor PT-01 (male, 30s, 8 years stage design experience) articulated strategic rationale:

*"We create three-dimensional depth impossible with traditional shadow puppets. But technology serves story, it's not decorative."* (PT-01, Interview, May 2024).

This represents deliberate augmentation strategy rather than replacement. Creator CR-01 framed this explicitly:

*"I'm not replacing wayang kulit, I'm extending its language. From monochrome to color, from static screen to light and movement. Children already have screens; I want screens to bring them INTO wayang, not away from it."* (CR-01, Interview, May 2024)

This strategic framing aligns with digital heritage theories emphasizing augmentation over replacement (Lian & Xie, 2024), challenging binary tradition-technology oppositions. The strategy evidence in three design principles: (1) technological visibility must remain subordinate to narrative, (2) digital elements must amplify rather than obscure traditional aesthetics, (3) multimedia integration must serve cultural communication objectives over spectacle.

Observational documentation revealed technology systematically amplified symbolic communication. Figure 2 illustrates how traditional shadow puppet aesthetics are preserved while incorporating environmental symbolism. Figure 3 demonstrates multimodal integration where colorful forest projections layer onto traditional puppet silhouettes, exemplifying the "extended language" strategy described by CR-01.



**Figure 2.** Traditional Shadow Puppets with Environmental Symbolism  
*Source: (Musim Semi Salihara, 2022)*

Conventional *Wayang Motekar* compositions, as shadow-form aesthetics, are employed to address environmental symbolism. Animal figures (at left and right) serve as metaphors for the relationship between humans and nature, and warm light and natural elements (yellow flowers in the foreground) underscore ecological themes. An image that demonstrates how *Wayang Motekar* retains and reflects on existing shadow puppet traditions while also intersecting with contemporary environmental stories.



**Figure 3.** Multimodal Stage Integration with Colorful Projection Mapping  
*Source: (Salihara Spring, 2022)*

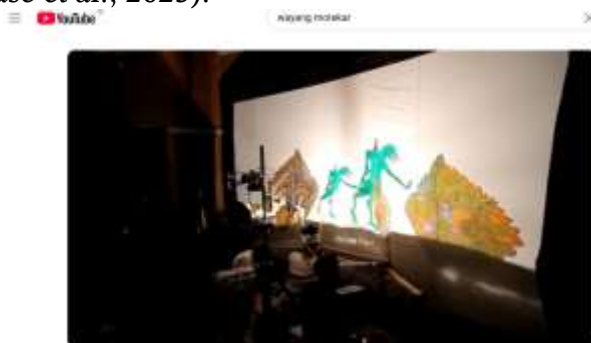
Immersive environment context for a layered projection system. Colorful forest images of trees and nature are projected onto numerous transparent screens that ring the traditional marionette silhouettes. Moreover, it is this “expanded language” that aligns with creator Herry Dim’s vision of applying color, depth, and digital imagery as additions rather than replacements for traditional shadow aesthetics. The green-blue

color scheme found here appears to provide a visual analog to the environmental theme identified in observational studies.

### 3.2.2. Digital Distribution Strategy

Digital content analysis of seven YouTube videos and nineteen Instagram posts revealed clearly differentiated platform strategies. YouTube functioned primarily as an archival and educational space, featuring long-form content with a mean duration of 47 minutes, including full performances (n=2), behind-the-scenes documentaries (n=3), and explainer videos (n=2). Analysis of forty-seven YouTube comments indicated substantive interpretive engagement, with viewers posing questions about cultural meanings and participating in educational discussion, and five of six younger informants reported using YouTube for learning and repeated viewing. In contrast, Instagram operated as a discovery and affective engagement platform, dominated by short-form video excerpts of 15–60 seconds (n=12) and visually striking still images (n=4). Comment analysis of ninety-four Instagram responses showed predominantly affective reactions (e.g., “beautiful,” “amazing”), and five of six younger informants identified Instagram as their initial point of encounter with *Wayang Motekar*.

This differentiated approach demonstrates strategic platform affordance exploitation: Instagram generates curiosity through visual appeal and algorithmic visibility; YouTube provides depth for interpretive engagement and archival access. This aligns with multiplatform communication research emphasizing medium-specific message adaptation (Hase et al., 2023).



**Figure 4. YouTube Digital Distribution Platform**

Source: *Wayang Motekar's YouTube channel*

The image shows a full-color performance recording in which projected puppets (turquoise and yellow figures visible) are layered with live puppeteering (*dalang*) operating traditional puppets in the foreground. YouTube functions primarily as a long-form platform, hosting full-length

performances (average duration: 47 minutes) and behind-the-scenes documentary content. The visibility of the search term “*wayang motekar*” in the search bar highlights discoverability through platform search mechanisms. Content analysis of seven YouTube videos revealed that this platform elicited more substantive interpretive engagement (47 analyzed comments) than Instagram, which predominantly elicited affective responses, supporting its role as a space for reflection, learning, and archival access.



**Figure 5.** Instagram Digital Engagement Platform  
 Source: @orbitaldago’s Instagram

A 3×3 grid presents various types of content, such as creator and performer headshots (top center), exhibition and performance documentation (bottom center), and decorative *wayang* visuals that convey messages about the environment or culture. The pervasiveness of bright blue, green, yellow, and orange speaks to a visual strategy best suited to fast scrolling and mobile consumption. A content analysis of 19 Instagram posts reveals featured short-form video clips (15–60 seconds) and visually arresting still images intended to capture the eye and engage effectively. Instagram resulted in a higher portion of emotion-bearing comments than YouTube (94 analyzed comments, e.g., “beautiful” or amazing”), therefore, supporting platform-specific audience interaction.

**Table 3.** Media Selection Strategy: Technological-Traditional Synthesis

Media Dimension	Strategic Function	Implementation Evidence	Reception Patterns	Limitations
Video Mapping & Projection	Create visual depth and symbolic layering beyond	Deployed and 8/8 observed performances; average of 43 projection	Enhanced engagement reported by 11/14 informants; cultural	Risk of technology overshadowing traditional performative elements

	traditional formats	scenes per 90-minute show	observers noted potential “spectacle risk”	
Layered Screen Systems	Enable simultaneous presentation of traditional puppets and contemporary imagery	Three-layer transparent screen system used at Teater Salihara across all observed performances	Audiences reported “visual richness” (9/14) but occasional “information overload” (3/14)	Balancing visual complexity with narrative clarity
Programmable Lighting	Reinforce emotional tone and symbolic meaning through color coding	Consistent use of green/blue (harmony) and red/orange (destruction); average of 38 lighting changes per performance	Effective symbolic reinforcement for 10/14 informants; 2 reported distractions	Requires cultural literacy to decode symbolic meanings
YouTube Archival	Provide access to full performances and educational context	Seven videos: 2 full performances, 3 behind-the-scenes documentaries, 2 explainer videos	Enables repeated viewing and cross-regional access; by 5/6 younger audience members	Loss of embodied, communal performance experience
Instagram Discovery	Generate curiosity and direct audiences to full-length content	Nineteen posts: 12 short video excerpts, 4 still images, 3 engagement-oriented posts	Effective discovery mechanism (5/6 younger audiences); 94 comments predominantly affective	Fragmentation of performance into decontextualized clips

*Source: Research Results, 2025*

### 3.3. Theme 3: Delivery Methods as Participatory Cultural Dialogue

All fourteen informants identified delivery methods as the performative dimension realizing communication strategies.

Observational data documented that dalang Opick Sunandar Sunarya (traditional puppeteer trained in Sundanese wayang, performing with *Wayang Motekar* since 2007) employed conversational narrative style featuring humor, spontaneous improvisation, and local Sundanese language.

Cultural Observer CO-02 (male, 50s, cultural communication scholar) assessed this approach:

*"The dalang's style is conversational, not preachy. He makes you laugh while making you think. That's sophisticated communication."* (CO-02, Interview, June 2024).

Engagement extended beyond physical venues into digital spaces. Observational field notes (6/8 performances) documented audiences video-recording segments and posting to personal social media, creating distributed cultural amplification.

University student AU-01 (female, 22, attended 3 live performances) explained:

*"I filmed clips for my Instagram story; friends who couldn't attend asked where to watch full versions."* (AU-01, Interview, June 2024)

Production team members (PT-01, PT-04) emphasized deliberate multisensory design: visual projections synchronized with live music (responding to emotional narrative rhythm) and movement elements (shadow dance), requiring extensive rehearsal for coherent integration.

**Table 4. Analysis of Delivery Method Elements in Wayang Motekar**

Analytical Aspect	Empirical Data	Key Finding
<b>Dalang's Communication Style</b>	Opick Sunandar Sunarya uses a light and humorous narrative style. Dialogues are interspersed with local Sundanese jokes and spontaneous improvisations that evoke audience laughter.	The delivery style is relaxed and communicative so that the moral message is conveyed without sounding preachy, while maintaining emotional closeness with young audiences.
<b>Audience Interactivity</b>	The audience actively responds to scenes,	The form of direct and digital participation shows

Analytical Aspect	Empirical Data	Key Finding
<b>and Participation</b>	laughs, and applauds. After the performance, many viewers re-upload video clips to social media.	that the audience is not only message recipients but also part of the process of disseminating cultural meaning.
<b>Synergy of Visuals and Music</b>	Live music is combined with lighting design and color projections that change according to the emotional tone of the scene.	The collaboration of visual and musical elements creates a multisensory experience that enhances the emotional impact of the ecological message.
<b>Symbolic and Emotional Narrative</b>	The story depicts the conflict between humans and nature through animal characters and green-blue lighting.	The narrative is delivered symbolically and reflectively, encouraging the audience to grasp the ecological message through empathy rather than direct preaching.

*Source: Research Results, 2025*

### **3.4. Theme 4: Cross-Theme Integration: Cultural Communication Effects**

While the three themes represent distinct strategic dimensions, their synergy produces observable cultural communication effects. This section synthesizes reception patterns and impacts across fourteen informants, including disconfirming evidence.

#### ***3.4.1. Cognitive Reframing of Traditional Arts***

Nine of fourteen informants (primarily younger audiences ages 19–26) reported that *Wayang Motekar* reframed their perceptions of traditional performing arts:

*“Before Wayang Motekar, I thought wayang was old-fashioned and boring. This showed me tradition can be contemporary and relevant.”* (University Student, age 20, Interview 5, June 2024)

This suggests successful disruption of deficit narratives about tradition’s incompatibility with contemporary sensibilities, consistent with cultural innovation research (Gotua & Rcheulishvili, 2019). However, two younger informants (AU-03, AU-05) remained uncertain whether they would attend unmodified traditional *wayang*, indicating that appreciation

may not automatically transfer to traditional forms, a limitation for cultural preservation objectives.

### **3.4.2. Environmental Consciousness Development**

Eight informants reported increased environmental awareness, though depth varied significantly:

*"The story about greed destroying nature hit me, made me think about my plastic use. It wasn't preachy, but it stuck."* (AU-02, age 25, Interview, July 2024)

When probed for behavioral changes, only three informants reported concrete actions. This reflects commonly observed gaps between attitudinal resonance and sustained behavioral change in environmental communication (McLoughlin et al., 2023), suggesting *Wayang Motekar* achieves awareness-raising but faces challenges in behavior modification, an acknowledged limitation.

### **3.4.3. Cultural Pride and Digital Visibility**

Five informants (cultural observers, production team, two older audiences) linked digital visibility to cultural pride:

*"Seeing Sundanese culture on global platforms, YouTube, Instagram, with production values matching international content, creates pride. It shows our culture can compete aesthetically."* (PT-02, Interview, June 2024)

However, two cultural observers (CO-01, CO-02) cautioned against "digital nationalism" where metrics (views/likes) become dominant cultural value criteria, potentially distorting artistic priorities, echoing critical heritage studies concerns. (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021).

### **3.4.4. Disconfirming Evidence and Limitations**

Several findings complicate claims of universal effectiveness. Cultural Capital Mediation was evident, as informants with prior Sundanese cultural knowledge (n=4) reported significantly richer and more nuanced interpretations than those without such backgrounds (n=10), indicating that reception was strongly mediated by existing cultural capital (Artha et al., 2023). These challenges assume universal accessibility and suggest that digital adaptation alone cannot overcome cultural literacy barriers. Generational Normative Conflicts also emerged, with older audience members (n=2, ages 45+) expressing discomfort toward smartphone recording during performances (observed on June 8 and July 13, 2024), revealing intergenerational tensions over what constitutes appropriate cultural engagement within participatory performance contexts. Socioeconomic Accessibility Barriers further constrained reach, as performances were staged in a premium urban venue (Tori, 2022) with

ticket prices ranging from IDR 100,000 to 250,000, thereby limiting participation primarily to economically advantaged audiences. This structural condition indicates that Wayang Motekar's effectiveness operates within specific demographic parameters rather than as a universally accessible model. Longitudinal Limitations also apply, as the cross-sectional design captured single-point audience perceptions rather than sustained attitudinal or behavioral change over time. Finally, Digital Infrastructure Inequalities were evident, with online engagement concentrated among urban, device-enabled users, reflecting broader infrastructural disparities in Indonesia (Choczyńska, 2024). Collectively, these constraints indicate that while Wayang Motekar's strategic cultural communication is effective within sociocultural and infrastructural conditions, it faces significant challenges related to scalability, equity, and long-term impact.

#### **4. Discussion**

This study examined how *Wayang Motekar* employs integrated strategic communication principles, message planning, media selection, and participatory delivery to transmit traditional Sundanese cultural values to digital-native audiences in contemporary Indonesia. The findings differ from prior studies in both analytical focus and theoretical orientation. Previous research on traditional performing arts in digital contexts has predominantly examined either technological features or cultural content in isolation, without conceptualizing their combination as a unified strategic communication system (Midyanti & Sukmayadi, 2021; Sutiyono, 2020). In contrast, the present study demonstrates that sustained cultural relevance in digital environments emerges through deliberate integration of message intentionality, media system design, and participatory delivery, rather than through technological adoption alone. This study, therefore, contributes a novel conceptual perspective by positioning strategic communication as an operative framework for heritage performance, extending its application beyond the organizational and institutional domains in which it has traditionally been theorized.

##### **4.1 Message Planning as Strategic Value Integration**

The findings reveal that Wayang Motekar's message planning operates through the deliberate recontextualization of the Sundanese philosophical principle of *tatali paranti karuhun* within contemporary environmental discourse. By embedding culturally specific heritage values within universally resonant themes, the production achieves dual legibility: cultural insiders recognize underlying philosophical depth while broader audiences engage through accessible contemporary framing. These

findings support Kurin (2004), who conceptualizes cultural adaptation as an active meaning-negotiation mechanism rather than passive heritage transmission, confirming that value-translation is a dynamic communicative process rather than a fixed preservation act.

However, an important divergence from these prior studies emerges. (Kurin, 2004) reported stronger cultural attribution retention among their study audiences, whereas the current findings indicate that younger Indonesian informants accurately decoded environmental messages without identifying their Sundanese philosophical origins. This difference is likely attributable to cultural proximity: prior studies engaged audiences with closer familiarity with the relevant heritage tradition, while this study's urban Gen Z informants had limited prior exposure to Sundanese philosophy. This suggests that cultural literacy functions as a critical moderating variable in value-translation outcomes, a factor undertheorized in existing cultural communication scholarship.

This finding raises a broader theoretical tension that this study identifies but cannot fully resolve. If strategic communication prioritizes message effectiveness over cultural attribution, the very success of accessibility may progressively erode the philosophical lineage it ostensibly transmits. This unresolved tension points to a conceptual gap in cultural communication theory regarding how effectiveness in heritage contexts should be defined and evaluated, a question requiring dedicated theoretical attention in future research.

## **4.2 Media Selection as Technological-Traditional Synthesis**

### ***4.2.1 Augmentation as Strategic Design Principle***

Findings document a deliberate augmentation-over-replacement orientation governing Wayang Motekar's media selection, operationalized through three consistent design principles across all observed performances: technology subordinated to narrative, digital elements amplifying rather than obscuring traditional aesthetics, and multimedia serving cultural communication over spectacle. These findings extend beyond (Lian & Xie, 2024), who document digital technology's potential to extend cultural reach, toward an understanding of strategic implementation, specifically, the explicit design governance required to realize that potential in practice. This research introduces a new perspective on digital heritage studies by demonstrating that augmentation is not a natural outcome of technology adoption but a deliberate strategic orientation requiring active design management.

In contrast to these findings, Midyanti & Sukmayadi (2021) observed that hybrid performances in Indonesian community settings tended toward technology-as-spectacle rather than technology-as-amplification. This

divergence is attributable to production context: their study examined resource-constrained community performances without explicit strategic design, whereas *Wayang Motekar* operates with professional infrastructure and articulated design principles. This comparison suggests that the augmentation model may not be directly replicable across resource-constrained settings, a limitation with significant implications for heritage institutions operating outside urban professional contexts.

#### **4.2.2 Differentiated Platform Strategy**

The differentiated platform strategy further demonstrates strategic media intelligence calibrated to digital-native consumption patterns. Instagram functioned as an effective discovery channel through visual appeal and algorithmic visibility, while YouTube provided archival depth for interpretive engagement. Consistent with Hase et al., (2023) Multiplatform communication research, these findings confirm that effective cultural communication requires medium-specific message adaptation rather than uniform content strategies across platforms. This study addresses the gap identified in prior literature by demonstrating that strategic coherence in cultural performance must be sustained across hybrid physical-digital ecologies with distinct affordances, a dimension absent from traditional single-medium strategic communication models.

At the same time, concerns about spectacle risk and informational overload documented across informants suggest that technological enhancement may compete with cultural messaging when design governance weakens. These findings indicate that effective cultural communication operates along a complexity continuum whose optimal calibration point requires further investigation, representing an area needing continued theoretical and empirical development.

#### **4.3 Participatory Delivery as Aesthetic Communication**

The participatory dynamics observed in *Wayang Motekar* diverge notably from the dominant theoretical frameworks used to conceptualize participation in communication research. While Freirean dialogic education (Freire, 1970) constitutes participation as explicit consciousness-raising and horizontal dialogue, and Habermasian public sphere theory (Habermas, 1991) frames it as rational-critical deliberation, participation in *Wayang Motekar* operates primarily through aesthetic-emotional engagement. Humor, multisensory immersion, and affective resonance, rather than argumentative exchange, serve as the primary mechanisms through which cultural values are received and meaning is constructed by audiences.

This distinction reflects a fundamentally different communicative logic operating in aesthetic performance contexts that prior strategic

communication studies did not capture, because those studies were conducted primarily within organizational settings where audiences are positioned as message recipients rather than co-creators (Falkheimer & Heide, 2022; Van Ruler, 2018). These findings reveal a previously unexplored dimension of participatory communication theory: aesthetic-emotional participation as a distinct mode in which audience agency is exercised affectively and experientially rather than discursively. Table 7 illustrates how this mode differs from established participatory frameworks.

**Table 7.** Comparison of Participatory Communication Frameworks

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Mode of Participation</b>	<b>Mechanism</b>	<b>Applicability to Wayang Motekar</b>
Freirean Dialogic Education (Freire, 1970)	Rational-critical dialogue	Explicit consciousness-raising, horizontal exchange	Partial: values transmission occurs, but not through deliberate dialogue
Habermasian Public Sphere (Habermas, 1989)	Deliberative exchange	Argumentative reasoning, rational consensus	Limited: audiences do not engage through rational deliberation
Aesthetic-Emotional Participation ( <i>this study</i> )	Affective-experiential engagement	Humor, multisensory immersion, embodied resonance	Fully applicable: primary mode of meaning construction observed

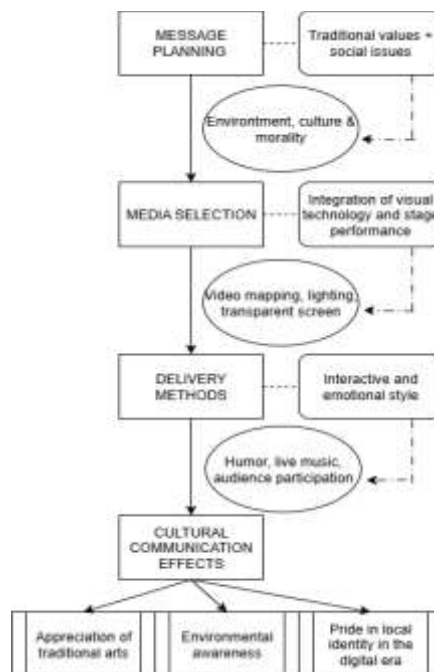
Source: Research Results, 2025

This theoretical contribution requires strategic communication theory to expand its conception of participation beyond rational deliberation to include symbolic, embodied, and affective modes of meaning construction, particularly when the communicative context is cultural performance rather than institutional exchange.

#### **4.4 Integrated Conceptual Model of Strategic Cultural Communication**

The emergent strategic dimensions observed in this study provide empirical grounding for an integrated conceptual model in which message planning, media selection, and participatory delivery are mutually

constitutive rather than sequential. As illustrated in Figure 6, each strategic dimension feeds into the next while maintaining bidirectional feedback loops: audience responses inform message refinement, digital engagement metrics shape media strategy adjustments, and participatory interactions generate new cultural meanings that feed back into performance conventions. This cyclical process reflects a form of strategic cultural intelligence in which *Wayang Motekar* continuously calibrates its communicative approach through accumulated experiential feedback rather than fixed procedural design. The model explicitly positions contextual moderators, cultural literacy, digital infrastructure access, socioeconomic conditions, and generational differences as structural constraints rather than peripheral factors, emphasizing that strategic communication produces differentiated rather than uniform effects across audience segments.



**Figure 6.** Conceptual model of cultural communication strategies in *Wayang Motekar* performances  
*Source: Research Results, 2024*

#### 4.5 Theoretical, Practical, and Methodological Implications

The finding that aesthetic-symbolic communication functions as a fully strategic mode suggests that strategic communication theory requires formal expansion beyond its current instrumental-persuasion orientation to account for metaphorical, polysemic, and experiential meaning-making processes. The identification of cultural literacy as a moderating variable

in value-translation outcomes points to an area needing theoretical development: specifically, a cultural capital-sensitive framework for evaluating heritage communication effectiveness that moves beyond binary preservation-versus-innovation models. Additionally, the documentation of aesthetic-emotional participation as a distinct participatory mode contributes new theoretical propositions addressing affective and embodied dimensions of strategic communication not captured in existing organizational paradigms.

For cultural practitioners, the augmentation-over-replacement principle offers an actionable design framework for digital integration that sustains cultural depth. To address the cultural attribution erosion identified in message planning findings, organizations should supplement universal messaging with explicit cultural attribution elements, program notes, post-performance discussions, and digital explainer content, ensuring that accessibility gains do not come at the cost of philosophical lineage. Participatory programming should prioritize multisensory immersion, humor, and affective engagement over explicit educational formats, as these aesthetic modes proved more effective in sustaining digital-native audience engagement with traditional cultural content. For heritage policymakers, the finding that digital distribution currently reaches primarily urban, economically advantaged populations suggests that structural interventions, subsidized ticketing, regional touring programs, and mobile-accessible digital content are necessary conditions for equitable cultural reach rather than supplementary considerations.

Methodologically, the cross-sectional single-case design's inability to capture sustained behavioral change indicates that future studies should integrate repeated-measures approaches tracking attitudinal and behavioral outcomes over time. Purposive sampling strategies must be deliberately expanded beyond urban, educated informants to capture diverse reception patterns across socioeconomic and geographic dimensions, ensuring that findings reflect Indonesia's full cultural and infrastructural diversity rather than urban professional contexts alone.

#### **4.6 Limitations**

While this study provides in-depth documentation of Wayang Motekar's strategic communication system, the single-case design means findings may not transfer to rural, community-based, or resource-constrained performance contexts, precisely the settings where scalable cultural heritage models are most urgently needed. The cross-sectional design captures immediate audience perceptions but cannot assess whether the cognitive reframing or environmental awareness reported by informants translates into sustained behavioral change over time; this

constraint renders claims about long-term communicative impact speculative rather than empirically grounded. The concentration of informants among urban, educated, and economically advantaged groups further limits the extent to which findings reflect the experiences of Indonesia's broader population, while the professional production context of *Wayang Motekar* may introduce contextual specificity that constrains direct applicability to smaller-scale or grassroots cultural initiatives. Despite these constraints, the study offers a theoretically grounded and empirically informed contribution by articulating a strategic communication model that reflects the realities of hybrid cultural performance in digital Indonesia, while simultaneously clarifying the boundaries within which these findings are valid and the priorities that future research must address.

#### **4.7 Future Research Directions**

Building directly from these findings, five research directions are proposed. Comparative case studies across heritage traditions, including digital adaptations of Chinese shadow puppetry, multimedia kathakali in India, and augmented reality practices in Mexican Day of the Dead celebrations, would test whether the strategic communication model identified here transfers across cultural contexts and resource levels, employing consistent analytical frameworks to enable meaningful cross-cultural synthesis. Longitudinal studies tracking audience attitudes and behaviors over 12 to 24 months following performance exposure would directly address the attitudinal-behavioral gap observed in environmental consciousness findings, employing panel survey designs with repeated-measures analysis to assess whether single-exposure cultural performances can realistically achieve sustained behavior modification objectives. Audience segmentation studies examining how cultural literacy, socioeconomic status, and geographic location moderate meaning construction would refine the cultural capital finding and enable target-specific communication strategy development, using stratified sampling to ensure demographic breadth beyond current urban concentrations. Production-side organizational research examining resource requirements, institutional capacities, and design decision-making processes would clarify the conditions under which the augmentation model is replicable in non-professional settings, contributing evidence directly relevant to scaling debates in heritage policy. Finally, theoretical development work producing aesthetic-symbolic strategic communication frameworks, drawing on cultural semiotics, affect theory, and performance studies, is needed to formally account for the metaphorical, polysemic, and experiential meaning-making processes this study documents empirically

but that existing organizational communication paradigms cannot yet adequately theorize.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Wayang Motekar* employs integrated strategic communication processes, message planning, media selection, and participatory delivery that enable traditional performing arts to maintain cultural relevance in digital contexts. Theoretically, the findings extend strategic communication theory beyond its organizational roots by showing that effectiveness in cultural performance emerges through symbolic–aesthetic co-creation rather than linear message transmission.

Empirically, the strategic recontextualization observed in *Wayang Motekar* extends cultural transmission theories by identifying concrete translation mechanisms through which local cultural values achieve dual legibility, remaining recognizable to cultural insiders while accessible to broader audiences through contemporary environmental framing. However, this success introduces tension, as universal accessibility risks cultural attribution erosion, evidenced by audiences decoding environmental messages without recognizing their Sundanese origins. This tension highlights an unresolved theoretical question: whether effectiveness should be measured by value transmission alone or by sustained cultural attribution and community ownership.

The integrated conceptual model synthesizes these findings by conceptualizing *Wayang Motekar* as a strategic cultural communication system in which message, media, and delivery are mutually constitutive and shaped by bidirectional feedback loops. By framing aesthetic hybridity as a strategic communication mechanism rather than artistic innovation alone, the model bridges heritage preservation and strategic communication literatures while explicitly acknowledging contextual moderators such as cultural literacy, digital infrastructure, and socioeconomic access.

At the same time, the study's single-case design, urban context, reliance on self-reported data, and assumptions of digital access constrain generalizability and limit claims about long-term impact (Nugroho & Lonard, 2019). Despite these constraints, *Wayang Motekar* reflects broader global shifts toward digitally hybrid heritage performance. Future research should pursue comparative and longitudinal studies, audience segmentation analyses, and production-side investigations to assess scalability, equity, and sustainability across diverse cultural contexts.

As digital technologies increasingly mediate cultural experience, understanding how traditional knowledge systems strategically communicate through technological transformation becomes an urgent imperative for cultural diversity preservation. This study offers one empirical foundation for that effort while underscoring the need for continued theoretical and empirical work to ensure that strategic communication serves, rather than supplants, communities' cultural autonomy.

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