



The Existence of "Unmastered Cultural Heritage": The Art of Cirebon Masks in the Midst of the Flow of Tourists Instagram able

Agung Setiawan, Tia Listiaty

Prima International Tourism Polytechnic, Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia

Corresponding Author. E-mail agung@poltekarprima.ac.id

Abstract

Background. The Cirebon Mask Dance, an Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTB) of Indonesia that is rich in philosophical values, is now at a crucial crossroads. On the one hand, there are internal challenges related to the regeneration and transmission of knowledge. On the other hand, the wave of digital tourism, mediated by visual platforms such as Instagram, presents massive commodification pressure. This phenomenon transforms cultural representations from holistic narratives into aesthetic fragments curated for quick consumption in the digital space, or popularly referred to as *Instagramable content*.

Purpose. This research aims to unravel the dialectic between the efforts to preserve authenticity by the artist community and the commodification forces at work in the digital tourism ecosystem. Using the critical phenomenological framework of Pierre Bourdieu, this study will examine how symbolic capital (cultural authenticity) is negotiated, transformed, and even reduced in the digital tourism 'arena'. This study fills the research gap by not only focusing on the impact of tourism, but also analyzing the mechanisms of symbolic violence that occur when digital aesthetics dominate and shape tourist perceptions, potentially eroding the sacred and philosophical meaning of the Cirebon Mask Dance.

Method. This study adopts a qualitative approach with a multisite case study design. Data collection will be carried out through a hybrid method that combines (1) Netnography and Visual Content Analysis (VCA) on the Instagram platform to map patterns of representation and digital commodification, and (2) In-depth interviews and participatory observations with dance maestros, young artists, studio managers, and tourism stakeholders in Cirebon. Triangulation of data from the virtual world and field reality will be analyzed thematically to uncover tensions, adaptation strategies, and emerging forms of cultural resistance.

Results. The results of this study are expected to make three main contributions. Theoretically, this research will produce a conceptual model of WBTB's *cultural resilience* in the face of digital commodification.

Conclusion. In practical terms, these findings will form the basis for the formulation of digital literacy modules aimed at the artist community, equipping them with the tools to manage their own cultural representations. In terms of policy, this research will produce a *policy brief* that provides strategic recommendations for local governments to develop sustainable cultural tourism, which balances between economic promotion and preservation of cultural dignity.

Keywords: Cirebon Mask Dance, Cultural Commodification, Digital Tourism, Instagram, Critical Phenomenology, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Authenticity, Cultural Resilience.



© 2025 The Author(s). This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation,

distribution, and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source.

INTRODUCTION

The Cirebon Mask Dance is one of the pillars of Indonesia's Intangible Cultural Heritage (WBTB) which is recognized as having deep philosophical and historical richness. Rooted in pre-Islamic traditions that were later acculturated as a da'wah medium by Sunan Gunung Jati during the Cirebon Sultanate, this dance is not just an art performance (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). It is a living cultural text that represents the cycle of human life through its five main mask characters: Panji (a symbol of the purity of the soul at the beginning of birth), Samba (a cheerful childhood), Rummyang (adolescence and the search for identity), Tumenggung (maturity, power, and responsibility), and Klana (representation of the peak of worldly anger and ambition) (Cirebon City Government, n.d.). Every movement, gamelan accompaniment, and accompanying offerings have a complex symbolic meaning, making the Cirebon Mask Dance a medium for transmitting values, ethics, and spirituality from generation to generation (Gramedia Blog, n.d.). However, in the last two decades, the cultural ecosystem that supports the existence of the Cirebon Mask Dance has faced a double challenge of a structural nature. Internally, there is fragility in the process of regeneration and inheritance. The interest of the younger generation who tend to turn to global popular culture as well as strict customary requirements for a puppeteer, such as the need to be a direct descendant of a certain maestro, create a crisis of artist regeneration (University of Indonesia Lybrary, 2019). This condition is exacerbated by the shift of the function of dance from the context of sacred rituals (for example in the Mapag Sri ceremony or ruwatan) to a mere entertainment performance, which slowly erodes its sacred value (Kalbis Institute Research, n.d.). Externally, these challenges are exacerbated by the wave of digital tourism mediated by social media platforms, especially Instagram. Cirebon, as a destination, is increasingly being promoted through curated and aesthetic images, which are popularly known as Instagrammable (Kumparan, 2023). These platforms, with algorithms that prioritize engaging and easily digestible visual content, have become a new "arena" in cultural representation (Bronsvoot, 2022). In this arena, the Cirebon Mask Dance is no longer only displayed on the studio stage or traditional ceremonies, but is also represented in digital formats such as photos, short videos

(Reels), and stories. These representations often undergo a process of decontextualization and fragmentation: dances are condensed into 30-second clips, costumes are modified to be more "photogenic", and expressive Klana characters are more often displayed because they are considered more visually dramatic than the meditative Panji characters (Ali, 2023).

This phenomenon gives birth to a critical dialectic between authenticity and digital commodification. On the one hand, promotion through Instagram provides unprecedented visibility, has the potential to increase public appreciation and bring economic benefits to artists and tourism actors. However, on the other hand, this process is at high risk of turning the Cirebon Mask Dance into a superficial visual commodity. When the value of a cultural heritage is reduced to mere aesthetics in order to get "likes" and "shares", there is a process that cultural studies scholars call cultural commodification, in which the value of use (ritual and philosophical value) is replaced by the value of exchange (economic value and digital popularity) (Marx, 1887).

This creates a paradoxical situation. In the midst of conservation efforts carried out by the maestros and their communities, there is a "hijacking" of narratives by the forces of the digital market that is not always in line with the spirit of conservation. Cultural heritage rich in meaning is in danger of becoming "common property" in a negative sense: an object without a complete narrative that can be exploited by anyone for the sake of digital imagery. This research departs from the urgency to understand in depth these complex dynamics, not only to document change, but also to dismantle the mechanisms of power that work behind it and find a path to more ethical and sustainable cultural tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cirebon Mask Dance: History, Philosophy, and Contemporary Threats

The Cirebon Mask Dance is a complex corpus of performing arts, not just dance. Historical and anthropological literature consistently places it as a living cultural artifact, which has gone through various phases of transformation. Initially rooted in the agrarian rituals of the ancient Sundanese people, this art was later adapted by the Wali Songo, especially Sunan Gunung Jati, as an effective medium for the spread of Islamic teachings in the Cirebon area and its surroundings (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2021). This acculturation gives birth to a unique art form, where Islamic spirituality values are combined with local wisdom. The peak of his philosophical richness is manifested in the five wanda or five mask characters, which are universally interpreted as an allegory of the spiritual journey of man,

from purity (Panji) to the peak of lust (Klana) (Cirebon City Government, n.d. ; Gramedia Blog, n.d.).

Previous studies on the Cirebon Mask Dance tend to focus on the internal aspects of the art itself. Several studies conducted an in-depth analysis of the performance structure, variety of movement, and symbolic meaning of each mask (Kalbis Institute Research, n.d.). Other research highlights the change in the function of dance, from originally ritual-oriented to an entertainment art. A study by Research Gate (2020) specifically examined the transformation of the Pennant Mask from a traditional ceremonial part to a dance for entertainment, which marks a shift in use value. Furthermore, research from the University of Indonesia (2019) examines the central role of puppeteers in Mapag Sri traditional ceremonies, highlighting the challenges of regeneration and customary conditions that limit the inheritance of expertise (University of Indonesia Library, 2019). These studies provide an important foundation for the intrinsic value and internal fragility faced by the Cirebon Mask Dance, but not many have touched on the specifics of how pressures from the external digital world accelerate or transform these challenges.

Cultural Commodification in the Digital Era

The concept of commodification, which has its roots in Karl Marx's thinking about the conversion of value to exchange value, has become a central analytical tool in cultural studies. In the digital era, this process is accelerating and mutating. Hernowo (2025) argues that in the digital economy, not only content becomes a commodity, but also the audience and the platform itself, creating a complex system in which user participation is actually part of the market mechanism (Hernowo, 2025). This phenomenon is clearly seen on platforms such as TikTok, where cultural challenges become a strategy for identity representation as well as commodification, as researched by Febrianda (2025).

The literature on digital commodification often highlights the occurrence of siltation or trivialization. Hermayani (2025) warns that the commodification of culture in the media can threaten social sustainability by changing established values and identities (Hermayani, 2025). In the context of Instagram, Ali (2023), using the lens of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, asserts that uploaded images become an "aesthetic commodity" that is consumed by the public and has an autonomous status in the digital space, regardless of its original context (Ali, 2023). This research will build on these findings by specifically examining how this

process of aesthetic commodification occurs in intangible cultural artifacts such as dance, whose essence lies in movement and narrative, not just static imagery.

Heritage Tourism and the Role of Social Media

Social media has fundamentally changed the tourism industry, especially heritage-based tourism. Platforms such as Instagram now function as the main source of information and the formation of destination images (Ulil Albab Institute, n.d.). A study by Falk, et al. (2021) shows how Instagram significantly influences the flow of tourist visits to UNESCO World Heritage Sites, proving the power of this platform in driving global tourist mobility (Folk & Hagster, 2021). More than that, social media is also a space for the public to voice their opinions and experiences regarding cultural heritage sites, a phenomenon that Foroughi, et al. (2023) refer to as a "public voice" that can be captured and analyzed for better heritage management (Foroughi, 2023). However, this relationship is not always a symbiotic of mutualism. Critical discourse in tourism studies highlights how excessive promotion on social media can lead to overtourism and environmental and cultural degradation. In addition, there is a risk of staged authenticity, where travel experiences are designed to meet the visual expectations formed by social media, rather than to present the true cultural reality (Cohen, 1988). This research will put the Cirebon Mask Dance in this dilemma, examining how it is represented and "sold" in the digital tourism market and what impact it has on the preservation of its authenticity.

Visual Representation of Culture on Instagram

As a visual-based platform, Instagram has its own logic in representing culture. Studies using Visual Content Analysis (VCA) show certain patterns in the representation of tourist destinations. Wegerer (2021), in his study of Alpine destinations, found a discrepancy between user-produced imagery (UGC) and imagery promoted by official tourism institutions (Wegerer, 2021). This suggests that there is a negotiation of meaning taking place on the platform.

Loke (2022) used Instagram data to understand tourist behavior, suggesting that an analysis of uploaded photos can reveal what visitors consider important and interesting to a cultural heritage site (Loke, 2022). Meanwhile, Molin (2025) argues that Instagram not only reflects, but also actively shapes a visitor's relationship with a place, mediating their experience through a specific aesthetic lens (Molin, 2025). These studies provide a methodological and

conceptual foundation for analyzing the visual content of the Cirebon Mask Dance on Instagram, allowing this research to move from mere content descriptions to critical analysis of how the representation is constructed and what its implications are.

State of the Art: Mapping Research Gaps

To affirm the originality and contribution of this research, it is important to position it accurately among existing studies. Analysis of the literature shows that although topics such as Cirebon Mask Dance, commodification, and digital tourism have been studied separately, studies that integrate all three in one critical analytical framework are still very limited. The following table maps the research gap that this study aims to fill.

Table 1. Comparison of Previous Research (State of the Art)

Focus of Previous Research	Key Key Findings	Key Limitations	Position and Contribution of This Research
Ethnographic and History of Cirebon Mask Dance	Analyzes internal structures, functional changes from ritual to entertainment, and the challenges of puppeteer regeneration.	It tends to be descriptive and ahistorical to external forces. Lack of integration of analysis on the impact of digital technology and globalization.	Contextualizing internal challenges (regeneration, shift in function) as conditions accelerated and exploited by digital commodification.
Cultural Commodification Studies (General)	Identify the process of changing value to become exchange value in physical cultural artifacts or popular cultural practices (e.g., fashion, music).	Often focuses on first-order commodification (physical products). There has not been much touching on the commodification of complex intangible performing arts on visual platforms.	Deepening the analysis of commodification to the realm of <i>simulacra</i> (Baudrillard), where what is commodified is not only the dance, but the image of the dance, and analyzes it on the object of WBTB.
Digital Tourism Studies & Social Media	Analyze the role of Instagram in destination promotion, image formation, and its influence on the flow of tourists.	Tends to focus on economic and managerial impacts (destination management). Lack of critical analysis of socio-cultural impacts on local communities.	Using a critical lens to look at digital tourism not just as a promotional tool, but as an "arena" of symbolic power that can lead to shifts and reductions in cultural meaning.
Visual Content Analysis on Instagram	Identify visual patterns and themes of user-generated content.	It often stops at the level of content analysis (a description of what exists). Lack of connecting visual findings with the lived experiences and responses	Linking the analysis of visual content (virtual world) with ethnographic studies (field reality). The findings from the VCA will be used as the basis for in-depth interview questions, creating a bridge

		of the communities represented.	between representation and reality.
--	--	---------------------------------	-------------------------------------

Thus, the main novelty of this research lies in the **multidisciplinary integration** that uses critical social theory (Bourdieu) to bridge digital media studies, tourism studies, and cultural heritage studies in one coherent and in-depth analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This research does not lean on a single theory, but rather adopts a multi-perspective approach by integrating several relevant theoretical frameworks to dissect this complex phenomenon.

Pierre Bourdieu's Critical Phenomenology: Arena, Habitus, and Capital

The main framework that overshadows this research is the theory of social practice of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu provides a conceptual tool for understanding how social structures are reproduced and challenged through everyday practice. Its three key concepts will be used as follows:

1. **Arena:** Instagram and Cirebon's tourism ecosystem will be analyzed as an "arena", a social space where various agents (artists, tourists, governments, content creators) compete for position and recognition. In this arena, there are rules of the game (Instagram algorithm, market trends) and stakes that are contested, namely the legal definition of "what is the Cirebon Mask Dance" and who has the right to represent it (Bourdeau, 1993).
2. **Habitus:** This concept refers to a system of dispositions or schemes of perceptions, thoughts, and actions that are ingrained in an individual, which is formed through long experiences in a particular social environment. This study will examine *the habitus* of Cirebon Mask Dance artists. How they view the world, respond to market pressures, and make artistic decisions is a product of their habitus formed in strong cultural traditions. Does this habitus make them resistant, adaptive, or do they give in to commodification? (Bourdeau, 1990).
3. **Capital:** Bourdieu expands the concept of capital from just economics. In this study, **cultural capital** (knowledge and expertise about dance), **social capital** (network between artists and studios), and **symbolic capital** (reputation, authenticity, recognition) are crucial. This research will analyze how these capitals are staked, converted, or even lost in the digital tourism arena.

Using Bourdieu's framework, this research can avoid views that are deterministic (that artists are passive victims) or overly voluntistic (that artists are completely free to create), and instead see their practices as the result of a dialectic between structure (arena) and agency (habitus).

The Theory of Commodification and Simulacra: From Marx to Baudrillard

To understand the process of cultural transformation into merchandise, this study refers to the theory of commodification. Starting from **Karl Marx's** basic concept of the shift of **use value** (e.g., the ritual value of dance) to **exchange value** (economic value or popularity) (Marx, 1887). However, since the object of this research is digital representation, this framework is extended with the **simulacra and simulation** theory of **Jean Baudrillard**. Baudrillard argues that in the era of mass media, we live in a world of "hyperreality" where representations or images (simulacra) become more real than reality itself (Baudrillard, 1994). In this context, the content of the Mask Dance on Instagram can be analyzed as a simulacra. It is no longer a representation of the original dance, but a new reality created for and by the media itself. The question is no longer "is this image authentic?", but "how does it work and what effect does it produce?". Baudrillard's theory allows us to analyze how *Instagram's aesthetic is able* to create a version of the Mask Dance that is separate from its historical and philosophical roots, a "copy without the original".

Authenticity in Cultural Tourism

This research rejects the essentialist view of authenticity as something pure, static, and unchanging. Instead, the study adopts a social constructivist view that sees authenticity as something that is negotiated and attributed [18]. Referring to Wang (1999), this research will distinguish between **objective authenticity** (related to the authenticity of an object/performance based on historical facts) and **existential authenticity** (related to an individual's subjective feeling that they are experiencing something real and meaningful) (Wang, 1999). Thus, this study will examine: (1) How does the artist community define and try to maintain the "objective authenticity" of the Cirebon Mask Dance? (2) How does representation on Instagram create a form of "staged *authenticity*"? (3) Can arriving tourists still achieve "existential authenticity" when their experience has been profoundly mediated by digital imagery?

The Concept of Cultural Resilience

Faced with the pressures of commodification, communities are not always passive victims. The concept **of cultural resilience** is used to analyze the capacity of communities to respond to change and crises in a way that allows them to maintain the core elements of their cultural identity and practices (Unesco, 2017) [26]. Cultural resilience does not mean rejecting change, but about the ability to adapt, innovate, and absorb new elements without losing one's identity. This research will use this concept to identify and analyze the strategies used by the Cirebon Mask Dance artist community, both proactive (e.g., creating counter-narratives on social media) and reactive (e.g., strengthening internal rituals), as a manifestation of their cultural resilience.

METHODS

This research is under the umbrella of a critical qualitative paradigm. This paradigm was chosen because the purpose of the research is not only to understand or describe the phenomenon (what is happening), but also to dismantle the power structures, ideologies, and symbolic domination processes that work behind it (why is it happening and in whose interest?) (Crosswell, 2018). The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings and lived experiences of artists, which cannot be captured through numbers and statistics. Meanwhile, a critical lens allows researchers to analyze how the phenomenon of digital commodification on Instagram is not a neutral process, but rather related to the power dynamics between local culture and global markets. Thus, this research approach is interpretive and emancipatory in nature. Interpretive because it seeks to interpret the meaning behind the visual representations and narratives of the participants. Emancipatory because it aims to empower the artist community through critical understanding and the development of digital literacy strategies.

Research Design: Multi Site Case Study

The design used in this study is a multisite case study. This design was chosen because the object of the research, the Cirebon Mask Dance, exists in two distinct but interrelated "worlds": the physical world in Cirebon and the virtual world on Instagram. Case studies allow for an intensive and in-depth investigation of a phenomenon in its real context (Yin, 2018).

The use of multi-sites allows researchers to perform comparisons and contrasts, as well as track the flow and transformation of cultural meaning as it moves from one site to another.

The site of this research site was deliberately chosen to represent the dialectic polar between authenticity and commodification:

- 1 Authenticity (Physical) Site: Includes traditional dance studios that are considered as the center of inheritance and guardian of the purity of the Cirebon Mask Dance. The main focus is on studios that have a clear lineage of legendary maestros such as Mimi Rasinah or the puppeteer Arja from Slangit Village. On this site, researchers will observe practices that are considered authentic and explore the understanding of the artists from the emic (point of view from the inside).
- 2 Commodification (Virtual) Site: This site is an Instagram platform. The focus is not only on studio accounts, but also on tourism influencer accounts , official local government accounts, and content that appears under popular hashtags such as [#topengcirebon](#), [#cirebonhits](#), and [#wisatacirebon](#). This site became a location to track how the Mask Dance was represented, aestheticized, and consumed by a wider audience.
- 3 Mediation (Physical) Site: encompasses the space where the authentic world and the commodified world meet. Examples are cultural events or festivals sponsored by the government or the private sector, performances in hotels or restaurants, and souvenir centers where masks are sold as souvenirs. On this site, researchers can observe the negotiation and adaptation process firsthand.

By comparing data from these three types of sites, the research can build a strong argument about how the meaning of the Cirebon Mask Dance is transformed as it crosses different contexts.

The research will be carried out in several locations. The physical field research will be centered in Cirebon City and Regency, West Java, with a focus on dance studios, related offices, and performance locations. The virtual research will be conducted on the Instagram platform without geographical restrictions, but with a focus on content relevant to Cirebon. Timing: The study is planned to last for 12 months, starting from March 2025 to February 2026.

Table 3. Visual Content Analysis Matrix (VCA) of Cirebon Mask Dance on Instagram (Summary)

Categories Analysis	Variable	Indicators/Options	Purpose of Critical Analysis
A. Content Identity	Content ID, Account, Date, Type (Photos/Reels)		
B. Primary Visual Elements	1. Dominance of Mask Characters	Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung, Klana, Multi	Measure the representation bias towards more "dramatic" characters.
	2. Costume Completeness	Complete according to package, Minor modifications, Major modifications	Identify the level of simplification or modernization.
C. Contextual Elements	3. Setting/Setting	Traditional Stage, Studio, Modern Stage, Café/Hotel, Nature/Outdoor	Analyzing the decontextualization from the sacred space to the profane space.
	4. Shot Type	Full body shot, Medium shot, Close up, Selfie with dancer	Measuring fragmentation (focus on aesthetic detail vs. motion wholeness).
D. Narrative Elements	5. Accompaniment Music	Live Music, Recorded Music, Music Remix/Pop, No Music	Analyze the shift from authentic accompaniment to trending music.
	6. Caption Analysis	Educational (explaining meaning), Promotional, Personal/Entertainment	Identify whether philosophical narratives are being conveyed or ignored.
E. Critical Assessment	7. Level of Authenticity (Score 1 5)	Using the Rubric (Table 4)	Assess in aggregate the extent to which content deviates from the package.
	8. Potential for Commodification	Low, Medium, High	Assess the potential of content to be reduced to a visual commodity.

Table 4. Visual Content Authenticity Assessment Rubric (Scale 1 5)

Score	Description of Criteria
5 (Very Authentic)	Showing an entire performance or a fragment that is clearly in context. All elements (costumes, music, movements) are according to the package. Captions are educational and explain philosophical meanings. Recorded in the context of the proper performance (customs/studios).
4 (Authentic)	Most of the elements are as per the package, there may be minor modifications to the costumes or music. The context of the show is clear. Captions provide basic information about the dance.
3 (Hybrid)	There is a mix of authentic and modern elements. For example, traditional movements with remix music, or costumes in irrelevant locations (cafes). The philosophical narrative begins to disappear.
2 (Reduced)	The main focus is on visual aesthetics. Movements are only taken in the most interesting fractions. The costumes are significantly modified. Music is irrelevant. The context of the show is missing.
1 (Highly Reduced/ Full Commodification)	Dances or masks are used only as aesthetic properties (e.g., models wearing masks in fashion fashion, selfies with dancers without context). There is no narrative or cultural value left.

DISCUSSION

The object of this research is content related to the Cirebon Mask Dance uploaded on the Instagram social media platform. The main focus of digital observation was on accounts that actively promote Cirebon tourism and culture, with an emphasis on popular content creator accounts such as **@daboribo** and **traditional dance studio accounts @sanggar_topeng_mimi_rasinah**. In addition, the observation also targets other accounts relevant to Cirebon tourism to gain a comprehensive understanding. The research informants consisted of content creators, Mask Dance artists, cultural experts, and representatives from local tourism offices who were selected based on their involvement and expertise in Cirebon's cultural and tourism ecosystem.

The Transformation of Sacralitas into Popular Aesthetics: A Form of Commodification of Cirebon Mask Dance Culture on Instagram

Observations on Instagram content show a shift in the presentation of the Cirebon Mask Dance from a ritual full of philosophical and sacred values to an aesthetic product that is popular and easy to consume by digital audiences. This form of commodification can be identified in several aspects:

Simplification of Dance Movements and Duration

The content that gets the most engagement is the short videos (Reels) that show the most iconic and energetic pieces of the Mask Dance movements. The duration of the dance that could have lasted for a long time was condensed to 15-60 seconds. A content creator, let's call it Budi (not his real name), in an interview stated:

"If you want to go viral, you have to follow the trend. The music uses the ones that are hits, the movements choose the most 'wow', not the slow ones. The duration should also not be long, later people will get bored and immediately scroll. The important thing is that people know that Cirebon has a Mask Dance."

This quote indicates an awareness of adapting content to suit Instagram's algorithms and audience preferences, where speed and instant visual appeal are top priorities, putting aside the wholeness and depth of the dance narrative.

Modernization of Costumes and Makeup

Some of the content features dancers in modified costumes. For example, the use of shinier fabrics, the addition of modern accessories, or makeup that is more glamorous and does not completely follow traditional customs. An upload from a local tourism account shows a model wearing a Panji mask with a modern dress, accompanied by a caption that invites tourists to "feel the sensation of being a Cirebon noble". This phenomenon shows that there is an effort to make the Mask Dance more relevant to contemporary fashion tastes, although it risks reducing its authenticity.

Recontextualization: From Ritual to Entertainment

The context of the Mask Dance performance in Instagram uploads is often released from the roots of the ritual. This dance is performed in modern cafes, shopping malls, or as a backdrop for product promotions. This changes the audience's perception from dancing as part of a traditional ceremony to simply entertainment or tourist attractions. The dance maestro, let's call her Ibu Sinta (not her real name), expressed her concerns:

"Masks are not just property, every mask has a life, has a character, has a story. If it is danced in any place, without understanding its meaning, it loses its spirit. So it's just an ordinary spectacle, even though this is a guideline."

The Impact of Commodification Ambiguity: Between Popularity and Value Degradation

The commodification of the Cirebon Mask Dance on Instagram has an ambiguous impact. On the one hand, it has succeeded in increasing popularity and public awareness, but on the other hand, it has the potential to degrade the noble values it contains.

1. **Increased Visibility and Interest of Tourists.** Representatives from the tourism office acknowledged that promotion through Instagram, especially by content creators, significantly increases the interest of tourists to visit Cirebon and seek cultural experiences, including watching Mask Dance performances. Viral content often sparks the audience's curiosity to see the dance live.
2. **Potential Degradation of Philosophical Meaning.** The cultural experts interviewed highlighted the risk of shallowness of meaning. When the Mask Dance is only shown as a fragment of an interesting visual fragment without a complete narrative regarding the philosophy behind each mask (Panji, Samba, Rummyang, Tumenggung, and Kelana), the audience only gains a superficial understanding. They may be impressed by its visual

beauty, but they lose the essence of the story about the human life cycle that is at the heart of the dance.

Knitting Balance: The Direction of a Conservation-Based Promotion Strategy

From the analysis of the findings, several ideas emerged regarding strategies that can balance the need for tourism promotion with the urgency of cultural preservation.

1. **Collaboration between Content Creators and Artists/Cultural Experts.** The informants suggested the need for a communication bridge between content creators and dance maestros and cultural experts. Content creators have expertise in packaging engaging content, while artists have a deep understanding of dance philosophy and practices. This collaboration is expected to produce content that is not only visually appealing, but also rich in educational value.
2. **Utilization of Instagram Feature for Education.** The proposed strategy is to make the most of Instagram's feature features to provide context. For example, using the *caption* feature to tell a brief history or philosophical meaning of the movement or mask being displayed. The *Instagram Live* feature can be used for discussion sessions with artists, and *Guides* can be used to create curated educational content about the Cirebon Mask Dance. Thus, promotion does not only stop at the surface level, but also touches on the deeper aspects of knowledge.

Table 4.1. Projected Results of Visual Content Analysis (VCA) on Instagram (N=500)

Categories Analysis	Variable	Projection Results	Critical Interpretation
Dominance of Character	Distribution of Mask Emergence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Klana (45%) 2. Tumenggung (20%) 3. Samba (15%) 4. Rummyang (12%) 5. Banner (8%) 	Narrative Dramatization & Reduction: The expressive and "evil" characters of Klana are visually more appealing to algorithms and audiences, sacrificing the narrative of the entire life cycle that begins with the holy Banner.
Context of the Show	Setting/Setting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Modern Cafes/Hotels/Stages (55%) 2. Selfies/Photo Properties (25%) 3. Traditional Stage/Studio (15%) 4. Ritual Context (5%) 	Decontextualization: Dance is uprooted from its ritual and cultural roots, moved to a profane space of consumption (tourism). It becomes the aesthetic background, not the main event.

Categories Analysis	Variable	Projection Results	Critical Interpretation
Visual Fragmentation	Shot Type	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Close up of Face/Mask (40%) 2. Medium Shot (30%) 3. Selfie with Dancer (20%) 4. Full body Shot (10%) 	Focus on Aesthetics, Not Movement: The dominance of close-up shots suggests that masks as visual objects are more important than dance as a movement art. The integrity of the choreography is lost.
Narrative Text	Caption Analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promotional/Invite (60%) 2. Personal/Self-Expression (25%) 3. Educational (Explaining Meaning) (10%) 4. No Context (5%) 	Emptiness of Meaning: The majority of captions only serve as advertisements or personal expressions, very few attempt to explain the philosophical value behind dance.
Authenticity Assessment	Average Score (Scale 1 5)	2.1 (Reduced)	In aggregate, the representation of Mask Dance on Instagram tends to be highly reduced, closer to a visual commodity than cultural documentation.

The above findings, when synthesized, paint a complex picture of the dialectic between authenticity and commodification. This is not a simple story about a "noble culture" being destroyed by the "evil market". Instead, it's a dynamic battle in an arena where the rules are constantly changing, where each actor fights with the capital he has.

First, Instagram's digital tourism arena is inherently not a neutral arena. Its algorithm that prioritizes engagement (likes, comments, shares) indirectly rewards the most dramatic, simplest, and most visually digestible content. This creates a symbolic violence: artists feel "forced" to conform to this logic if they want to remain relevant and visible. Commodified representations (dominant Klana, fragmented dances) become "doxa" or truths that are taken for granted in this arena, while authentic representations (meditative banners, life cycle narratives) become marginalized.

Second, the response of the artists is not monolithic. The three typologies of habitus (purist, pragmatic, innovator) show that human agency still plays an important role. Habitus puris, while noble in its intentions, runs the risk of becoming irrelevant and isolated. The pragmatic habitus, while allowing economic sustainability, is slowly eroding authenticity and reinforcing the doxa of commodification. It is the critical innovator's habitus that shows the greatest potential for cultural resilience. They don't reject the digital arena, but try to play it by their own rules. They are examples of what Bourdieu calls intelligent "gamers", who understand the

logic of the arena but are not completely subservient to it (Bourdieu, 1990). They seek to accumulate digital capital to protect and promote their cultural capital.

Third, this dialectic ultimately has an impact on the audience. When commodified representations dominate, they form a cycle of detrimental perception. Tourists come with superficial expectations, the tourism industry responds by providing superficial products, and artists (especially pragmatic ones) feel pressured to meet those demands. This is a feedback loop that, if not broken, has the potential to empty the Cirebon Mask Dance from its core meaning, leaving a beautiful but empty aesthetic shell.

Thus, this study projects that the solution to this problem does not lie in a total rejection of tourism or social media, nor in a total surrender to the logic of the market. The solution lies in strengthening the habitus of critical innovators and the creation of interventions that can change the rules of the game in the digital arena.

CONCLUSION

This research is projected to produce three main conclusions that directly answer the formulation of the problem:

- 1 The process of visual commodification of the Cirebon Mask Dance on Instagram occurs systematically through the mechanisms of dramatization, decontextualization, and fragmentation. The algorithmic logic and aesthetics of platforms inherently favor simple and dramatic representations (such as the Klan mask) over intact and complex cultural narratives. This creates a digital version of the Mask Dance that is separate from its philosophical and ritual roots, a simulacra that lives within the social media ecosystem.
- 2 The Cirebon Mask Dance artist community does not respond to digital commodification uniformly, but rather shows three different habitus typologies: purist resistance, pragmatic adaptation, and critical innovation. This response is determined not only by age factors, but also by their position in the cultural arena and their mastery of capital (cultural, economic, digital). The habitus of critical innovation, embraced by a small percentage of young artists, emerged as the most promising form of cultural resilience because it did not reject modernity, but sought to conquer it from within.

- 3 The dominance of commodified representations on Instagram significantly contributes to the reduction of meaning and the shallowness of the traveler experience. Tourists whose exposure is dominated by social media tend to seek aesthetic confirmation rather than cultural understanding, creating a surface-oriented tourism demand and supply cycle. This threatens the long-term sustainability of the core values contained in the Cirebon Mask Dance.

Overall, the dialectic between authenticity and digital commodification is not a binary battle, but rather a complex negotiation in the arena of symbolic power. Without conscious and planned interventions, the power of digital markets tends to dominate and reduce cultural heritage to superficial visual commodities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. (2021). Cirebon Mask Dance, a Traditional Dance Rich in Philosophical Value. Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia.
- Cirebon City Government. (n.d.). Cirebon Mask. Official Website of the Cirebon City Government.
- Grammar. (n.d.). History and Origin of Mask Dance: Typical Dance of Cirebon. Gramedia Blog.
- University of Indonesia Library. (2019). Sanija: The Puppeteer Behind the Mask The Existence of the Cirebon Mask Mastermind in the Mapag Traditional Ceremony. UI Library.
- Kalbis Institute Research. (n.d.). A Study of the Function of Cirebon Masks. research.kalbis.ac.id.
- Coils. (2023). 4 Cirebon Tourist Attractions that Are More Hits and Contemporary. kumparan.com.
- Bronsvoort, I. (2022). "Seeing the street through Instagram. Digital Platforms and the Commodification of Culture." *Urban Studies*, 59(15).
- Ali, A. (2023). "Commodification of Culture, the Frankfurt School and Instagram." *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Marx, K. (1887). *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I. Progress Publishers.
- ResearchGate. (2020). The Transformation of Topeng Panji of Cirebon Dance from Being Part of Traditional Ceremony into a Dance Performed for Entertainment.

- Hernawo, T. (2025). "Commodification and Participatory Culture of Social Media in Digital Communication Strategies." *Indonesian Journal of Communication Sciences*, 4(1), 54-66.
- Febrianda, P.A. (2025). "Cultural Commodification in the TikTok Challenge as an Identity Representation Strategy in the Social Media Era." *University 17 August 1945 Repository*.
- Hermayani, A. (2025). "Cultural Commodification in Media and Its Challenges." *Diksima*, 2, 20
- Ali, A. (2023). "Commodification of Culture, the Frankfurt School and Instagram." *SSRN Electronic Journal*.
- Ulil Albab Institute. (n.d.). *The Utilization of Instagram as a Tourism Information Media on @hutanpinuslimpakuwuss Account*.
- Falk, M.T., & Hagsten, E. (2021). "Visitor Flows to World Heritage Sites in the Era of Instagram." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(2-3), 436-451.
- Foroughi, M., et al. (2023). "Capturing Public Voices: The Role of Social Media in Heritage Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 99, 103539.
- Cohen, E. (1988). "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15(3), 371-386.
- Wegerer, P. (2021). *Visual Content Analysis of Instagram Posts: The Case of an Alpine Destination*. University of Massachusetts Amherst.
- Loke, T. (2022). "Heritage Site Seeing Through the Visitor's Lens on Instagram." *Cultural Analytics*, 7(3).
- Molin, L.U. (2025). "How Instagram Shapes Visitors' Relation to Wild Places." *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.
- Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The Field of Cultural Production*. Columbia University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Wang, N. (1999). "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience." *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(2), 349-370.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Cultural Resilience: The Concept and its Application in the Context of the 2003 Convention*.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. Sage Publications.

Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined*. Sage Publications.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77, 101.