International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Vol. 01 No.01 August 2026, ISSN: 3163-2912

Interpreting Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo for Generation Z through Tourism Communication

Herman Novry Kristiansen Paninggiran[1*], Pritha Ayodya[2], Marwan Hadi[3]

[1] *Doctoral Program in Communication Studies, Universitas Sahid, Indonesia*
[2] *Doctoral Program in Communication Studies, Universitas Sahid, Indonesia*
[3] *Doctoral Program in Communication Studies, Universitas Sahid, Indonesia*

[*]*Corresponding author. Email:hermannovrypaninggiran@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo is an important form of Javanese intangible cultural heritage that contributes to the cultural identity of Semarang, yet currently faces serious sustainability challenges due to declining audiences and limited engagement from younger generations. This study examines how tourism communication can support the promotion of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo and enhance its visibility, relevance, and sustainability as a heritage-based cultural tourism attraction in an urban and digital media context. Adopting a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with performers, managers, government officials, and young audiences, complemented by participant observation at regular stage performances and public events, as well as analysis of promotional materials and social media content. Thematic analysis was conducted using three analytical lenses: heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences. The findings reveal a persistent gap between the strong symbolic and cultural value of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo and the relatively weak interpretation practices on stage and in digital channels, which limits the ability of Generation Z audiences to understand and relate to the messages conveyed. Multi-stakeholder collaboration among the group, government, universities, and communities exists but remains fragmented and event-based rather than guided by an integrated, long-term communication strategy. At the same time, Generation Z audiences express high aesthetic appreciation but are not yet facilitated as active co-creators of heritage experiences. The study proposes conceptual directions for strengthening interpretive practices, designing more strategic multi-stakeholder communication frameworks, and developing digital-based co-creation spaces to enhance the visibility, relevance, and sustainability of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo as a cultural tourism attraction in Semarang.

Keywords: *tourism communication, intangible cultural heritage, heritage interpretation , co-creation, Generation Z ,Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo*

1. INTRODUCTION

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a vital component of community identity, embodied in traditions, knowledge, and practices transmitted across generations [1], [2]. ICH is defined as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills, as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated with them, that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage [1]. In Indonesia, as a country with extraordinary cultural diversity, ICH forms an important foundation of national identity and holds significant potential for the development of sustainable cultural tourism [2], [8].

One such cultural asset is Wayang Orang, a traditional Javanese dance-drama performance that combines music, dance, dialogue, and literary narration based on stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata adapted into local contexts [3]. Beyond entertainment, Wayang Orang functions as a medium for conveying moral teachings, philosophical reflection, and collective memory, and is often described as providing both "tontonan" (spectacle) and "tuntunan" (guidance) [3], [7]. However, like many traditional performing arts, Wayang Orang currently exists in a paradoxical landscape: formally recognized as an important cultural heritage while simultaneously facing crises of relevance and sustainability [3], [5].

A marked decline in audience numbers, especially among younger generations including Generation Z, has become one of the most pressing challenges [4], [5]. Generation Z, who have grown up in an intensively digital environment, exhibit media and entertainment consumption patterns that differ sharply from those of previous generations, with strong preferences for short-form visual content, flexible experiences, and "Instagrammable" moments [2], [4], [6]. The growing

disconnect between young people and traditional arts threatens the performing arts ecosystem and raises concerns about the emergence of a "lost generation" of wayang audiences [4], [19].

The rise of digital entertainment platforms such as streaming services, social media, and online games has further accelerated the decline of interest in traditional arts [5]. This situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which severed direct encounters between artists and audiences for almost two years, while content consumption habits shifted further into digital spaces [5]. As restrictions were gradually lifted, the habit of attending live performances was increasingly replaced by the convenience of on-demand digital entertainment [5], [9].

This study focuses on Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo, one of the oldest and best-known Wayang Orang troupes in Indonesia, based in Semarang and active since the 1960s [3], [7]. Despite its historical and artistic significance, Ngesti Pandowo has experienced a decline in audience numbers over the past two decades, particularly among younger spectators and cultural tourists, mirroring broader trends in traditional performing arts [3]. At the same time, the city of Semarang has been actively building its image as a cultural heritage and tourism destination through the development of the Kota Lama heritage district, local culinary attractions, and a variety of cultural events embedded in the city's branding strategy [8], [9]. This situation indicates potential synergies in which Wayang Orang could play a strategic role in the city's cultural tourism narrative, yet this potential has not been fully realized [8], [10].

This article argues that the main problem does not lie solely in the artistic quality of the performances, but rather in how the values of Wayang Orang are interpreted, packaged, and communicated to contemporary audiences [7], [11]. From a tourism perspective, the success of a heritage attraction is determined not only by its intrinsic value, but also by how it is interpreted, staged, and communicated as a meaningful experience for visitors [8], [9] Studies on ICH tourism and Generation Z show that this cohort approaches heritage with different motivations seeking authentic experiences, educational value, and opportunities for social media sharing which require adaptive strategies in presentation and communication [2], [4], [5]

In this context, the study draws on three main theoretical lenses. First, the concept of heritage interpretation, which emphasizes the need to translate heritage into narratives, symbols, and media that are relevant to visitors' lives [8], [13]. Second, sustainable tourism communication, which views communication as a multi-stakeholder, long-term process aimed at balancing promotion, preservation, and socio-cultural sustainability [12], [15], [16]. Third, the concept of co-creation of experiences, which positions tourists as partners who co-create experiences through participation, interaction, and content sharing, both offline and online [2], [5], [9], [17].

In the digital era, decisions to visit attractions are strongly influenced by narratives, visual imagery, and social recommendations circulating through social media and online platforms [5], [9]. Potential visitors, especially young people, tend to search for information on social media before deciding to attend an event and subsequently share their experiences in ways that function as organic promotion for organizers [4], [11], [18]. Thus, the key question is no longer simply "does Wayang Orang have value?", but rather "how are those values translated, communicated, and experienced by Generation Z audiences?".

Despite the growing literature on intangible cultural heritage tourism and Generation Z, few studies have examined how heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences intersect in the communication of traditional performing arts within an urban, digitalised context. Existing research often treats these dimensions separately, focusing either on destination branding, youth motivations, or digital promotion tools, without analysing how they jointly shape the sustainability of a specific heritage attraction such as Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo. This article contributes by providing an integrated case study that explores interpretation practices, multi-stakeholder communication dynamics, and co-creation opportunities with Generation Z, and by proposing conceptual directions for a more participatory and sustainable tourism communication model for intangible cultural heritage.

1.1 *Background and Problem Formulation*

Based on the above context, this study seeks to explore how heritage-based performing arts such as Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo are communicated within the framework of urban cultural tourism. The background problem lies in the contrast between the formal recognition and symbolic importance of Ngesti Pandowo, and the reality of declining audience numbers and limited engagement from younger generations. On the one hand, various stakeholders artists, managers, government agencies, and universities acknowledge the need to preserve and promote Wayang Orang as part of Semarang's cultural identity. On the other hand, existing communication practices remain largely event-based, information-oriented, and focused on traditional performance formats, with limited adaptation to the media habits and expectations of Generation Z. This gap motivates the need for a deeper analysis of how messages about cultural value, local identity, and educational benefits are constructed and conveyed, and how these messages are interpreted (or not) by young audiences.

1.1.1 Research Questions In line with the background and conceptual focus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do key stakeholders (managers, performers, and tourism/culture officials) interpret the cultural values, local identity, and educational benefits of Wayang Orang Ngesti

Pandowo in the context of tourism communication?
2. How are tourism communication practices implemented by these stakeholders to promote Ngesti Pandowo through various channels, including social media, cultural events, and institutional collaborations?
3. Why have these communication practices not yet been optimally interpreted and responded to by audiences, particularly Generation Z, as relevant and meaningful cultural tourism experiences?

1.1.2. Research Objectives Corresponding to the research questions, this study aims

1. To understand and describe how stakeholders interpret the cultural values, local identity, and educational benefits of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo.
2. To explore and interpret tourism communication practices used by stakeholders to promote Ngesti Pandowo as an intangible cultural heritage attraction.
3. To interpret the causes of the gap between existing communication practices and the relatively low engagement of Generation Z, and to formulate conceptual directions for a more participatory and sustainable tourism communication model aligned with the experiential characteristics of this generation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intangible Cultural Heritage and Wayang Orang

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) encompasses practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills, as well as the instruments and cultural spaces associated with them, that communities recognize as part of their heritage [1]. ICH is dynamic because it is continuously re-created by communities in response to their environment and history, while providing them with a sense of identity and continuity [1]. A growing body of literature frames ICH as a key element in the development of cultural tourism, particularly when it is managed in ways that respect authenticity and community ownership [2], [8].

Wayang, including Wayang Orang, has long been positioned as a medium of education, moral reflection, and aesthetic expression that integrates epic narratives, philosophical values, and Javanese symbolic systems [3]. Sunardi et al. show that technological developments and digital media have driven aesthetic transformations in wayang performances, including hybrid presentation formats, the emergence of new stories, and increasing audience interaction [3], [7], [5]. These findings highlight that wayang is not a static object but a living cultural practice that continually negotiates with its contemporary context [3]. Studies on Generation Z's interaction with cultural heritage in various settings likewise indicate that this cohort tends to engage with heritage when it is presented in formats that are contextual, interactive, and relevant to their everyday lives [2], [4], [5].

In this regard, Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo can be understood as an ICH asset that simultaneously embodies deep historical and artistic values and faces contemporary pressures related to urbanisation, digitalisation, and shifting audience preferences [3], [7]. This dual character makes Ngesti Pandowo a particularly relevant case for examining how ICH is positioned within urban cultural tourism and how it may (or may not) connect with Generation Z.

2.2 Heritage Interpretation in Cultural Tourism

Heritage interpretation refers to the process of translating objects, sites, or cultural practices into meaningful visitor experiences through narratives, symbols, activities, and media [13]. Tilden emphasises that effective interpretation does not simply present information, but provokes thought, evokes emotion, and encourages personal reflection among visitors [13]. In cultural tourism, the quality of interpretation has a direct impact on visitors' understanding, appreciation, and satisfaction [8]. McKercher and du Cros argue that heritage management needs to move from an "object-centred" approach towards viewing "heritage as experience," in which visitors feel involved in the stories and meanings presented [8]. Recent studies on walking tours and museums demonstrate that the way stories are structured, the narrative devices used, and the opportunities for participation offered can significantly influence learning outcomes and the strengthening of cultural identity among young visitors [14].

In the context of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo, the heritage interpretation framework is relevant for assessing the extent to which the philosophical values, local identity of Semarang, and educational messages embedded in the performances are articulated explicitly, both on stage and through promotional materials and digital content [3], [7]. This perspective highlights that the challenge is not only to preserve the traditional form of the performance, but also to design interpretive layers that bridge the gap between the internal meanings of the tradition and the external perspectives of contemporary audiences, especially Generation Z.

2.3 Sustainable Tourism Communication and Stakeholder Roles

Sustainable tourism communication understands communication not merely as a short-term promotional tool, but as a strategic process to build understanding, care, and participation related to destinations and local communities [16]. Within this approach, multiple stakeholders government agencies, cultural practitioners, tourism businesses, communities, and academic institutions are seen as interdependent actors who jointly construct and disseminate narratives about the destination [12], [15]. Research shows that integrating various communication channels such as social media, public relations, events, and institutional collaborations can strengthen destination image while simultaneously supporting sustainability objectives [10], [11], [12].

Alipour et al. stress the importance of mapping stakeholder roles in the governance of sustainable tourism destinations, including communication functions that mediate diverse interests [15]. Radjabov further argues that strategic communication in sustainable tourism can align messages, values, and actions among stakeholders so that they do not only seek visitor numbers, but also reinforce identity and socio-cultural sustainability [16]. In the case of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo, this framework is useful for analysing the communication dynamics between the troupe's management, the city government, universities, and arts communities in positioning Ngesti Pandowo within Semarang's cultural tourism strategy [7], [8].

2.4 Generation Z, Digital Media, and Co-creation of Tourism Experiences

Generation Z has grown up in a highly connected digital environment and shows strong preferences for short-form visual content, personalised experiences, and social media sharing as part of self-identity construction [2], [4], [18]. Priyanto et al. find that Gen Z tourists in Yogyakarta tend to prioritise aesthetic moments, authentic local interaction, and flexibility in organising their trips [4]. Other studies indicate that their interaction with digital heritage content influences their attitudes and intentions to engage in ICH tourism [2].

The concept of co-creation of experiences views tourists as partners who actively shape their experiences through interaction, participation, and the content they produce [9], [17].Co-creation research in tourism destinations shows that active involvement through workshops, interactive activities, and collaborative digital content can enhance satisfaction, loyalty, and the likelihood of recommending the destination [17]. In the context of Generation Z, immersive technologies and interactive digital content such as virtual reality (VR), mixed reality (MR), and digital storytelling have been shown to increase emotional and cognitive engagement with cultural heritage [5], [6], [11].This provides a conceptual basis for repositioning Ngesti Pandowo not only as a performance provider but also as a facilitator of shared experiences that can be co-created and shared by Generation Z.

2.5 Wayang Orang, City Identity, and Destination Branding

Cultural tourism and place branding literature highlight how cultural heritage assets are used to build destination image and differentiation [8], [11]. Cities with rich tangible and intangible heritage can leverage cultural narratives to strengthen their position in tourism competition, particularly when such narratives are communicated consistently across multiple touchpoints [8], [11]. Studies of destinations that integrate festivals, performing arts, and heritage landscapes into their branding strategies show that intangible heritage can significantly contribute to constructing a distinctive city identity [6], [11].

In the case of Semarang, the development of the Kota Lama heritage district, local culinary attractions, and cultural events forms part of broader efforts to build a heritage-based city image [8], [10]. However, traditional performing arts such as Wayang Orang have not yet occupied a prominent position in the city's official narratives and digital campaigns [7]. This suggests untapped potential to embed Ngesti Pandowo more strongly within Semarang's tourism brand, both as a stand-alone attraction and as part of a wider network of heritage experiences across the city [7], [8.]

A recent in-depth study on Wayang On The Street (WOTS) in Semarang's Kota Lama heritage district provides a robust conceptual framework for understanding how traditional performing arts can be revitalised through public-space adaptation. The study identifies three interconnected processes underlying WOTS: transit, transisi (transition), and transmisi budaya (cultural transmission). Transit refers to the physical relocation of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo from its enclosed theatre venue (Gedung Ki Narto Sabdo) to an open public space in Kota Lama, a move driven by declining audiences for the conventional indoor format. Transisi captures the subsequent changes in performance function, technical aspects, and visual presentation including simplified stage design, shorter duration, and the use of more accessible Javanese speech levels as the performance adapts to its new role as a cultural tourism attraction. Finally, transmisi budaya occurs through a pentahelix collaboration model that integrates five stakeholder groups: government, academia, the private sector, communities, and the media.[21].

This model facilitates the transfer of moral values, performance techniques, Javanese language and literature, and local historical identity, while simultaneously emphasising innovation to support heritage preservation and cultural tourism promotion. Importantly, the study demonstrates that the transit–transisi–transmisi framework explains not only how WOTS emerged from the decline of Ngesti Pandowo, but also why the street performance format generates qualitatively different audience engagement compared to theatre-based presentations. For Generation Z, the open-air, festival-embedded context lowers barriers to entry, enables flexible spectator positioning, and transforms the act of watching into a participatory, shareable experience aligning directly with the co-creation principles discussed earlier in this paper.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three main theoretical perspectives: heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences. Heritage interpretation is used to analyse how the cultural values, local identity, and educational messages of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo are articulated in performances, promotional materials, and digital content [3], [8], [13]. Sustainable tourism communication provides a lens to understand multi-stakeholder communication dynamics among the troupe's management, government agencies, universities, and communities in positioning Ngesti Pandowo within Semarang's cultural tourism strategy [12], [15], [16].The co-creation of experiences framework is employed to examine the extent to which

Generation Z is involved as a partner in creating experiences and narratives about Wayang Orang, both through direct interaction and social media practices [2], [4], [9], [17].

Together, these perspectives form the conceptual basis for analysing the empirical findings presented in the subsequent sections and for proposing directions for more audience-oriented, participatory, and sustainable tourism communication models for intangible cultural heritage.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a single case study design focusing on Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo in the city of Semarang [20]. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research seeks to understand meanings, experiences, and interpretations constructed by stakeholders in relation to the promotion of cultural heritage, rather than to measure relationships between variables quantitatively [20]. The case study design allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon of tourism communication for intangible cultural heritage in a contextual and holistic manner, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined [20].

3.2 Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in Semarang, Central Java, with a specific focus on Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo, which is based at the Taman Budaya Raden Saleh (TBRS) complex, particularly in the Ki Nartosabdo theatre [7]. The study also observed Ngesti Pandowo's involvement in several city events, such as the "Wayang on the Street" programme in the Kota Lama heritage district and various cultural festivals [8], [10]. Semarang was selected as the research site because it represents an urban environment where traditional cultural practices interact with processes of modernisation and digital transformation [8], [11].

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document and digital content analysis.

3.3.1 Informants and Interview Protocol

The research data were obtained from in-depth interviews conducted during the research period with 12 key informants. The informants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diversity of perspectives. The informants' profiles were categorized into three groups: (1) Management and cultural figures (I-1 to I-4), who provided information on history, philosophical values, and operational challenges; (2) Regulators/government representatives (I-5), who offered insights into local tourism policies; and (3) Generation Z participants (I-6 to I-12), consisting of students and young workers aged 18–24 years, to explore the perceptions of future consumers. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview guide focusing on communication barriers and the potential for digital innovation in the preservation of Wayang Orang.

3.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation was carried out in several settings: regular performances at the Ki Nartosabdo theatre, performances in public spaces such as "Wayang on the Street" in Kota Lama, and organised student visits. Observations focused on audience composition, patterns of engagement, communication materials displayed, and interactions between performers and audiences [20]. Fieldnotes were compiled systematically in both descriptive and reflective formats to capture situations, key dialogues, and the researcher's impressions [20].

3.3.3 Document and Digital Content Analysis

Documents analysed in this study included content from the Instagram account @wo_ngestipandowo, posters and promotional materials, city cultural and tourism planning documents, and media coverage of performances and events involving Ngesti Pandowo. Document analysis concentrated on message content, visual forms, posting patterns, and levels of audience interaction [11], [18].

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using thematic analysis [20]. The analytical process involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and fieldnotes, coding of relevant meaning units, clustering codes into themes that represent patterned meanings, refining themes to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between them, and interpreting these themes with reference to the frameworks of heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences [8], [9], [17].

3.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through data and method triangulation, limited member checking with key informants, and the provision of rich contextual description (thick description) [20]. The researcher engaged in reflexivity by acknowledging his dual role as a ***doctoral candidate in communication studies and a lecturer in tourism***, who possesses prior engagement in cultural preservation initiatives in Semarang. This background provided deep access and contextual understanding but required the researcher to consciously reflect on potential biases. Reflexivity was practiced by maintaining analytical distance, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the collected data rather than personal assumptions, and maintaining transparency throughout the interpretation process.[20]

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organised into four main themes, followed by a synthesis that highlights gaps in interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation.

4.1 The Position of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo and Sustainability Challenges

Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo is perceived by informants as one of the key icons of traditional

performing arts in Semarang, carrying important historical, philosophical, and cultural identity values [3], [7]. For artists and managers, the troupe is not merely a workplace but a "heritage home" where cultural values are transmitted to the public and younger generations. However, interviews and observations reveal a sharp decline in audience numbers at regular theatre performances, which are now dominated by older spectators, while Generation Z is almost absent unless they come as part of organised visits or academic assignments. This pattern aligns with other studies that highlight weakened connections between young people and traditional arts in various contexts [3], [4], [19].

This situation illustrates a paradox between the high heritage value acknowledged by practitioners and the fragile sustainability of audience ecosystems [3], [7]. From a heritage interpretation perspective, it suggests that the symbolic and historical values of Wayang Orang have not yet been translated into experiences that resonate with younger audiences in the context of regular performances [8], [13]. Interestingly, when Ngesti Pandowo performs in public events such as "Wayang on the Street" in the Kota Lama district, audience size and diversity increase significantly, including the presence of Generation Z and tourists [1], [8]. This contrast indicates that Wayang Orang still holds substantial appeal, but audience response is strongly influenced by context, accessibility, and the overall event atmosphere [3], [8].

4.2 Heritage Interpretation Practices On-stage and in Digital Media

On stage, Ngesti Pandowo performers and managers tend to maintain a classical Wayang Orang format, including the use of Javanese high speech (krama), long story structures, and relatively conventional staging styles [3]. This choice is understood as a responsibility to preserve the authenticity and dignity of the heritage and to uphold the pakem (traditional conventions) passed down from previous generations [7]. For older audience members familiar with the language and cultural codes, this format evokes strong feelings of nostalgia and emotional closeness [3]. For many Generation Z spectators, however, limited proficiency in Javanese high speech and unfamiliarity with wayang dramaturgy make long performances with minimal explicit explanation a barrier to understanding the storyline and moral messages [4], [19].

From a heritage interpretation standpoint, this indicates that the process of "translating meaning" into accessible language, duration, and formats for younger audiences remains suboptimal [8].On-stage interpretation largely occurs implicitly and relies on audience members' prior knowledge to decode symbols, dialogues, and dramatic situations [3]. Potential enhancements such as brief pre-show introductions, concise explanations of characters and plot, or supporting media like projected summaries and simple infographics have not yet been systematically implemented [13], [14]. By contrast, some heritage destinations deliberately design additional interpretive layers through guides, concise booklets, or digital media to support young visitors' understanding [8], [14].

In the digital realm, content analysis of the Instagram account @wo_ngestipandowo shows that posts are dominated by performance schedules, documentation photos, and post-event thank-you notes, while interpretive content explaining story meanings, character profiles, or underlying values is scarce. Audience interaction in the form of likes, comments, and shares is relatively low, indicating that communication remains largely one-way and informational rather than dialogic and engagement-oriented [18]. Studies on digital storytelling and cultural tourism promotion suggest that narrative content combining factual information with personal stories and compelling visuals is more effective in building emotional connection with audiences, particularly Generation Z [11].

Viewed through heritage interpretation principles, Ngesti Pandowo's social media presence currently functions more as a noticeboard for schedules than as a space for interpretation that bridges heritage with the everyday lives of young audiences [7], [13]. The absence of narratives linking Wayang Orang to contemporary issues, artists' personal experiences, or audience reflections means that the potential of digital media as a medium for interpretation and co-creation remains underutilised [2], [17]. Consequently, both on stage and online, current interpretation practices remain centred on presenting traditional forms rather than deliberately designing interpretive experiences that foster understanding, closeness, and participation among Generation Z [4], [19].

The findings of this study regarding the transit process of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo resonate strongly with independent research on the Wayang On The Street (WOTS) programme. According to that study, the relocation from the enclosed Ki Nartosabdo theatre to the open public spaces of Kota Lama was not merely a change of venue but a strategic response to the decline of the conventional performance format. This transit enabled Ngesti Pandowo to reposition itself within Semarang's cultural tourism landscape by becoming a visible, accessible attraction embedded in the Kota Lama heritage district. Concretely, our observations and interviews confirm that the open-air setting allows Generation Z spectators to dynamically choose their viewing distance, take photographs with heritage architecture as a backdrop, and circulate freely behaviours that are physically restricted in the fixed-seating theatre environment.[21]

Furthermore, the transisi (transition) dimension identified in the WOTS literature helps explain the specific modifications that make the street performance more intelligible and engaging for young audiences. These include: (1) a condensed performance duration that corresponds with Generation Z's shorter attention spans; (2) simplified staging that emphasises visual aesthetics and "Instagrammable" moments; and (3) the use of more colloquial Javanese (ngoko) rather than high speech (krama), which our informants explicitly cited as a barrier

to understanding. Importantly, the transmisi budaya (cultural transmission) process operationalised through a pentahelix stakeholder model involving government, academia, the private sector, communities, and the media provides an institutional mechanism that our study found to be fragmented and event-based in the context of regular theatre performances. Whereas Ngesti Pandowo's routine communication with stakeholders often remains ad hoc, WOTS benefits from structured coordination among the Semarang city government (which integrates the programme into the Kota Lama Festival), universities (which conduct research and facilitate student visits), local businesses (which sponsor or host events), communities (which provide volunteer support), and media outlets (which broadcast performances and generate publicity). This integrated framework not only sustains the WOTS programme but also systematically transmits the moral and aesthetic values of Wayang Orang to new audiences, including Generation Z. Thus, from a sustainable tourism communication perspective, WOTS exemplifies how a strategically coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach can bridge the interpretation and co-creation gaps that persist in conventional theatre-based performances.

These findings indicate that preserving classical performance formats is not sufficient on its own; it needs to be complemented by deliberately designed interpretive aids that translate philosophical values into succinct explanations, visual summaries, and interactive digital content tailored to Generation Z. Strengthening heritage interpretation thus requires a shift from merely presenting performances to curating narrative entry points before, during, and after the show that help young audiences understand, feel, and share the meanings embedded in Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo.

4.3 Sustainable Tourism Communication and Stakeholder Dynamics

The findings show that communication between stakeholders around Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo has developed, but remains partial and is not yet integrated into a coherent sustainable tourism communication strategy [16]. Ngesti Pandowo's management relies heavily on invitations and programmes from the Culture and Tourism Office or TBRS to secure performance opportunities in city events, while the municipal government tends to position Ngesti Pandowo as one of several cultural acts used to support heritage and tourism agendas [7]. Universities contribute through organised visits, research, and community engagement activities, whereas arts communities participate in ad hoc creative projects.

From a sustainable tourism communication perspective, these patterns reflect some collaborative initiatives but lack an explicit shared vision and long-term planning [16] There is no clear strategic communication framework that aligns messages and defines the roles of each actor in positioning Wayang Orang as a core element of Semarang's cultural tourism narrative [15], [16]. Events and promotional activities follow the internal agendas of individual organisations rather than a jointly developed communication roadmap [12], [15]. As a result, public messaging becomes fragmented: city tourism campaigns tend to highlight Kota Lama and culinary attractions, while the narrative connections to Wayang Orang remain weak[10].

Studies on sustainable destination governance emphasise that the success of cultural tourism depends heavily on the ability to manage stakeholder roles and communication in a structured way [15]. In the case of Ngesti Pandowo, the absence of regular forums or dedicated communication platforms that bring together managers, government, universities, and communities means that many potential synergies are not fully realised. Initiatives such as the TBRS director's invitation to universities to strengthen support for wayang orang indicate growing awareness of the need for collaboration, but require follow-up in the form of joint programmes and measurable communication plans [7].

Conceptually, this situation suggests that communication around Ngesti Pandowo still operates largely within a short-term, event-based logic rather than a relationship-based approach aimed at building long-term connections between heritage, stakeholders, and audiences [16].

From a sustainable tourism communication perspective, these patterns point to the need for a more explicit communication framework that clarifies shared goals, roles, and key messages among stakeholders. Such a framework could, for instance, align city branding narratives, Ngesti Pandowo's programming, university engagement, and community initiatives around a common storyline that positions Wayang Orang as a living heritage experience for Generation Z, rather than as an occasional supporting act in isolated events.

4.*4* Co-creation of Experiences and Generation Z Engagement

Interviews with students and observational data reveal that Generation Z has a high potential for appreciating Wayang Orang, but is not yet optimally facilitated to engage as co-creators of experience [4], [19]. Before attending, many students held stereotypes of wayang as old-fashioned and boring, yet after watching live performances they expressed surprise and admiration for the costumes, music, and choreography, describing them as "cool" and "different from everyday entertainment In the early stages of performances, they appeared enthusiastic, taking photos and short videos and sharing them on social media..

However, as performances progressed, attention tended to decline; some students appeared tired, struggled to follow the story due to language barriers and long duration, and returned to focusing on their smartphones [4]. These interview findings regarding the barriers and perceptions of Generation Z are summarized in Table 3, which presents direct quotes from participants concerning their experience watching Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo.

Table 1. Synthesis of In-depth Interview Findings: Generation Z Perceptions and Barriers

Category	Informant Code	Key Findings (Direct Quotes)	Researcher Interpretation
Expectation vs. Reality	I-7 (Student)	"Initially, I thought it would be boring, but seeing the costumes and music live, it turned out to be very grand and aesthetically pleasing for photos."	Presence of a positive "aesthetic surprise" limited to visual aspects.
Participation Barriers	I-9 (Student)	"The Javanese language used is too high (krama); I couldn't understand the story without reading the paper synopsis. Eventually, I just went back to my phone."	Language barriers and lack of digital interpretive tools.
Visit Motivation	I-10 (Student)	“honestly coming for tasks of class I would think twice to come again unless there was a special event."	Low intrinsic motivation; dependence on external academic drivers.
Co-creation Desires	I-12 (Gen Z)	"It would be exciting if we could take photos with the performers on stage or learns for a bit. So we aren't just sitting still for hours."	Need for a shift from passive spectatorship to active participation.

The data in Table 4.1 illustrates a clear disconnect between visual appreciation and narrative understanding. Informants I-7 and I-9 represent a common pattern where admiration for surface-level aesthetics (costumes and music) fails to sustain attention due to linguistic barriers. This confirms that for the sustainability of Ngesti Pandowo, authenticity alone is insufficient; it requires communication bridges that are relevant to the linguistic competencies of the younger generation. Furthermore, the desire expressed by Informant I-12 to engage in physical activities such as short workshops or stage interactions suggests that traditional performance models must begin to adopt "experience economy" principles, where value is co-created through active involvement rather than mere one-way consumption [17].When asked whether they would attend again voluntarily without being invited by lecturers or friends, most expressed hesitation and stated that they would need a special reason or external push to return [19]. This pattern is consistent with previous research showing that Generation Z visits to heritage attractions, including wayang museums, are often driven by external factors such as social invitations or academic requirements rather than intrinsic motivation [19].

From a co-creation perspective, this indicates that the current experience design still positions Generation Z primarily as passive spectators rather than partners in shaping the experience [17]. Students’ experiences are dominated by consumption of a fully pre-designed performance, with limited structured opportunities for participation .Activities that could enable direct interaction with artists such as short post-performance discussions, Q&A sessions, basic movement workshops, or opportunities to try costumes and props have not yet been routinely integrated into the offer [17].

Co-creation research suggests that active involvement in designing, modifying, or sharing experiences can strengthen visitors’ sense of ownership and emotional attachment to destinations [17]. For Generation Z, such involvement is often mediated through social media practices that link individual experiences to collective narratives about a place [2], [18]. In the case of Ngesti Pandowo, although some students spontaneously upload content, there is no deliberate strategy to facilitate or guide these practices as part of co-creation such as through hashtag campaigns, creative challenges, or collaborative content projects with the official account.

The gap between aesthetic appreciation and sustained participation suggests that visual and musical appeal is important but insufficient to build long-term engagement without experience designs that give Generation Z a sense of being involved, contributing, and recognised [4], [17].

4.5 Synthesis: Gaps in Interpretation, Communication, and Co-creation

Synthesising the findings from Sections 4.1–4.4 reveals three major gaps in the tourism communication of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo. First, there is an **interpretation gap**, in which the cultural values of

Wayang Orang are not yet adequately translated into accessible language, formats, and media for Generation Z, both on stage and online [8], [13]. Second, there is a **sustainable tourism communication gap**, where existing multi-stakeholder relationships have not been structured into an integrated communication strategy that positions Ngesti Pandowo as a key component of Semarang's cultural tourism narrative [12], [15], [16]. Third, there is a **co-creation gap**, in which Generation Z shows clear potential for appreciation and engagement but is not yet systematically enabled to act as a partner in disseminating their experiences of Wayang Orang [17], [19]

Theoretically, these findings underscore the value of integrating heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences to understand communication dynamics around traditional performing arts in urban and digital contexts [8], [16]. Practically, they suggest that strengthening the sustainability of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo as a cultural tourism attraction requires more than increasing performance frequency and promotional volume; it demands a shift from simply "showing" heritage towards "interpreting, communicating, and co-creating" heritage experiences with Generation Z [2], [4].

Taken together, these gaps point towards the contours of a conceptual tourism communication model for Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo that integrates heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences. Rather than providing a fully operational blueprint, this study proposes initial conceptual directions in which interpretive narratives, multi-stakeholder coordination, and structured co-creation opportunities are designed as mutually reinforcing components to sustain Generation Z engagement with intangible cultural heritage

.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo holds a vital role as an intangible cultural heritage icon in Semarang but faces serious sustainability challenges due to declining audiences and limited Generation Z engagement, despite strong recognition of its historical and identity values by stakeholders. This study shows that the main barriers lie not in artistic quality, but in an interpretation gap, a sustainable tourism communication gap, and a co-creation gap that weaken the translation of heritage values into meaningful experiences for young audiences. On-stage and digital practices still prioritise classical formats and one-way information, while multi-stakeholder collaborations between the troupe, government, universities, and communities remain fragmented and event-based, so that Generation Z's initial aesthetic appreciation rarely develops into repeat visits or active participation. Conceptually, the research advances the integration of heritage interpretation, sustainable tourism communication, and co-creation of experiences as a lens for understanding how traditional performing arts can remain relevant in urban digital contexts, and outlines initial directions for a tourism communication model that links interpretive narratives, coordinated stakeholder messaging, and structured co-creation opportunities. Practically, the findings point to the need for investments in interpretive design and clearer communication frameworks that align city branding and institutional programmes, as well as participatory formats that position Generation Z as partners rather than passive spectators. This qualitative single-case study is limited to one troupe and city context and does not measure the quantitative impact of specific interventions, so future research could experimentally test co-creation formats and digital storytelling strategies across multiple intangible heritage sites and youth segment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Chairperson of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandowo and all artists and managers who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights during the research process. Appreciation is also extended to the Head of Taman Budaya Raden Saleh and officials from the Culture and Tourism Office of Semarang City for providing access, information, and opportunities for observation at various cultural events. The authors are grateful to colleagues from the Tourism and Javanese Arts study programmes who collaborated in organising student visits to Ngesti Pandowo performances, which enriched the empirical data, as well as to the students who willingly participated as informants and shared their perspectives as members of Generation Z .

REFERENCES

[1] UNESCO, "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage," Paris, France, 2003. [Online]. Available: https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention

[2] Y. Jiang, C. Lyu, and J. Li, "Unpacking Generation Z tourists' motivation for intangible cultural heritage tourism," *Tourism Recreation Research*, Aug. 2024, doi: 10.1080/02508281.2024.2387895.

[3] S. Sunardi, P. A. Saka, K. I. Sulastuti, A. R. Mulyana, I. Ansari, W. Novianto, Kiswanto, and R. L. U. Putro, "Aesthetic transformation of Javanese wayang performances in the digital era," *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 78–95, 2025, doi: 10.15294/harmonia.v25i1.11320.

[4] S. E. Priyanto, S. Malkhamah, M. Baiquni, and J. Suprihanto, "Pola pengalaman wisatawan Generasi Z di destinasi pariwisata Yogyakarta," *Jurnal Pariwisata Terapan*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 112–128, 2024, doi: 10.22146/jpt.96487.

[5] F. Wajdi, N. I. Abas, A. A. Setyawan, and D. Puspawati, "Virtual tourism for cultural heritage: Transforming Generation Z's engagement and visit intentions," *Tourism*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 45–62, 2025, doi: 10.18778/0867-5856.2025.20.

[6] D. Buhalis and N. Karatay, "Mixed reality (MR) for Generation Z in cultural heritage tourism towards

Metaverse," in *ENTER 2022 eTourism Conf.*, 2022, pp. 16–27, doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-94751-4_2.

[7] J. Suranto, "Leveraging indigenous resources: A digital communication framework for the Omah Wayang tourism village in Sidowarno," *Jurnal Javanologi*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 145–162, 2025.

[8] B. McKercher and H. du Cros, *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management*, 2nd ed. New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2015

[9] A. M. Morrison, *Marketing and Managing Tourism Destinations*, 3rd ed. London, UK: Routledge, 2023, doi: 10.4324/9781003343356.

[10] I. Aminuddin, R. Rumyeni, and R. E. Yozani, "Strategi komunikasi pemasaran Dinas Kepemudaan Olahraga dan Pariwisata dalam mempromosikan wisata budaya festival perang di Kabupaten Kepulauan Meranti pasca Covid-19," *Jurnal Teknik Industri Terintegrasi*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 78–92, 2025.

[11] H. T. Wijaya, "Digital storytelling untuk pelestarian budaya komunitas: Studi kasus desa wisata di Jawa Tengah," *Komunika: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 23–40, 2023, doi: 10.24090/komunika.v17i1.6531.

[12] J. Ganobcik, M. Halmo, and M. Lukac, "Optimising marketing communication processes in cultural tourism," *Marketing Science & Inspirations*, vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 7–14, 2025

[13] F. Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 4th ed. Chapel Hill, NC, USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2008

[14] A. Agoes and S. Indrianty, "Exploring how walking tour interpretation influences Generation Z's attitudes toward heritage conservation," *Tourism and Sustainable Development Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 276–290, 2024, doi: 10.32659/tsj.v10i2.448.

[15] Suparjo, Y. A. Dana, C. M. Kumala, and E. S. Sunarsih, "Stakeholder collaboration in sustainable tourism development in Tana Toraja, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia: Efforts to improve tourist visits," *International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Management Studies*, vol. 7, no. 6, pp. 1025–1042, 2025, doi: 10.47191/jefms/v7-i6-58.

[16] O. Radjabov, M. D. Terruel-Serrano, O. Cherednichenko, R. Kulakovska, and M. Morozova, "Prospects of using strategic communication in sustainable tourism promotion," *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, vol. 7, art. no. 1623121, Nov. 2025, doi: 10.3389/fspor.2025.1623121.

[17] L. F. N. Fortunato, G. Sarfati, and Y. M. Dallabrida, "Value co-creation for memorable touristic experiences: Experimental evidence of the effects on consumer satisfaction and purchase intention," *Revista Turismo em Análise*, vol. 35, pp. 38–60, 2024, doi: 10.11606/issn.1984-4867.v35p38-60.

[18] M. F. Arkansyah, D. Pramono, and A. Wijaya, "TikTok content strategy for heritage tourism: Engaging Generation Z with traditional culture," *Journal of Digital Tourism*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 34–51, 2024.

[19] T. Patricia and S. Soeprapto, "Museum wayang and Generation Z: Understanding visit motivation through social influence perspective," *Indonesian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 145–162, 2023.

[20] R. K. Yin, Case Study Research and Applications: *Design and Methods*, 7th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications, 2025.

[21] D. Yullastuti, (2025). *Transit, Transisi, dan Transmisi: Pertunjukan Wayang On The Street di Kota Lama Semarang* (Universitas Gadjah Mada).