

BARONGAN DANCE: INSTILLING LOCAL WISDOM VALUES TO FOSTER CULTURAL AWARENESS IN GENERATION Z

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Abstract

Generation Z, growing up in the digital era, faces significant challenges in the form of shifting values and declining awareness of local culture. This study aims to explore the instillation of local wisdom values through the Barongan Dance as an instrument to foster cultural awareness in Generation Z. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with an ethnographic approach. Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders and Barongan Dance artists, and documentation studies. Data analysis used data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing techniques. The research findings show that the Barongan Dance not only functions as a performing art, but is also rich in local wisdom values such as religious values, mutual cooperation, discipline, and chivalry (courage to defend the truth). The instillation of these values in Generation Z was successfully carried out effectively through modifications to communication strategies, the use of social media for performance documentation, and their active involvement in group practice processes. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of transforming traditional arts into a modern context without losing their essence. The Barongan Dance can be a strategic character education medium in both formal and informal environments to maintain the sustainability of the nation's cultural identity in the future.

Keywords: Barongan Dance, Local Wisdom, Cultural Awareness, Generation Z

Introduction

The dynamics of human civilization have now entered the era of Society 5.0 , a phase in which cyber-physical technology and artificial intelligence are fully integrated into social life. On the one hand, this digital transformation offers limitless efficiency, but on the other hand, it brings a massive wave of cultural disruption to developing countries, including Indonesia. The wide-open digital gateway without any barriers has facilitated the aggressive penetration of global culture. As a result, local values, traditions, and cultural norms that have been rooted for centuries are now experiencing a great existential shock. The main actors in the vortex of this disruption are Generation Z, a group of people who

were born and grew up alongside the rapid development of smart devices and social media algorithms. As *digital natives* , Generation Z spends most of their productive time in the digital space, which is dominated by foreign popular culture content such as K-Pop, Western culture, and superficial instant global trends. This intense attachment to cyberspace creates a tendency where the younger generation is more familiar with cosmopolitan identity than their own local cultural identity.

This phenomenon of shifting cultural orientation aligns with previous findings that (Setiawan, 2018) assert that exposure to uncritically filtered digital content has a positive correlation with the erosion of the younger generation's pride in regional

values. This process of global cultural homogenization gradually creates a new standardized lifestyle that tends to be materialistic, individualistic, and hedonistic. When these global values are adopted without a strong mental filter, what is known as cultural alienation occurs (*Alienation*). Generation Z is beginning to feel unfamiliar with their local languages, awkward when interacting with local traditions, and even cynical about traditional rituals that are considered to provide no practical utility in their modern lives (Fanindy & Mupida, 2021). This condition triggers collective concerns about an acute national identity crisis in the coming decades. This alienation symptom does not stand alone, but is exacerbated by the determination of social media algorithms that constantly direct youth attention away from local narratives.

This cultural issue cannot be viewed solely from an external perspective in the form of an invasion of foreign culture, but must also be evaluated from the internal perspective of cultural governance and preservation itself (Kostytsky et al., 2020; Redkina et al., 2021). Currently, there is a wide gap or a clear communication gap *between* the older generation as holders of customary authority (cultural preservers) and Generation Z as potential cultural consumers. Many traditional institutions, art studios, and traditional communities still use conventional, linear, and dogmatic communication patterns in transmitting ancestral values. Doctrinal patterns such as "we must preserve culture because it is heritage" often no longer apply to the critical reasoning of Generation Z who require logical, aesthetic, and functional arguments. This communication gap has direct implications for the birth of a negative stigma against folk performing arts. Traditional arts are often identified with activities that are ancient, mystical, monotonous, outdated, and have no social prestige value.

This resistance and rejection of the younger generation is confirmed by research conducted by (Pratama et al., 2019). Their findings revealed that the low involvement and participation of young people in regional cultural activities stems from a lack of innovation in the packaging of these performing arts. Traditional performances are often presented in rigid formats, are too long, and are not adaptive to modern distribution media such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok. When a cultural product fails to meet the aesthetic expectations of a generation, it loses its relevance. Generation Z's preference for visual, interactive, fast-paced content, and rich in creative narratives (*storytelling*) is rarely accommodated by traditional arts practitioners who tend to be conservative. As a result, local cultural spaces are devoid of young people. If this regeneration vacuum continues without deconstruction and recontextualization efforts, it is certain that hundreds of traditional performing arts genres in Indonesia will experience sociological extinction. Their art may still exist in museums or historical records, but its soul has died within society.

One intangible cultural heritage currently at a crossroads between sociological extinction and superficial commercialization is the Barongan Dance. Barongan art is a form of folk theater that is very popular in the Java region, particularly in the former Pati Residency (Blora, Kudus, Rembang) and East Java (Kediri, Ponorogo). Sociologically and historically, Barongan is not merely a recreational spectacle, but a highly sacred cultural instrument. Within the large Barongan mask representing a lion or mythological creature, there are symbols of profound Javanese cosmology, harmony between humans, nature, and the Creator, and a representation of resistance against evil. However, the sociological reality of the contemporary era shows an ironic phenomenon. When the Barongan Dance is presented to Generation Z, there is a very severe reduction in meaning. Based on

empirical observations in the field, the majority of the younger generation sees Barongan only from the dimension of visual exoticism alone, such as magical sensations, aspects of trance, or thrilling physical attractions.

This tendency to shallow meaning is reinforced by findings (Cahyani & Rahayu, 2024), which state that adolescents' understanding of Barongan art often stops at the level of visual entertainment for society without being able to articulate the values of local wisdom contained behind the performance structure. This reduction of meaning is very unfortunate, because within the structure of the Barongan Dance performance contains pearls of local wisdom that are very rich and relevant to healing the social ills of modern society. In Barongan art there are values of religiosity (surrender to God), the value of mutual cooperation (solid teamwork between gamelan musicians, Barongan holders, and supporting dancers), the value of discipline (precise rhythm of movement), and the value of chivalry (courage to defend the truth and protect the weak). When Generation Z only consumes Barongan as profane entertainment or merely as a momentary aesthetic content for social media, then these noble character values simply evaporate. There is a systemic failure in the process of internalizing values (*value internalization*) of artistic properties into the cognitive and affective structures of the younger generation.

Given the complexity of the issues outlined above, a strategic repositioning of how traditional arts are managed and taught is necessary. Cultivating cultural awareness *among* Generation Z cannot be achieved through coercion or moral intimidation. The approach must be transformed into an emancipatory, educational, and inclusive one. The Barongan dance should no longer be positioned as a static and sacred cultural heritage object atop an ivory tower, but rather must be enlivened as a dynamic character education medium rooted in the

realities of young people's daily lives. Instilling local wisdom through Barongan art is highly urgent. First, local wisdom acts as a psychological shield *for* Generation Z, preventing them from being easily swayed by digital radicalism, consumerism, and social alienation. When teenagers understand that the heavy movement of holding the Barongan requires a strong foundation (symbolizing steadfast life principles), they learn consistency and integrity. Second, the group practice process in the Barongan studio naturally trains their emotional and social intelligence. Amidst the trend of digital communication that is solitary with high levels of screen time, physical interaction in Barongan practice forces them to collaborate, negotiate, and suppress individual egos in order to create a harmonious performance.

Urgency This recontextualization is supported by recent research from (Handayani & Lestari, 2019), which shows that the revitalization of local arts integrated with interactive and community-based learning methods has proven effective in significantly increasing cultural awareness *among* adolescents. This success is achieved when the structure of value delivery is adapted to the learning characteristics of Generation Z, who prefer concrete visualization, direct active involvement, and the provision of space for free expression. Therefore, in-depth research on the methodology for instilling local wisdom values is crucial as a practical guide for educators, cultural practitioners, and policymakers in formulating effective cultural preservation strategies. Efforts to bridge past values with current technology are key to ensuring that culture does not simply become a historical artifact.

Although there have been many studies discussing the Barongan Dance from the perspective of choreographic aesthetics, historical development, or its magical ritual aspects, there is still very limited research that specifically dissects

how Barongan art is used as a social engineering tool *to* reconstruct the cultural consciousness of Generation Z amidst the onslaught of the digital media era. Most previous studies tend to position youth only as passive audience objects, not as active subjects who experience a transformation of moral values after interacting with this traditional art. Herein lies the novelty *and* significance of this research. This research does not only aim to document the philosophical values in the Barongan Dance textually, but goes further to analyze the mechanisms of contextualization , internalization, and transmission of these values into the affective and conative consciousness space of Generation Z. This research seeks to find the common thread how a centuries-old folk art can adapt, be accepted, and internalized by a generation that consumes information based on digital algorithms.

Through a qualitative, descriptive-ethnographic approach, this research will explore in-depth the perspectives of both sides: from the perspective of the maestros/artists on how they pass down their knowledge in the modern era, and from the perspective of Generation Z on how they perceive, feel, and adopt the values of local wisdom in their daily social lives. A comprehensive understanding of this pattern will be a valuable theoretical contribution to the science of cultural sociology and character education. Departing from all the empirical, theoretical backgrounds, and sociological urgencies that have been explained in detail above, the author believes that a comprehensive and in-depth scientific study on this matter is absolutely necessary. Therefore, this research was designed and implemented with a clear title: "Barongan Dance: Instilling Local Wisdom Values to Grow Cultural Awareness in Generation Z."

Discussion

Global Cultural Decontamination and the Defensive Strengthening of Gen Z's Cultural Identity.

The dynamics of Society 5.0 bring logical consequences in the form of cultural deterritorialization , where geographical barriers are no longer able to stem the penetration of foreign content into Generation Z's cognition. Yusuf and Rahmawati's (2022) findings regarding the phenomenon of cultural alienation are proven to manifest in the form of a decline in local pride due to the glorification of popular cosmopolitan aesthetics. From a sociological perspective, today's youth experience what is called (Azmi et al., 2024) a *mediascape* and *ideoscape* , namely a condition in which the flow of digital information and global images form a new mental landscape that uproots individuals from their traditional roots. This construction of a liquid identity, borrowing a term (Bauman, 2013), makes young people's emotional ties to regional values very fragile because they are required to continue to adapt to global trends that change instantly.

In Indonesia, this *mediascape pressure is clearly visible in Generation Z's media consumption preferences, which neglect local content* . Research synergies (Hidayah, 2025) show that the standardization of modern lifestyles driven by social media algorithms has shifted adolescents' materialistic value orientations , rendering regional cultures marginalized and lacking social bargaining power. This situation demands adaptive cultural defense mechanisms. The concept of local wisdom can no longer be taught as a dogmatism of the past, but must be constructed as a new form of cultural capital . As emphasized by (Wagiati & Zein, 2018), the best cultural defense in the digital era is not by blocking access to information, but by formulating local content to have "algorithmic competitiveness" on par with global content.

Reconstruction of Cultural Transmission Channels and Elimination of Generational Gaps

The communication crisis between the older generation as guardians of tradition (*cultural gatekeepers*) and Generation Z as potential consumers is one of the main triggers for the death of the relevance of traditional art. The one-way and doctrinaire communication patterns that have been implemented by conventional studios have actually given rise to psychological resistance among teenagers. This aesthetic barrier, as identified by (Herdiana, 2013; Widyastitieningrum et al., 2023), is rooted in the failure of preservationists to translate sacred values into a dynamic visual language. From the perspective of communicative action theory (Habermas, 2001), this phenomenon represents a failure of *intersubjective understanding* , where the space for dialogue between two generations is blocked by the unilateral truth claims of the older generation who consider modernity a pure threat to cultural authenticity.

To overcome this communication bottleneck, deconstruction of distribution media and performance packaging is absolutely necessary. Research (Luh, 2025) indicates that active involvement of teenagers in traditional arts increases twofold when the process of transmitting values utilizes an interactivity- based digital *storytelling approach* . This transition phenomenon is also discussed in a global study by (Borić et al., 2023; Walton, n.d.), which states that the younger generation in the contemporary era tends to ignore ancestral heritage not because of hatred, but because of the loss of functional significance and symbolic meaning of performances in their modern living spaces. Therefore, the digitalization of traditional arts as practiced through the TikTok and YouTube platforms is not a form of blasphemy against the canons, but rather an essential revitalization strategy. (Amri et al., 2017) He added that the convergence between oral tradition and modern

visualization is the only rational way to eliminate the "old-fashioned" stigma attached to folk theater in Indonesia.

Hermeneutics of Barongan Dance: Dissecting Commodification and Restoring the Philosophical Essence .

The Barongan dance is currently in a sociological vortex of danger in the form of shallow commodification . As mapped by (Azmi et al., 2024)), Generation Z's appreciation of Barongan art is often trapped in profane aspects, such as mystical sensations and the awesomeness of physical attractions (*trance*). This reduction of meaning is in line with Baudrillard's theory of *simulacra* in (Morris, 2021) , where the sign value (visual aesthetics and magical exoticism for the sake of social media content) has completely eclipsed the ritual's original utility and philosophical significance. Barongan is no longer understood as a cosmological symbol of good versus evil, but rather as a spectacle commodity for superficial consumption.



Figure 1. Visualization of the Blora Barongan in the Context of the Performance (Photo Credit : Samin Edan, 2020)

The Matrix of Reduction vs. Restoration of the Meaning of the Barongan Dance

Dimensions of Performance	The Reality of Meaning Reduction (Gen Z)	Reconstruction of Philosophical Essence
Lion Barong Mask	Just a mystical property/aesthetic display	A symbol of controlling human desires and anger
Trance Attraction	Extreme entertainment/social media content	Representation of transcendence and surrender to God
Accompanying Music (Gamelan)	Tension builder / rhythmic noise	Symbol of social harmony and the right discipline of life

The restoration of this meaning is crucial given the spiritual richness it contains. Based on ethnographic studies by (Jazuli & Alam, 2020), the structure of the Barongan performance is a concrete manifestation of sociological mutual cooperation in an agrarian society. This is reinforced by an analysis (Cahyani & Rahayu, 2024) that explains that the movement of holding the heavy *caplokan* (Barongan head) actually teaches the concept of *bekti* (integrity) and the steadfastness of life principles. On a global scale, the phenomenon of the reduction of the meaning of cultural heritage due to the demands of the tourism industry and the media is also criticized by (Wardani et al., 2023). They assert that commodification that ignores cultural integrity will end the function of art as an instrument of social cohesion. Therefore, restoring the interpretation of the Barongan Dance from mere profane entertainment to a medium for moral reflection is an urgent academic agenda in Indonesia.

Activation of Barongan Art as a Psychological Shield and Social Engineering Vehicle.

Instilling local wisdom values through the Barongan Dance has proven to be ineffective through rigid classroom

indoctrination. Findings (Lestari, 2014) confirm that increased cultural awareness *among* urban youth occurs when local arts are integrated with emancipatory, community-based methods. This approach positions traditional arts as a social laboratory. When Generation Z actively engages in group physical exercise in studios, *screen time* is drastically reduced, simultaneously eroding the pathology of digital individualism. This process represents a healthy form of *intergenerational knowledge transmission*, similar to the aesthetic transformation of Ogoh-Ogoh in Bali, which is collectively driven by local youth groups. (Oktavianus et al., 2024)

From a social psychology perspective, consciously internalized Barongan values serve as a psychological shield. It (Erni & Artis, 2025; Wisarja & Sudarsana, 2017) is suggested that adolescents with a strong attachment to their local cultural identity demonstrate higher levels of resilience to social anxiety and exposure to digital radicalism. Folk art acts as an emotional anchor that provides a sense of *belonging*. This idea is supported by global studies that (Lei et al., 2019) state that indigenous knowledge *revived* through interactive educational spaces can restore the mental health of young people fragmented by cyber alienation. Through this reconstruction, the Barongan Dance mutates from merely an ancient dance into an instrument of social engineering to produce a generation with strong character. (Cahyani & Rahayu, 2024)



Picture 2. Activities carried out by the Samin Edan community in Semarang City in the context of performances (Photo Credit : Hartono, 2019)

Synthesis of Scientific Novelty: Integration of Tradition in Curriculum and Digital Ecosystem.

The novelty of this research lies in repositioning Generation Z: not as passive objects of spectacle, but as active subjects who contextualize the moral values of Barongan in the midst of an algorithm-based digital ecosystem. Most previous research tends to be trapped in historical romanticism or formal documentation of cultural law, such as the protection of Communal Intellectual Property (Kanwil Kemenkumham Jawa Tengah, 2025). This research goes further by offering a tactical integration model into modern learning media. One concrete implementation is presented (Jazuli & Alam, 2020; Kesenian et al., 2025) in global-scale research, which proves that the use of Barongan narratives (*folklore animation*) in the civics curriculum can significantly increase cultural pride because it is packaged through the visual logic of young people.

Furthermore, the sustainability of traditional arts in the modern era depends on the creation of an inclusive cultural ecosystem with creative economic value. A multi-stakeholder (*pentahelix*) collaboration model is essential to keeping Barongan alive in modern public spaces. (Anindya & Devi, 2023) This concept is in line with the study of cultural economics by

(Elvandari, 2020; Kesenian et al., 2025) regarding the preservation of cultural heritage through temporary urbanism , which shows that local traditions will last long if they are able to create dynamic socio-economic interaction spaces for young people.

In Indonesia, this success can be seen in the adaptation of the Barongan community in Blora which has begun to collaborate performing arts with the digital creative industry (Kesenian et al., 2025) Thus, the instillation of local wisdom values through the Barongan Dance is no longer seen as an anachronistic (outdated) conservation effort, but rather a futuristic strategy to build the cultural awareness of Generation Z which is locally rooted but has a global perspective (Gunawan & Wardani, 2024).

Conclusions

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion that have been presented, it can be concluded that the onslaught of the 5.0 Society era and the dominance of social media algorithms have actually triggered cultural alienation and a reduction in the meaning of local cultural heritage among Generation Z. The communication gap *between* conventional art preservers and the dynamic learning characteristics of *digital natives* widens the gap, so that traditional performing arts such as the Barongan Dance are often trapped in an old-fashioned stigma or consumed as a superficial, profane visual entertainment commodity (*simulacra*).

However, this research demonstrates that the Barongan Dance has strategic significance if appropriately recontextualized . Beneath its props and performance structure lie gems of local wisdom (such as religiosity , mutual cooperation, discipline, and chivalry) that can serve as a psychological shield *for* adolescents against digital pathology and identity crises.

The key to successful preservation lies not in cultural isolation, but rather in deconstructing the transmission channels. Through a community-based, emancipatory approach, the integration of an interactive educational curriculum, and the use of modern distribution media (*digital storytelling*), the Barongan Dance has been successfully repositioned. Generation Z is mutating from mere passive spectators to active subjects who internalize ancestral values. This tactical integration of local philosophical richness and global technological adaptation is a futuristic formula for fostering strong and sustainable cultural awareness in Generation Z.

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