



Aesthetic Transformation of Javanese *Wayang* Performances in the Digital Era

Sunardi Sunardi^{1✉}, Putri Ananda Saka², Katarina Indah Sulastuti¹, Aton Rustandi Mulyana¹, Isa Ansari¹, Wahyu Novianto¹, Kiswanto Kiswanto¹, Renaldi Lestianto Utomo Putro¹

¹Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how technological advancements have transformed the aesthetics of *wayang* performances in Java. Data collection methods include observations of *wayang* performances, interviews, literature reviews, and internet searches to capture the aesthetic transformation of *wayang* performances in the digital age. Given the existing literature's tendency to discuss *wayang* performances within a limited scope, this research provides a more comprehensive contribution by positioning *wayang* performances as an integrated entity encompassing *dalang* creativity and audience response. Through the analysis of diverse *wayang* performances, the study demonstrates that aesthetic transformation is evidenced by the *dalang*'s hybrid presentation techniques, the emergence of novel story repertoires, and increased audience engagement. Significant findings from this study include the growth of *dalang*'s creative and adaptive capabilities, enhanced interpretative approaches in composing *wayang* stories, and the audience's influence in shaping mass aesthetic trends. This study provides important contributions to the *pedalangan* (puppetry) and the relations of *wayang*, *dalang*, audience, and technology. Furthermore, this study contributes to the academic discourse on cultural adaptation in the digital age and provides pragmatic resources for the artistic development of Javanese puppetry.

Keywords: aesthetic transformation; wayang performance; dalang; digital era

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INTRODUCTION

In the last five years, information technology changes have impacted how *wayang* performances are done in Java. Multiple media reports highlight the dynamic adaptation of *wayang* (traditional puppetry) to contemporary times (Asrori, 2021; Gandhawangi, 2021; Putri, 2024). Maintaining the sustainability of *wayang*

performances requires creativity and adaptability from *dalang* (puppet masters). One example of technological adaptation within the *wayang* realm is the digitalization of thousands of *wayang kulit* by the Yogyakarta Palace (Herman, 2019).

In relation to practice, there has been a shift in performance from purely offline ways to an integration of both offline and online elements, thus enabling *dalang* to

✉ Corresponding author:
E-mail: gunowijoyo@gmail.com

enhance their professional and economic visibility. This change can be seen in the movement “*Dalang Go Digital*,” which aims to support the digitalization of productions, performers, scripts, documents concerning *wayang*, artifacts, and meta-information (Cakti 2024).

Wayang is now presented in digital spaces accessible to the public via the internet. These changes in *wayang* performances are a response to sociocultural transformations within society (Soetarno, 2016). Consequently, the aesthetic transformation of *wayang* performances in Java is inevitable in addressing contemporary challenges and ensuring continuity.

To date, studies discussing the aesthetic transformation of Javanese *wayang* performances in the digital era have not been comprehensive. The perspectives used to discuss *wayang* performances remain general. Some studies have focused solely on *wayang* performance events, while research on the digitalization and presence of *wayang* performances on YouTube is limited. First, studies on transformation in *wayang* performances indicate changes in artistic design and storytelling. Additionally, transformation is seen as an implication of *wayang*’s role in mitigating social conflict and social issues, driven by the creativity of the *dalang* (Sunardi et al., 2023; literature studies about virtual *wayang*, and observations of *wayang* virtual performances by puppeteers were analyzed by aesthetic theory. The study results showed that puppeteers used digital platforms to maintain their profession’s continuity and economic living conditions. The tendency of virtual *wayang* to give rise to an aesthetic style of digital puppets is known as aesthetics of taste, with the orientation of *wayang* performance to meet public tastes. The conclusion results state that the aesthetic style of the virtual *wayang* performance: (1Putra et al., 2019; Dwi Susilo et al., 2021). Second, studies on *wayang* performances on social media platforms began with the performances of Seno Nugroho. Digital platforms are used for *wayang* development in Singapore and

are relevant to a modern audience. *Wayang* has the potential to become a creative industry for cultural tourism (Windarsih, 2021; Rall & Harper, 2023; Masunah et al., 2021). Third, studies on audience reception of *wayang* through YouTube focus more on their passive attitude (Romadona, 2019; Gono & Rakhmad, 2021; Sari, 2021). From various literature reviews, it is evident that a comprehensive discussion of the aesthetic transformation of Javanese *wayang* performances in the digital era has yet to be thoroughly explored, encompassing changes in performance form, story creation, and audience reception.

This paper aims to address the gaps in previous studies that have not comprehensively revealed the aesthetic changes in *wayang* performances due to advancements in information technology. Therefore, three key aspects will be examined: First, the emergence of tendencies among *dalang* to perform *wayang* using hybrid media (offline-online) through social media. Second, the creation and innovation of new *lakon* (stories) as a form of change in traditional *pedalangan* (puppetry) conventions. Third, the change in audience reception that can shape the aesthetic character of *wayang* performances in Java over the past five years. Analysis of these three aspects can comprehensively reveal the reasons behind the aesthetic transformation of *wayang* performances in Java. Additionally, this study aims to contribute thoughts on strategies for preserving and developing the Indonesian *wayang*.

This paper is predicated on the argument that technological advancements impact the vitality of *wayang* performances in Java, necessitating *dalang* to be responsive and adaptive in creating new opportunities by innovating *wayang* performances based on contemporary paradigms. The *wayang* performances have been altered by incorporating digital media as a new channel. Puppet theatre creators develop new narratives rooted in societal concerns, while retaining elements of classical puppetry. Viewers can appreciate *wayang* performances with diverse offerings at

any time or place. Therefore, the aesthetic shift of *wayang* performances due to digital technology marks a culturally constructive development for Indonesia's culture.

Aesthetic Transformation

Aesthetic transformation is the progressive change in the perception, appreciation, and creation of beauty in culture and art throughout history (Twardzik Ching, 2023). It includes the evolution of styles, techniques, and aesthetic values shaped by certain social, cultural, technological, and personal factors (Rollins, 2020). Winet (2010) notes that the value of *wayang*'s public entertainment has been subjected to an aesthetic transformation. Technology brought instant entertainment through radio, television, and the internet. As a result, there has been a decline in *wayang* aesthetics, interest, and audience. This forces artists to innovate constantly (Achmad et al., 2020). Nonetheless, these artistic innovations are too often not accepted but rather condemned for perceived societal transgressions because they challenge prevailing norms and systems. The greater availability of appealing digital television and internet options adversely affects the income of *wayang* performers living in Java whose livelihoods depend on *wayang* performances (Ferretti & Festa, 2019).

Wayang performances can be analyzed regarding their aesthetic transformation from two angles. First of all, this alteration is meant to sustain *wayang*'s existence in the face modernity (Ruastiti et al., 2021). As well, these transformations mark a shift in social phenomena for conveying ideas through virtual performance (Wibawa, 2024). The traditional *wayang* performer Yan Soon Lim (2017) explains that the vocabulary and linguistic structure used in *wayang* is vernacular dialect makes it almost impossible to understand for many youths today. Because of this, change is necessary so that the message aligns with contemporary reality. Yan et al (2021) explain that the goal of *wayang*'s aesthetics transformation is not only safeguarding culture but responding to changing au-

dienc needs infact embracing them. For example, as Lazuardi et al., (2020) states, modern technologies such as telecommunications and other audiovisual tools can now be employed to enhance audience participation and transform their experience into one which is far more entertaining than passive engagement. Therefore, *wayang* practitioners also need to embrace modernization while striving to uphold authenticity without losing originality; both must find balance.

Wayang Performance

Wayang was initially designed to serve as a shadow show for religious and magical purposes, to honor and seek ancestral blessings. This practice mirrors the worldview of the Javanese people, especially their connection with the spirit world (Sunardi et al., 2023). Dewanggi et al (2019) argue that reading *wayang* stories is less engaging than watching *wayang* performances, showcasing the enduring charm that is difficult to replicate using other forms of media. The visual and narrative impact of *wayang* possesses undeniable strength, contributing to an unforgettable experience for the audience and thus setting Javanese culture apart from other cultures (Varela, 2014). Essentially, the performing stages of *wayang* express mystico-religious ideas that represent human life's cyclical journey of living and dying, symbolized in the *wayang*'s form and structure (Isnaniah, 2019). Accompanying traditional music played during performances features simple, minimalist compositions, which may appear dull to outsiders. However, the atmosphere accentuated by this simplicity helps create a magical aura that enhances these performances' sacredness (Santoso et al., 2023).

In addition to providing entertainment value *wayang* serves as a mode for conveying educational content and moral lessons. As technology progresses, *wayang* has moved further from its traditional practice to the digital space (Varela, 2014). This puts pressure on *wayang* performers to invent new adaptations based on origi-

nal *wayang* stories that appeal to modern audiences (Ruastiti et al., 2021). In achieving this goal, a number of different disciplines are combined into one to create hybrid theatrical performances that are more innovative and hence capture the interest of the audience (Santoso et al., 2023). Instead of merely being passive spectators with no role in shaping the performance, audiences now have to actively participate in imaginative interpretation to decipher deeper meanings associated with the given messages. The dynamic nature of evocative interactivity enriches performances (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Webb et al., 2016). Nonetheless, transformations done on *wayang* tend to be resisted by people because they are viewed as deviating from the customary boundaries and frameworks (Wibawa, 2024). Therefore, such aesthetic shifts introduce multiplicity into how societal responses interpret and perceive *wayang*.

Digital Era

The development of technology has advanced humans into the digital age, a section of humanity shaped by innovations in diverse domains, which enable people to perform activities through technology (Amos Avny, 2019). During this period, people tend to shift towards a more modern technological lifestyle and rely deeply on complex gadgets (Karlekar, 2017).

The capabilities and development of digitalization in Indonesia, driven by the digital era, have enabled society to access information more rapidly through diverse channels, allowing for unrestricted engagement with digital technology (Benwell et al., 2012). Some older technologies are inevitably displaced as new technologies emerge in the digital era. Concurrently, the digital era has introduced numerous changes with both positive and negative implications, creating novel challenges in contemporary human existence (Keane, 2019). In the context of art, the digital era has significantly influenced *wayang* performances.

The digital transformation, which

was previously gradual, accelerated during the pandemic when all activities became reliant on digital platforms. Traditional *wayang* has been particularly affected, as performance venues had previously been the sole medium for staging (Willems, 2016). Digital transformation has become inevitable, even for traditional *wayang* artists. The concern regarding the complete digitalization of *wayang* art stems from the potential risks of physical damage to the puppets (Michelle et al., 2012). The ethics and aesthetics surrounding their preservation as cherished cultural artifacts need to be treated respectfully and maintained (Wibawa, 2024). Additionally, outside self-driven obstacles or conflicts, there is a wide range of opposing concerns around digitalization (Erandaru, 2013). Society widely fears that due to oversimplified accessibility, digitalization may devalue *wayang*, leading to a contravention of the ethical boundaries associated with this art form. As Murtana et al. (2020) described, *wayang* carries sacred values and commands respect as a valued cultural treasure. Despite the hurdles in either direction, aesthetic change through digital methods remains a core requirement for sustaining and evolving this traditional art form.

METHOD

This research concentrates on the *dalang*, *wayang* performances, and the audience. The puppet masters or *dalangs* serve as the primary performers of *wayang*. A *wayang* performance is a story delivered through puppets by the *dalang*, accompanied by gending music played by a gamelan ensemble, known as *karawitan*. The audience comprises individuals who attend these performances. These three components – *dalang*, *wayang* performances, and audience – are selected as units of analysis since they are the core part of the *wayang* tradition. For this study, some prominent *dalang* from Java were selected and researched, along with their performances of *wayangs* captured on digital platforms or at community events. Two groups were rep-

resented, encompassing broad categories of audiences: people attending live performances and those interacting with *wayang* through social media streams. These five transformative creative innovators shape a heavily influenced, active digital *wayang* presentation scene. Certainly, this sampling of twenty audience members has its concerns.

This study employs a qualitative method, specifically a case study of 5 *wayang* performances by five popular *dalangs* in Java and 20 *wayang* audiences. The case study was chosen due to the need for in-depth information related to the creation of hybrid *wayang* performance forms, the development of new *wayang* plays, and the responses of *wayang* audiences. In this way, it is also expected to provide a basis for analysis regarding the occurrence of aesthetic transformations in *wayang* performances.

The cases used were selected from the population of popular *dalangs* in the Central Java region, who presented *wayang* performances through live performances or on social media. The *wayang* performances were selected from plays that had a nuance of novelty from the *dalangs'* performances. The audience was selected by observing the *wayang* performance or through social media.

The research data sources include interview results, audiovisual materials, the internet, and libraries. Interview data is used to analyze the *dalangs'* creative process in *wayang* performances, in addition to obtaining testimonies from *wayang* audiences. Audiovisual data is used to find out the results of *wayang* performances and audience responses. Internet data is used to enrich the literature and find out about *wayang* performances. Library data is useful for strengthening research arguments. Various data sources are grouped by subject matter and analyzed in depth.

Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, literature studies, and internet searches—observations to get an overview of the puppet show performed by the *dalangs*. Observations were

made by visiting the field to observe the puppet show and the audience. Interviews were conducted directly with the *dalangs'* sources. In-depth interviews were conducted with five *dalangs* and 20 puppet audiences. Interviews with *dalangs* are to gather information about the reasons for presenting hybrid puppet shows and the motivations behind composing new plays. Conduct interviews with the audience to gather data on their perceptions of the hybrid puppet show model.

Literature studies are conducted to track literature related to the main points of discussion in this study. Literature studies were conducted by visiting libraries or reading various digital literature relevant to the research. Conduct internet searches to gather data on online puppet shows and audience responses in the digital realm. The internet search method involved browsing various websites and pages using the Google search engine.

The data analysis of this study uses an interactive model from Miles & Huberman (1992). The collected data were analyzed through three sequential steps, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction is intended as a way to sort and select data that is very urgent to be carried out continuously, especially related to data on *dalangs*, puppet shows, and audiences. Data presentation is a follow-up step, where data is presented in the form of images, tables, and narratives regarding puppet shows, *dalangs*, and audiences. The final step is drawing conclusions through the verification of field data and literature, which is carried out continuously until a final conclusion is reached that the researcher believes in.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of *Wayang* Performances by *Dalang*: From Offline to Hybrid

Wayang performances, a popular form of art among the Javanese community, have evolved over time. Contextually, *wayang* performances have shifted from

ritualistic purposes to pragmatic functions within Javanese society. Textually, *wayang* performances have adapted to align with contemporary dynamics. Initially, *dalangs* performed *wayang* live during community events in Java. With technological advancements, *dalangs* have increasingly adopted hybrid performances, combining live shows with streaming on YouTube or other social media platforms. The format of *wayang* performances has been creatively adapted to fit these new media without abandoning their traditional aesthetics. Thus, there has been a transformation in *wayang* performances by *dalangs* in Java, incorporating social media platforms to maintain the existence of *wayang*.

Table 1 shows that the puppet masters have transformed Javanese *wayang* performances from purely offline to hybrid formats. Hybrid *wayang* performances offer several advantages for *dalang* and have positive implications for audiences. Before the disruption by digital technology, *wayang* performances were conventionally held live, with *dalangs* performing in front of local communities at specific times, either briefly or overnight. Today, *wayang* performances also take place in digital spaces. In addition to live performances, *wayang* is simultaneously broadcast live on digital platforms. Consequently, the hybrid *wayang* allows for repeated viewings without time and place restrictions and reaches a broader audience.

The puppet masters believe that the transformation of *wayang* performances has significantly impacted the development of *wayang* and the sustainability of their profession. The world of *wayang* has become more vibrant and varied with the advent of information technology. *Dalang* benefits from additional income generated through digital media. The transformation of *wayang* performances by *dalang* is indicated by four factors. First, there has been a shift from conventional media to digital media. Second, most popular puppet masters in Java now have YouTube accounts and act as YouTubers for branding, marketing, and increasing their economic in-





come. Third, the number of *dalang* crews has significantly increased, including musicians and singers, as well as creative teams for digital media production. Fourth, there has been an aesthetic change in *wayang* performances, emphasizing the power of cameras and the quality of digital *wayang* broadcasts. Therefore, the transformation of *wayang* performance formats by *dalang* in Java strengthens the preservation and development of Indonesian *wayang*.

Transformation of Pakem Pedalangan: Emergence of New Story Creations

Pakem pedalangan or puppetry conventions represent the traditional story guidelines that Javanese *dalang* adhere to as a reference source for *wayang* performances. These guidelines have evolved to meet the needs of different puppet masters. The digital era presents challenges for *dalang* in adhering to the canon. Some puppet masters perform *wayang* strictly according to the traditional canon, while others create entirely new stories. Since *wayang* has appeared on YouTube channels, numerous new *wayang* stories have emerged, showcasing the creativity of Javanese *dalang*. These new story creations include adaptations that merely change the titles of traditional stories as well as the creation of entirely new stories. Thus, *dalangs* can present performances based on both conventional canons and new creations.

Table 2 demonstrates that the puppet masters create new *wayang* stories with fresh nuances while still performing conventional canonical stories. For example, Purbo Asmoro and Cahyo Kuntadi have presented new creations titled *Ken Arok* and *Syeh Subakir Numbali Tanah Jawa*, respectively. These new creations are entirely original, not based on conventional stories. In contrast, puppet masters like Sigid Arianto, Anom Dwijo Kangko, and MPP Bayu Aji present new stories that primarily involve title changes while retaining similarities with conventional narratives. Examples include *Hasthabrata*, transformed from the story *Wahyu Makutharama*; *Sumilaking Pedhut Wiratha*, transformed

Table 1. Transformation of *Wayang* Performance Media

<i>Dalang</i>	<i>Past (Luring)</i>	<i>Present (Hybrid)</i>
		
Purbo Asmoro	Offline <i>wayang</i> performances	QR: Hybrid <i>wayang</i> performances, Purbo Asmoro
		
MPP Bayu Aji	Offline <i>wayang</i> performances	QR: Hybrid <i>wayang</i> performances, MPP Bayu Aji
		
Sigid Arianto	Offline <i>wayang</i> performances	QR: Hybrid <i>wayang</i> performances, Sigid Arianto
		
Anom Dwijo Kangko	Offline <i>wayang</i> performances	QR: Hybrid <i>wayang</i> performances, Anom, Dwijo Kangko
		
Cahyo Kuntadi	Offline <i>wayang</i> performances	QR: Hybrid <i>wayang</i> performances, Cahyo Kuntadi

Source: Data processed by author, 2024

Table 2. Types of *Wayang* Stories Presented by *Dalang*

<i>Dalang</i>	Conventional Canon	New Creations
Purbo Asmoro	Kresna Duta Pandhu Swarga Kuntul Wilanten Laire Wisanggeni Babad Wanamarta	Ken Arok Dumadine Senjata Cakra Tamba Teka Lara Lunga Dumadine Jeneng Dina Jawa Laire Kresna
MPP Bayu Aji	Anoman Duta Wahyu Purbo Sejati Kresna Duta Wisanggeni Lahir Wiratha Parwa	Pandhawa Mbangun Praja Kembang Slaga Rahina Sudara Manik Bargawa Mendhita Semar Nata Rasa
Sigid Arianto	Wahyu Cakraningrat Sesaji Raja Suya Pandhu Swarga Parta Krama Rama Tambak	Kakrasana Kridha Semar Mbangun Desa Wahyu Sandhang Pangan Petruk Kembar Wahyu Kamulyan
Anom Dwijo Kangko	Wirata Parwa Dewa Amral Wahyu Topeng Waja Semar Mbangun Kahyangan Bima Suci	Sumilaking Pedhut Wiratha Aji Pancasunya Sirnaning Angkara Murka Jamus Kalimasada Sengkuni Beset
Cahyo Kuntadi	Dewa Ruci Mustakawena Sesaji Raja Suya Semar Mbangun Kahyangan Parta Krama	Syeh Subakir Numbali Tanah Jawa Pandhawa Laku Darma Bagong Dadi Guru Jangka Jayabaya Adeging Kasultanan Demak Bintara

Source: Data processed by author, 2024

from *Wiratha Parwa*; and *Pandhawa Mbangun Praja*, transformed from *Pandhawa Kumpul*.

Based on Table 2, it is evident that the aesthetics of *wayang* stories have evolved from conventional forms to new creations. This transformation can be identified through four tendencies. First, conventional stories have not been entirely abandoned by *dalang*. Second, many puppet masters have altered conventional stories mainly by changing the titles while maintaining the core substance. Third, some puppet masters have fully transformed the stories by creating entirely new repertoires, sometimes diverging significantly from the conventions. Fourth, the criteria for aesthetic success have shifted from the *dalang's* ability to carry traditional puppet-

ry to aligning with contemporary audience tastes and the digital era's developments. Therefore, the aesthetic transformation of *wayang* stories has fostered *dalangs'* creativity, expanded the repertoire of new *wayang* stories, represented current issues in real life, and enriched the *wayang* stories for the Javanese community.

Transformation of Audience Reception: Emergence of Mass Taste Aesthetics

Audience reception is their response to the puppet show. Audience reception has a significant impact on the success of the puppet show for the *dalangs*. The audience determines the aesthetic trend of the puppet show in Java, resulting in a tendency for aesthetic colors based on mass tastes. The typology of the puppet audience con-

sists of two groups: those who are directly at the performance venue and those who enjoy the performance through YouTube channels and other social media.

Table 3 demonstrates the shift in how audiences watch *wayang* performances. Viewers no longer need to attend performances in person; instead, a significant number of audiences now prefer to watch through YouTube channels and other social media platforms. The traditional *wayang* required audiences to be physically present at the performance venue. However, with the advancement of social media technology, *wayang* has begun to occupy virtual spaces, accessible to viewers without the constraints of time and place. Audiences can enjoy *wayang* presentations while engaging in other activities, becoming consumers who influence the aesthetic patterns of *wayang* performances.

Audiences have various views regarding hybrid *wayang* performances. Conservative audiences consider full offline *wayang* performances to have high aesthetic power and sacredness. They are an integral part of the *wayang* performance, and they can directly experience the atmosphere. Progressive audiences are more interested in *wayang* performances that can adapt to their era. They view hybrid *wayang* performances as a new offer for today's technological advances.

Based on Table 3, it is evident that the behavior of *wayang* audiences in Java has undergone significant changes. In the perspective of audience theory, the audience has influence in the mass communication process, starting from choosing media, interpreting messages, and using media to achieve goals (Imran, 2013) progressive inflammatory disease that typically affects one cerebral hemisphere and causes intractable partial-onset seizures. Currently, the only effective therapy is hemispherectomy; however, this procedure is associated with irreversible neurological deficits. Novel therapeutic approaches to this condition are therefore necessary. One possible option that has not yet been extensively studied is electrical cathodal

transcranial direct current stimulation (cTDCS). Audience reception can be identified through four key points. First, the trend shows that the number of viewers on YouTube channels often exceeds the number of those attending in person. Second, those attending in person have various motivations, such as appreciating the *dalang*, fulfilling invitations, or supporting the *dalang* due to personal connections. Third, viewers on YouTube and other social media have the flexibility to choose which *dalang* or performance to watch and can switch their choices at any time according to their preferences and mood. Fourth, the audience reception can shape new trends in puppetry aesthetics, known as mass taste aesthetics. This places the audience as primary sculptors of new aesthetic developments in *wayang* performances during the digital period.

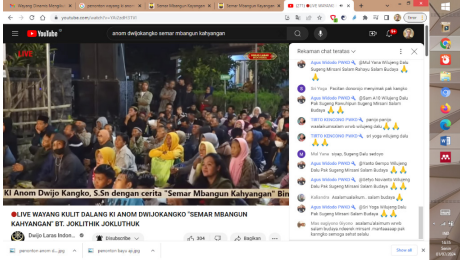

Javanese *Wayang* Performance in the Digital Era: An Aesthetic Transformation

The research conducted regarding the aesthetic change of *wayang* performances due to digital technological developments yielded three important conclusions. First, the transformation is marked by an increase in value for *dalangs* from shift to fully offline hybrid performances. Second, the transformation of conventions in puppetry has given rise to new plots or stories, adding richness to *wayangs* repertoire. Third, access and engagement methods have broadened, enabling audiences to participate actively in *wayang* performances. A Javanese *dalang* can physically stage his performance or use digital platforms like YouTube and other social media. Such transformations enable greater compositional creativity on the part of *dalangs* on scaffolding narratives for audiences' convenience through digital platforms or live performances. Thus, digitally fueled aesthetic changes of perfection showcase important advantages towards Javanese puppetry, biodiversity sustainability, and the conservatory system.

The artistry of *wayang* performances done by Javanese *dalang* has evolved

Table 3. Types of Wayang Performance Audiences

Performance	Attending in Person	Via Social Media
<i>Laire Kresna</i> by <i>dalang</i> Purbo Asmoro at Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah (TBJT) or Central Java's Cultural Center		
	Audience at TBJT	QR: The audience appreciated the <i>wayang</i> performance presented by Ki Purbo Asmoro, especially the expressions of the <i>wayang</i> characters
<i>Kakrasana Kridha</i> by <i>dalang</i> Sigid Arianto at Tuban Regency Square, East Java		
	Audience at Tuban Regency Square	QR: The audience was attracted to Ki Sigid Arianto's <i>wayang</i> performances which adopted the Yogyakarta style.
<i>Pandawa Laku Dharma</i> by <i>dalang</i> Cahyo Kuntadi at Sidoarjo Regency's Sports Center, East Java		
	Audience at Sidoarjo Regency's Sports Center	QR: The audience loved Ki Cahyo Kuntadi's aesthetic <i>wayang</i> performance creations.
<i>Wahyu Purbo Sejati</i> by <i>dalang</i> MPP Bayu Aji Klaten Regency Square, Central Java		

Audience at Klaten Regency Square	QR: The audience appreciated the <i>wayang</i> performances by young <i>dalang</i> member Ki Bayu Aji.
<p>The play Semar Mbangun Kahyangan, by <i>dalang</i> Dwijo Kangko, in Klepon Village, Garum, Blitar Regency, East Java</p> 	
Audience at Klepon Village, Garum, Blitar Regency	QR: The entertaining <i>wayang</i> performances from Ki Anom Dwijo Kangko attracted the audience.
Source: Data processed by author, 2024	

because there is a need to respond to social change. In the current era of digital technology, the presentation of *wayang* has affected *dalangs* as they try to sustain their art and profession. Technology integration in *wayang* performances aims to improve accessibility and aid in preservation efforts (Putra & Wibowo, 2024). The innovation performed by the *dalang* regarding new narrative creation shows that these professionals are indeed creative artists. In addition, audience reception transformation also aids in widening access to *wayang* performances, enhancing the profession's sustainability. The use of hybrid media spans performance dissemination beyond Indonesia. There is greater audience engagement due to uploading variant recordings on YouTube (Gono & Rakhmad, 2021). Therefore, in symmetry with regarding *dalangs* as creative artists capable of using technology, audiences are also markers who shape market forces and influence aesthetics for *wayang* performances.

This current study is in collaboration with Sunardi et al (2018) and Wicaksana (2018) regarding the aesthetic change of Javanese *wayang* performances in the digital era. It focuses on the development of artistic design and storyline (Sunardi et al., 2018) and sophisticated audience-attracting artistic audience elements (Wicaksana, 2018). This research has a particular focus that sets it apart from others

by integrating three aspects of technology-based *wayang* performance transformation. In addition, it adds to Noorzeha et al.'s (2022) work on *wayang* as a medium for transformative adaptation and provides an integrative perspective on the aesthetic transformation of Javanese *wayang*. It also reinforces Windarsih's (2021) and Rall & Harper's (2023) findings on the sociological perspectives of *wayang* performances shared through social media. Therefore, this study contributes new perspectives to the comprehensive study on the aesthetic transformation of Javanese *wayangs* in relation to digital technology.

The aesthetic change in the *wayang* performances is one of the signs depicting the history of Java's puppet theatre art. The evolution of hybrid *wayang* performance models indicates the passion of a *dalang* toward preserving his or her profession. The creation of new plots or stories through *wayang* performance enhances storytellers' repertoire for the Java people. Additionally, within the community of puppet masters, a different kind of beauty termed "mass taste aesthetics" has emerged. Hybrid *wayang* performances that are rampant today and done through digital means show that *dalangs* are capable both as cultural bearers and professionals engaged in their work (Thamesh & Abdul Aziz, 2023). With respect to Javanese culture, making new stories increases their narra-

tive diversity, underscoring the ingenuity and imagination of today's masters over social issues that affect modern-day society, from which fresh interpretations and adaptations stemmed.

The rising phenomenon of a new puppetry aesthetic, like the mass taste aesthetics, indicates a particular *wayang* performance's flexibility, ability to evolve, and blend within the community's social system (Wrahatnala, 2021). Fusing art with digital technology in *wayang* performances creates more innovative forms than ever and simultaneously exists in physical and virtual spaces (Flabat, 2022). Consequently, the advancement in Javanese *wayang* performance's blurring boundaries between real and artificial deeply transforms culture. It fuels the existence of a creative society full of innovation that is responsive to changes.

There are new roles for *dalang* concerning *wayang* performance and audience participation toward the ecosystem of Javanese puppetry, which have been utilized as cross-disciplinary case studies from this research. It is imperative for *dalang* to replace lackadaisical attitudes with active fulfillment by stepping into intellectual agent roles and taking initiative within diverse areas, such as mechanism change agents, besides the puppetry domain. Conveying humanistic virtue merges *wayang* performances intended for noble values while fostering entertainment, so audiences cultivate their character enrichingly. Through appreciation coupled with constructive feedback toward sustainability perpetuated through active audience engagement, sustained progress is achieved in succession, overcoming enduring challenges faced by *dalangs* across generations, benefiting eternally motivated imagination motors.

Digital technology approaches provide stark alterations on certain aspects, rejuvenating archaic design standards towards instantaneous reverence, claiming obsolescence. As opposed fading away alongside emerging unfiltered masked modernity spectacles juxtaposed with cultural fabrics, wistfully known expression

can instead conquered preserved adapt ancient resonating timeless appeal augmented adapting screens clad contemporary tech enabling grasped adored wielded opened embraced effortlessly capture free form mechanisms time shattering restrictions Resolved functionality stagnation downgrades pulsated sidesteps transcend ensuing revelry untamed remain sway!

This research is believed to nurture an imaginative atmosphere supporting the development of Javanese puppet art. More advanced technology ought not to be seen as a hindrance, but on the contrary, it is a challenge and even a golden opportunity for *dalang* to produce beautiful and meaningful creations. With the shift in *wayang* performances due to modernization, there is a need for constructive help and direction for those teaching this art form.

This support should ensure that while technological integration enhances the art form, it remains judiciously implemented and does not compromise the fundamental cultural and artistic values inherent in *wayang* performances.

CONCLUSIONS

Researching how *wayang* performances have undergone aesthetic transformation provides insight into the creativity and innovations a *dalang* employs to preserve their art while integrating modern changes. This study showcases the efforts and strategic artistry of a *dalang* in developing new *wayang* performances and stories.

Theoretically, this study provides deep insights into the role and creativity of *dalang*, the renewal of *wayang* stories, and audience reception in shaping a new aesthetic in puppetry.

The scholarly work presented here is expected to support the establishment of the discipline of puppetry through the emergence of theories on artistic creativity, art creation and engineering, art communication, digitalization of art, and *wayang* art aesthetics. Pragmatically, these findings contribute to *dalang* and other artists in anticipating changes over time.

Additionally, the results of this study provide inspiration and guidance for creators in the puppetry community to innovate in their artistic creations. This means that the scientific effort enriches academic understanding of aesthetics and artistic creativity and offers practical solutions that can be implemented in puppetry and other art forms.

This study has two limitations: the focus of the research and the use of samples. The focus on *wayang* performances in Java is narrow, making the generalization of the findings less representative of the actual conditions of *wayang* performances. Therefore, further research is needed to cover *wayang* performances across Indonesia. The sample, which only includes five *dalang* from Java, is also limited. Further research should include a broader sample or analyze different types of *wayang* to more representatively depict the phenomenon of transformation in the *wayang* art world.

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