



Reconstructing Traditional Arts Identity through Social Media Visual Culture in the Algorithmic Era

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ABSTRACT

Traditional arts face the challenge of identity reconstruction in the algorithmic era when the visual culture of social media shapes public perception. This study aims to analyze the relationship between social media visual practices and the transformation of traditional art identity. The method used is qualitative digital ethnography through content observation and in-depth interviews with 12 informants and art managers, with thematic analysis. The results of the study show that social media plays a role in the negotiation of art identity through visual adaptation, narrative, and digital interaction. In conclusion, identity reconstruction based on digital visual culture strengthens the sustainability of traditional arts and supports art preservation strategies in the algorithmic era.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional arts are currently in a complex transformation situation due to the increasing penetration of digital technology in social and cultural life. Social media has evolved from a mere communication space to an arena for the production of cultural meaning, where identity, aesthetic value, and artistic representation are renegotiated. In the context of a digital society, the existence of traditional arts does not only depend on direct inheritance between generations, but also on the ability of the art community to build visual representations that are in accordance with the character of digital media. Levin and Mamlok (2021) explain that the development of digital technology has changed the relationship between culture and society because cultural practices now take place through digital networks that allow for the exchange of symbols, identities, and experiences globally. These changes show that digital media is not only a tool for cultural documentation, but also a space for the formation of new identities.

The development of visual culture in social media further strengthens the transformation process. Digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have algorithmic mechanisms that determine the level of visibility of a content based on user interaction, popularity, and visual consumption patterns. As a result, traditional art actors need to adapt to digital formats through visual strategies, short narratives, content aesthetics, and more interactive communication patterns. According to Helmond (2021), digital platforms work through algorithmic logic that not only distributes information, but also shapes the way users understand and value a cultural object. In the field of cultural heritage, digitalization has opened up new opportunities to expand public access, but at the same time presents challenges related to authenticity, simplification of cultural meaning, and the dominance of popular aesthetics (Djufri et al., 2025).

Previous studies have shown that social media has a significant contribution to the sustainability of traditional arts. Diego et al. (2024) found that the Minangkabau traditional art community utilizes Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok as media ecosystems that support promotion, community communication, and cultural audience expansion. However, the study focuses more on the function of social media as a promotion and preservation strategy, not examining how digital visual elements reshape traditional art identities. Hong (2022) also shows that social media data analysis can support the spread of traditional culture, but the approach still dominates viewing technology as an instrument for disseminating information rather than as a space for the construction of cultural identity.

In addition, studies on the digitization of cultural heritage show a paradigm shift from conservation to digital participation. Febrianto et al. (2025) explained that the use of social media in the preservation of cultural heritage not only increases public access to local culture, but also encourages the involvement of the younger generation through a more adaptive form of cultural communication. However, the study focuses more on aspects of cultural education and the use of social media as a learning medium, so it does not explain how visual practices in digital platforms affect the process of reconstructing traditional art identities. Thus, there is still room for research to understand the relationship between social media visual culture, algorithmic logic, and changes in traditional art identity.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze how social media visual culture plays a role in reconstructing traditional art identities in the algorithmic era. This research focuses on the relationship between digital visual representation strategies, communication practices of art actors, and audience responses in shaping new meanings of traditional arts. Using a digital ethnographic approach, this study seeks to understand how the art community negotiates between traditional values and the demands of digital culture through the production and distribution of visual content on social media.

This research makes a theoretical contribution by expanding the study of cultural arts and digital communication through the understanding that traditional art identity is a construction that continues to change through the interaction between traditions, technology, algorithms, and digital society. Practically, this research can be a reference for the art community, cultural institutions, and cultural heritage managers in developing digital strategies that not only increase the visibility of traditional arts, but also maintain cultural significance in the process of digital transformation. This approach places technology not as a threat to tradition, but as a new space where cultural identity is negotiated and developed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reconstructing Traditional Art Identity in Digital Transformation

Traditional art identity is no longer understood as a fixed entity, but rather as a social process that continues to undergo formation through the interaction between culture, society, and technology. In the perspective of cultural identity construction, cultural representation has always undergone negotiation based on changing social contexts. The development of digital technology has expanded the space for the formation of cultural identities because art communities can produce, disseminate, and reinterpret cultural practices through online spaces. According to Couldry and Hepp (2022), contemporary society is experiencing a process of deep mediatization, which is a condition when digital media is not only a means of communication, but has become part of the structure of shaping social and cultural reality. In the context of traditional art, this process causes art identity to shift from a form of local inheritance to a more open and interactive form of digital representation.

These changes show that the preservation of traditional art is not only concerned with maintaining the original form of art, but also how cultural values

can adapt to the new communication environment. Lange (2022) explained that digital culture allows cultural communities to build identities through the practice of representation, participation, and interaction in digital networks. Thus, social media has become a new space for art communities to reconstruct identities through the selection of visual symbols, cultural narratives, and communication strategies that suit the character of digital audiences.

Social Media Platformization and the Influence of Algorithms on Cultural Representation

Social media in the algorithmic era has changed the mechanism of cultural production and distribution. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube not only provide digital public spaces, but also determine the level of visibility of content through algorithmic systems. This phenomenon is known as platformization, which is a process when social and cultural activities increasingly depend on digital infrastructure controlled by platform mechanisms. Nieborg and Poell (2021) explain that cultural platformization causes cultural production to follow the logic of the platform economy and technology, including attention economy, user engagement, and adaptability to digital formats.

In the context of traditional art, algorithms can provide both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, algorithms allow local art to gain global reach through broad digital distribution. However, on the other hand, algorithms can encourage the simplification of cultural representation because more visually popular content tends to get distribution priority. According to van Dijck et al. (2021), digital platforms have the power to determine how social and cultural value is produced through algorithmic selection mechanisms. Therefore, the study of traditional arts in the digital space needs to understand how art actors adapt to algorithmic logic without losing inherent cultural value.

Digital Visual Culture as a Space for Negotiation of the Meaning of Traditional Art

Visual culture is an important aspect in understanding the transformation of traditional art on social media. The dominance of image-based communication, short videos, and digital aesthetics has caused cultural representation to increasingly rely on the visual ability to attract the attention of audiences. Rose (2022) explains that visual culture is not only concerned with what is seen, but also how an object acquires meaning through the process of production, distribution, and social interpretation. In the context of social media, traditional art visualization is a means to rebuild the relationship between cultural heritage and digital society.

Manovich's (2021) study on digital visual culture shows that new media produces more flexible forms of cultural representation through a combination of images, videos, text, and user interaction. This is relevant to traditional art because art forms that previously relied on physical performance spaces can now be constructed through digital content. This process allows art actors to make visual innovations, such as repackaging performances, the use of cultural symbols in digital content, and the creation of new narratives that are more receptive to the younger generation.

Social Media as a Space for Participation and Sustainability of Traditional Arts

Social media not only serves as a medium for disseminating cultural information, but also as a space for community participation in building the sustainability of traditional arts. The concept of participatory culture explains that digital users are not only consumers of information, but also producers and disseminators of cultural meaning. Jenkins et al. (2022) explain that the digital environment allows for the formation of participatory communities that strengthen the relationship between cultural creators and audiences through the practice of sharing, commenting, collaboration, and reproduction of content.

In the context of traditional arts, digital participation can expand community involvement in the cultural preservation process. However, digital involvement also requires strategies so that the adaptation process does not cause the loss of the original cultural context. According to Bonacchi et al. (2021), the digitalization of cultural heritage must consider the balance between public accessibility and the sustainability of cultural values. Therefore, the reconstruction of artistic identity through social media needs to be understood as a negotiation process between digital innovation and the continuity of tradition.

Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, this study places traditional art identity as a dynamic construction influenced by the relationship between social media visual culture, art community digital practices, and platform algorithmic mechanisms. Visual culture functions as a medium of representation, while platform algorithms play a role as a factor that influences the level of public visibility and acceptance of cultural content. Through a digital ethnography approach, this study examines how art actors carry out strategies of adaptation, negotiation of meaning, and reconstruction of identity in digital space. This perspective expands the understanding that the sustainability of traditional art in the digital age depends not only on the conservation of old forms, but also on the ability of culture to transform through new communication practices.

METHODOLOGY

Types of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with digital ethnographic design to analyze the process of reconstructing traditional artistic identities through social media visual culture in the algorithmic era. This approach was chosen because it is able to understand cultural practices, digital representation strategies, and identity negotiations that take place in online spaces (Pink et al., 2022). The research focuses on the relationship between social media visual practices, art actors' communication, and cultural identity transformation.

Population and Sample

The research population included traditional art actors and managers who use social media as a space for publication and cultural representation. The sample was selected using purposive sampling techniques with a total of 12 informants, consisting of art actors and art community managers. Informants were selected based on the criteria of experience in traditional arts, social media use activities, and understanding of the process of art adaptation in digital space (Campbell et al., 2020).

Research Instruments

The main instruments of the study were researchers with the support of semi-structured interview guidelines, digital observation sheets, and social media content documentation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of visual representations of art on social media, and documentation of digital uploads. The validity of the data was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques to ensure the consistency of findings (Tracy, 2020).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out through three stages, namely research preparation, data collection, and data interpretation. The collection stage involved interviews with 12 informants as well as observation of social media content related to traditional art representation practices. The entire process was carried out by paying attention to the ethical principles of digital research, including informant consent and participant identity protection (Townsend & Wallace, 2021).

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the process of coding, thematic grouping, and interpretation of meaning based on patterns found from interviews, observations, and documentation. The analysis was carried out with the help of NVivo 14 software to organize the data and identify relationships between themes. The thematic analysis approach follows the appropriate Braun and Clarke (2021) model to examine social experiences and digital cultural practices.

RESEARCH RESULT

Characteristics of Research Informants

This study involved 12 *informants* who were selected through *purposive sampling techniques*. The informants consist of traditional art actors and community managers/art studios who actively use social media as a space for documentation, publication, and cultural communication. The selection of informants is based on artistic experience, involvement in cultural management, and understanding of the process of art adaptation in the digital space.

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants

Category	Quantity	Features
Traditional art performers	7 people	Active in the practice of performing and producing artworks
Community manager/art studio	4 people	Managing art activities and digital publication strategies
Cultural content manager	1 person	Manage documentation and distribution of social media content

Most informants have more than five years of artistic experience and use social media to expand audience reach, build cultural narratives, and maintain the existence of traditional arts. The diversity of informant backgrounds allows research to understand the process of reconstructing artistic identity from the perspective of cultural actors and managers of digital spaces (Pink et al., 2022).

Social Media as a Space for Reconstructing Traditional Arts Identities

The results of the study show that social media has undergone a shift in function from just a publication media to a space for the reconstruction of traditional art identity. Based on digital observations and in-depth interviews with 12 informants, it was found that art actors not only use social media to introduce performances, but also develop new strategies in building public perception of the value, meaning, and position of traditional arts in a digital society.

These findings suggest that traditional artistic identities are undergoing a shift from forms of identity that were previously attached to geographic spaces and local communities to identities that are negotiated through digital spaces. Art actors actively choose specific cultural elements to be displayed to the public, such as visual symbols, costumes, music, historical stories, and philosophical values that are perceived to be able to represent the character of their art.

As explained by Informant P3:

"We used to feel that traditional art was only known by people who came directly

to the show. After entering social media, we saw people from outside the region starting to get to know our art. But we have to choose how to display this culture so that people understand, not just see." (P3 Informant, Traditional Art Actors, February 12, 2026)

The statement shows that digitalization not only expands the reach of audiences, but also creates a process of curating cultural identity. Artists have an active role in determining how their culture is represented to the digital society.

These findings reinforce the concept of identity construction theory which explains that cultural identity is not something static, but is formed through ever-changing social, communication, and representation processes (Hall, 2021). In the digital context, cultural identity is becoming increasingly reflective as the art community must consider how they want to be seen by a wider audience.

The results of this study expand on previous research that placed social media more as an instrument of cultural promotion. For example, Yuliati et al. (2023) showed that social media helps the sustainability of traditional arts through the promotion and expansion of audiences. However, this study found that the function of social media is more complex because it becomes a space for the production of new cultural meanings. Social media not only answers the question of "how art is introduced", but also "how art is redefined". This phenomenon is in accordance with the views of Couldry and Hepp (2022) regarding *deep mediatization*, which is a condition when digital media has entered the structure of social reality formation. In the context of this research, digital technology is not outside of culture, but has become part of the process of how traditional artistic identities are constructed and maintained.

Adaptation of Visual Culture as a Strategy to Maintain the Existence of Art

One of the main findings of the study is the emergence of visual adaptation strategies in response to the image, video, and attention-oriented nature of social media. The results of the observations show that the art community is beginning to make changes in the way content is presented through short videos, training documentation, cinematic shooting, the prominence of costume details, as well as the use of more communicative visual elements. The adaptation does not show a change in the substance of art, but is a form of cultural translation from a physical performance space to a digital space. Traditional art that previously relied on hands-on experience is now undergoing a transformation into a screen-mediated visual experience.

Informant P6 explained:

"We don't change the dance or the music because it's part of our identity. What we change is the way people see it. If in the past people had to come to the studio, now we bring the atmosphere of the studio through video." (Informant P6, Performing Artist, February 14, 2026)

The statement shows that art practitioners understand digitalization not as a replacement for tradition, but as a process of translating culture into a new format.

In the perspective of visual culture, cultural objects acquire meaning not only through their original form, but through the processes of production, distribution, and visual interpretation (Rose, 2022). Thus, social media is creating new conditions in which digital aesthetics become part of the strategy of maintaining artistic sustainability.

However, the study found a tension between the need to follow the visual character of social media and maintain cultural authenticity. Informant P10 revealed:

"Sometimes there is pressure to make something simpler so that more people will watch. But we have to be careful, because if we follow the trend too much, our artistic character can be lost." (Informant P10, Art Studio Manager, February 25, 2026)

These findings show that digital adaptation is not a process of infinite modernization, but a process of negotiation between innovation and cultural conservation.

This supports the platformization theory of cultural production which explains that the production of digital culture is influenced by the logic of the platform, such as user attention, popularity, and audience engagement (Nieborg & Poell, 2021). In the context of traditional arts, algorithms encourage the art community to adapt the form of communication, but the community still has the ability to maintain cultural values through selective strategies.

Digital Narrative as a Mechanism for Preserving Cultural Meaning

In addition to visual changes, research has found that digital narratives are an important mechanism in maintaining the depth of traditional artistic meaning. Artists not only perform performances, but also include stories about the history, philosophy, cultural symbols, and social values contained in the art.

Informant P4 explained:

"If it's just a dance show, a lot of people might just see beautiful movements. But when we explain the meaning, they start to see that there's a deeper story and value." (P4 Informant, Art Community Manager, February 17, 2026)

These findings suggest that social media serves as a space for cultural interpretation. Digital narratives allow art communities to have greater control over how their culture is perceived by the public.

Informant P11 also said:

"We try to create content that not only invites people to watch, but also learns. Because the end goal is not only to be famous, but to make this culture understood." (P11 Informant, Art Actor, February 23, 2026)

These results show that the digitization of art has an educational dimension. Social media not only expands cultural distribution, but also becomes a space for informal cultural learning. These findings strengthen the concept of *participatory culture* put forward by Jenkins et al. (2022), that digital society can play a role as both users and participants in the production and dissemination of culture.

Digital Interaction and the Formation of New Cultural Communities

Research has found that audience interaction through comments, content sharing, and digital discussions plays a role in the formation of a new collective identity. Audiences are no longer just recipients of cultural information, but contribute to expanding the meaning and existence of traditional arts.

Informant P5 stated:

"From the comments of the community, we can see that many people are actually interested in the local culture, it's just that they didn't have access to know it before." (Informant P5, Traditional Artist, February 21, 2026)

Meanwhile, Informant P9 explained:

"There were some young people who initially only saw our videos, then asked how to learn. From there, new members emerged who wanted to take part in preserving this art." (P9 Informant, Cultural Activist, February 24, 2026)

These findings suggest that social media has the potential to create cultural regeneration through new relationships between artists and younger generations. In contrast to the conservative view that sees technology as a threat to tradition, this study shows that technology can become a space for cultural reproduction if communities are able to manage it strategically.

Digital Algorithms and Cultural Sustainability Negotiations

The findings of the study show that algorithms are an important factor that affects the visibility level of traditional art. Informants develop strategies such as the consistency of uploads, the use of popular formats, and the selection of visual elements that match the platform's character. However, the research found that algorithmic logic also creates challenges because cultural values don't always match fast digital consumption patterns.

Informant P12 said:

"Simple content usually spreads faster, but traditional art has many layers of storytelling. The challenge is how to get people interested without losing its depth." (P12 Informant, Art Actor, February 27, 2026)

The findings suggest that the arts community is in a negotiating position between the need to gain digital visibility and the obligation to maintain cultural values. According to Gillespie (2021), algorithms are not just technical systems, but mechanisms that affect how information receives public attention. In this study, algorithms play a role as a factor that shapes cultural communication strategies.

Theoretical, Practical, and Research Limitations Implications

Theoretically, this research contributes to the study of digital cultural arts by showing that traditional art identity is a dynamic process formed through the relationship between tradition, visual culture, algorithms, and community participation. Practically, this study shows that digital strategies for the arts community need to be directed not only to increase popularity, but also to maintain cultural context and value. This study has limitations because it involves a relatively limited number of informants and has not explored the perspectives of digital audiences in depth. Further research can use a *mixed method approach* by combining digital ethnography, social media comment

analysis, and audience surveys to understand the relationship between cultural production and public acceptance more comprehensively.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that social media in the algorithmic era not only functions as a traditional art publication media, but has become a strategic space in reconstructing cultural identity through the process of visual adaptation, digital narrative development, and participatory interaction with the audience. Based on the digital ethnography approach to 12 informants, it was found that art actors negotiate between traditional values and the demands of digital communication by maintaining the main cultural elements while adjusting the form of representation to be relevant to the character of social media.

The findings of the study show that digital technology does not automatically eliminate the authenticity of traditional arts, but can become a medium of cultural sustainability if managed through strategies that consider cultural context, meaning, and value. Therefore, art communities, cultural institutions, and cultural heritage managers are advised to develop digital literacy, culture-based content production strategies, and collaborative approaches with the younger generation so that digital transformation can strengthen the existence of traditional art without compromising its original identity. Further research is suggested to expand the scope of the study by involving the perspective of digital audiences, larger-scale social media interaction data analysis, and a mixed-method approach to understand the relationship between cultural representation production and public acceptance more comprehensively.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Further research can be directed at the development of a digital cultural sustainability framework model that integrates aspects of cultural identity, digital visual strategies, platform algorithms, and audience participation. Future studies can also use big data-based analysis of social media interaction patterns to identify how algorithms affect the visibility, spread, and change of the meaning of traditional arts in digital spaces. In addition, comparative studies between regions or between types of traditional arts can be conducted to understand variations in cultural adaptation strategies in the face of digital technology developments.

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