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Traditional Art Platformization: Commodification of Denawa Characters and the Attention Economy in AI Podcast Format on Tiktok

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the platformization of traditional arts through the commodification of the Denawa (Buta Bodoran) character within an AI-generated podcast format on TikTok. The central problem examined is how this digital transformation reconfigures traditional Sundanese philosophical values within the confluence of the attention economy and algorithmic logic. Employing a qualitative approach rooted in systematic netnography comprising the phases of entrée, data sourcing, coding, and triangulation alongside content analysis, this research examines four sample videos from the @wayanggoleknusantara account. The results indicate that the Buta character undergoes a process of media deterritorialization (demolition triggered by advances in technology and digital media) and reterritorialization elements that were once uprooted find their new form again) into an "in-between" space, wherein cultural legitimacy shifts from the appreciation of physical stage performances to digital metrics such as likes and shares. Crucially, the findings reveal that in the pursuit of virality and algorithmic engagement, a symbolic simplification occurs, reducing the philosophical depth of the Denawa figure to a mere commodity for instant entertainment. The study concludes that although digital innovation expands outreach among younger audiences, a "narrative negotiation" strategy is vital to maintain an equilibrium between technological adaptation and the originality of cultural values. Theoretically, this research reinforces the framework of the attention economy in traditional arts; practically, it provides actionable guidance for creators to safeguard cultural integrity amidst the relentless demands of platformization.

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional performing arts of *Wayang Golek* are currently facing severe existential challenges due to the overwhelming dominance of algorithm-based digital entertainment (Maulana, 2021; Pirmansyah et al., 2024). Traditionally, as an integral medium for conveying moral values, ethics, and local wisdom, *Wayang Golek* relied heavily on physical presence and the live improvisation skills of a puppeteer (*dalang*). Within this performing ecosystem, the character of *Denawa* or *Buta Bodoran* fulfills a vital dual function: serving both as a representation of antagonist power and as an agent of socio-cultural liberation through humor and localized social criticism (Andrieu, as cited in Maulana, 2021).

However, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) and the rise of short-form video applications have triggered a profound paradigm shift. This shift has led to the migration of these traditional characters onto contemporary digital landscapes, notably via content creator accounts on TikTok, such as @wayanggoleknusantara. This phenomenon exemplifies the broader process of the platformization of cultural production, wherein established cultural forms are systematically integrated into the infrastructural, economic, and technological frameworks of global tech platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Poell et al., 2021).

Consequently, traditional art forms are increasingly subjected to the logic of the attention economy and algorithmic recommendation systems (Citton, 2017). Under this regime, human attention becomes a highly commodified, scarce resource. Digital platforms employ algorithmic architectures optimized to maximize user engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and watch time which intrinsically prioritize immediate visibility and rapid consumption. Scholars note that when intangible cultural heritage is adapted to fit these algorithmic mandates, a tension arises between broad digital dissemination and the preservation of cultural depth. The pressure to secure virality often incentivizes the "entertainmentization" and structural simplification of complex cultural narratives, stripping characters like the *Denawa* of their multi-layered philosophical significance to fit the template of instant, modular digital commodities (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Wang, 2026).

This transformation presents a fundamental academic problem regarding the survivability of Sundanese cultural identity. As traditional symbols undergo media deterritorialization and are reassembled within virtual spaces, the mechanisms of cultural legitimacy shift from communal, physical stage validation to quantified algorithmic engagement. Therefore, understanding how traditional performing arts can balance technological modernization with philosophical authenticity remains a critical area of inquiry within contemporary digital sociology and cultural studies.

Previous research has highlighted a lot on the digitization of puppets, but the majority still focus on the aspect of archiving or transmitting knowledge through linear video. There is a significant research gap in understanding how AI not only changes the visual appearance of characters, but also transforms traditional art interaction structures into popular formats such as AI Podcasts. In this context, the character of *Buta* is no longer tied to a formal storyline (play), but rather acts as a speaker in a modern discussion format with the use of mixed Sundanese. This creates a cultural hybridity that blends old-fashioned aesthetics with contemporary urban lifestyles. The phenomenon suggests that social media has evolved into a hybrid cultural space, where traditional identities are renegotiated through more flexible and participatory digital communication formats

(Bayrak, 2026). The balance between the pure aspect (traditional philosophy) and the applied aspect (AI technology and digital monetization) is a critical point that needs to be dissected more deeply to see the extent to which the spirit of the traditional art still survives or is actually degraded. In the context of digital culture, traditional art transformation is often in the tug-of-war between the preservation of cultural identity and the demands of social media algorithms that push culture to become faster, more popular, and easier to consume by digital audiences (Putra, 2026).

The importance of this research lies in its ability to map the process of reterritorialization of traditional art in the digital space. Emphasizing that digitalization is a means of socio-cultural revitalization that reactualizes the meaning of art through the process of territorialization (Rafianti et al. 2026). This strategy is effective for expanding cultural expansion in the global realm, as long as the originality of its philosophical value is maintained in the midst of the dynamics of a complex digital ecosystem. Traditional art fails to adapt, and is at risk of being forgotten by the new generation, if the adaptation is too extreme in pursuit of virality, then it risks losing its originality. This condition shows that digital culture encourages traditional arts to continue to adapt to fast, visual, and algorithm-based media consumption patterns (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Digital platforms like TikTok shift cultural authority from artists to algorithms, where cultural content must be "standardized" in order to be widely distributed by recommendation engines (Nieborg & Poell, 2018). Through a case study of the Nusantara wayang golek account, this study tries to answer the tension between preservation and commodification. Gap analysis shows that audience interaction in the form of likes and comments now serves as a new legitimacy instrument that replaces audience applause on the physical stage.

Based on this background, this study formulates the main question: How does the process of commodification of *Denawa* characters in the AI podcast format on TikTok reconfigure the philosophical value of Sundanese traditional art in the vortex of the attention economy and social media algorithms? The research aims to analyze the process of commodification of *Denawa/Buta Bodoran* characters in AI podcast format on TikTok, and its impact on digital cultural capital. This research seeks to uncover creative strategies used to trigger engagement algorithms without having to use gift features directly, but through language and visual manipulation that is relatable to cross-generational audiences. Theoretically, this research contributes to the study of digital culture on how traditional art is negotiated in algorithm-based platforms. Practically, the results of this research are expected to be a reference for art creators in formulating preservation strategies that maintain a balance between digital innovation and originality of philosophical values.

The commodification of *Denawa's* characters in AI format is not just a change in the medium, but a form of cultural 'platformization' in which traditional art expressions are forced to submit to the logic of the digital market (Nieborg & Poell, 2018; Caplan & Gillespie, 2020). In the TikTok ecosystem, the character of *Buta* undergoes a process of partial dehumanization in order to meet the standard of 'algorithmic aesthetics' that prioritizes the speed of interaction over the depth of the philosophical narrative (Sunandar & Kurnia, 2023). This creates new tensions: on the one hand, AI technology extends the visual life of traditions, but on the other hand, it reduces the moral complexity of *Denawa* characters to mere 'attention commodities' whose success is only measured through quantitative metrics such as the number of likes and shares.

METHOD

The research uses a qualitative approach with the netnography method. The netnography method was chosen because it is able to observe the patterns of interaction, communication behavior, and cultural practices that are formed in the digital community. According to Kozinets, netnography is the development of ethnographic methods used to understand social and cultural phenomena in online space through participatory observation of the activities of social media users (Kozinets, 2020). This approach is relevant because the object of the research is on the TikTok ecosystem which is based on algorithmic interaction and participatory culture. Netnography in the age of algorithms does not stop at passive observation, but allows an analysis of the 'affordance' of the platforms (technical features) that shape the cultural behavior (Morais, Santos & Goncalves, 2020).

The object of the research is focused on the TikTok @wayanggoleknusantara account, specifically the *Buta*-AI Podcast content series featuring the *Denawa* or *Buta Bodoran* characters in an artificial intelligence-based visual format. The research focuses on how the traditional character of Sundanese *wayang golek* undergoes a transformation of form, function, and meaning when reproduced in a digital entertainment content format.

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation for three months by monitoring upload patterns, visual forms, language use, and audience responses to the comment column. Primary data is in the form of videos, screenshots, screen recordings, captions, and engagement metrics such as likes, comments, shares, and bookmarks. Data collection was carried out using computer devices and the desktop and mobile versions of TikTok applications to ensure the accuracy of visual documentation in a planned manner. To ensure data depth, the data collection instrument uses a structured observation sheet that includes three main indicators (Nur, 2021):

1. Visual Indicators: Includes the use of modern attributes (headset, mic), AI studio background, and lip-sync lip-sync.
2. Linguistic Indicators: Includes the frequency of use of soft vs generous Sundanese language, as well as the intensity of code-mixing (Indonesian/English).
3. Algorithmic Indicators: Includes upload time patterns, use of popular hashtags, and distribution of engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares). This is in line with the need for researchers to identify "digital footprints" as raw data in cyberspace.

The sampling technique used purposive sampling by selecting four videos that had the highest engagement rate and represented the main characteristics of the AI Blind Podcast content, such as the use of mixed Sundanese, contextual humor, locality themes, and AI-based Denawa character visuals. The selection of samples was made because videos with high engagement are considered to be able to represent the pattern of audience acceptance of digital cultural transformation. Data analysis was carried out systematically through four stages of netnography procedures adapted from the latest framework (Morais, Santos & Goncalves, 2020):

1. Entrée Stage: Conduct an introduction and immersion on @wayanggoleknusantara account to understand the culture of the Sundanese netizens community on TikTok.Tahap *Entrée*:
2. Data Sourcing Stage: Extracted data from four sample videos through purposive sampling techniques based on virality criteria (engagement rate > 10%).
3. Analysis and Interpretation (Coding) Stage: Classifying data into the categories of

Traditional Characters, AI Digital Aesthetics, and Audience Response. This stage uses manual coding techniques to capture nuances of humor that are not machine-readable.

4. Validation Stage (Triangulation): Ensure the credibility of the findings by comparing digital data with the literature of Sundanese puppet puppets and attention economics theory to see if there is a distortion of meaning. In digital culture research, this triangulation is useful to ensure that the sample taken represents the consumption patterns of the audience at large, not just a coincidence (Caliandro, 2018).

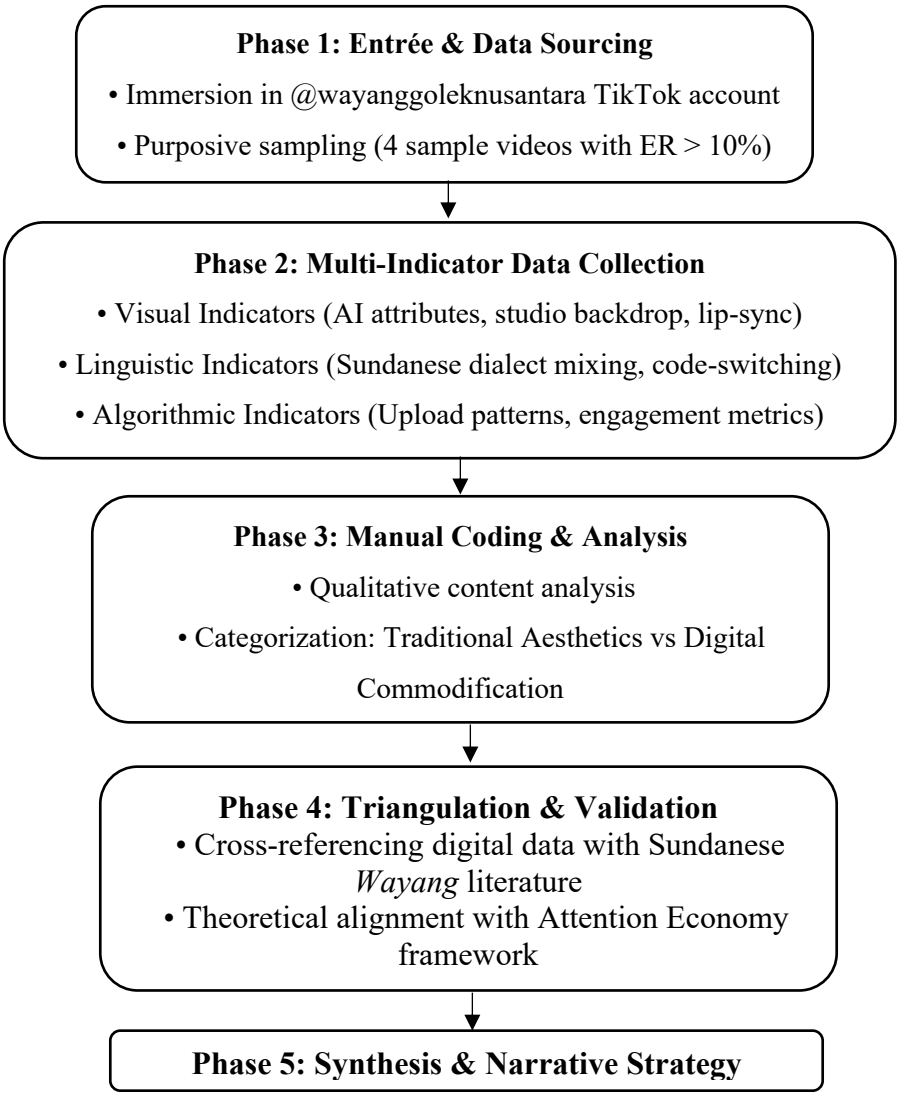


Figure 1: Research Methodology Flowchart
(Source : Author's documentation, 2026)

DISCUSSION

The @wayanggoleknusantara account transforms the character *Buta* (*Denawa)* who is traditionally an antagonist or complements figure in the bobodoran session, into an adaptive digital content creator. Visuals and Character formats are displayed in short video formats ranging in average length of 28 seconds to 60 seconds with a background setting resembling a podcast studio, complete with modern microphones, headsets and lighting.

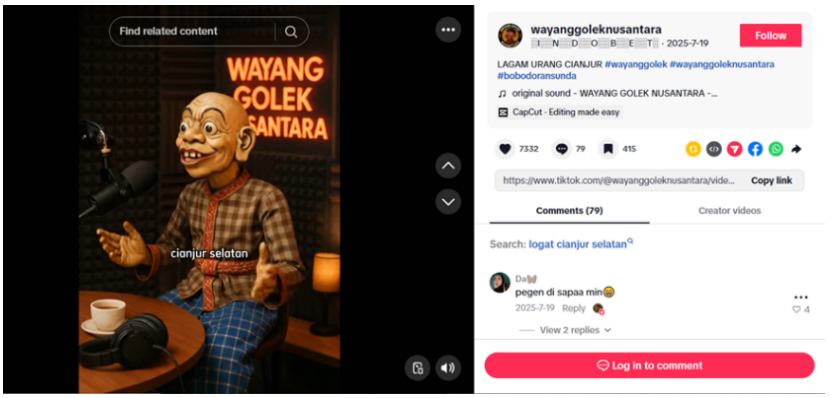


Figure 2. Video 1 with title lagam urang Cianjur
(Source: tiktok.com/@wayanggoleknusantara/video/7528802834326785297)

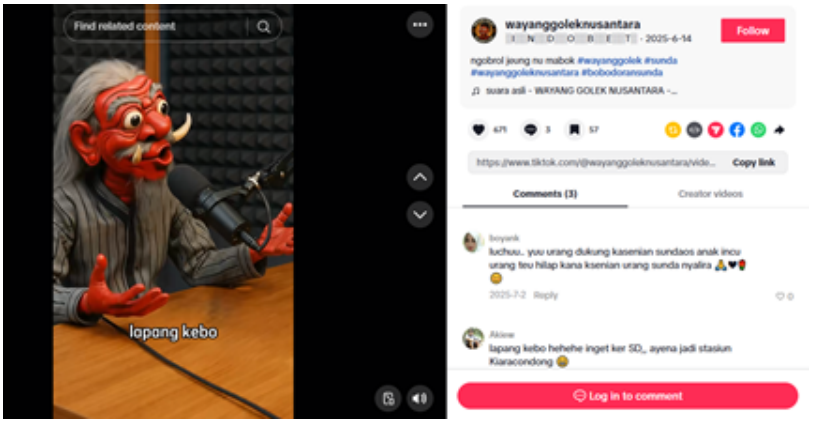


Figure 3. Video 2 with title ngobrol jeung nu mabok
(Source: tiktok.com/@wayanggoleknusantara/video/7515590084243229973)

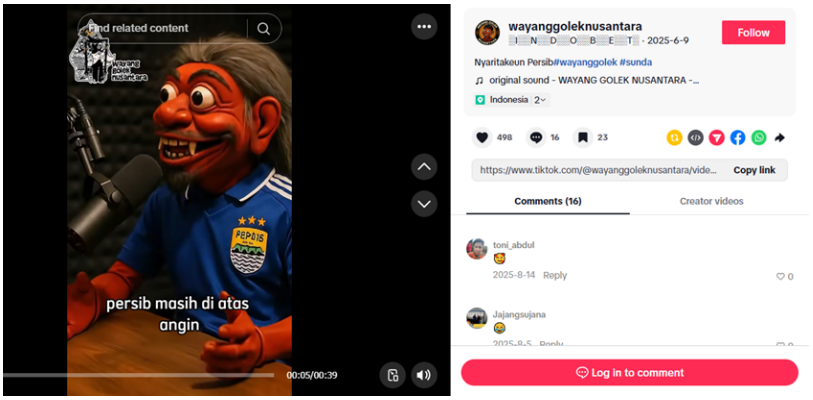


Figure 4. Video 3 with title perkara Persib
(Source: tiktok.com/@wayanggoleknusantara/video/7513648793468816660)



Figure 5. Video 4 with title Si Budeg meuli HP
(Source: tiktok.com/@wayanggoleknusantara/video/7525074674330406164)

Videos 2 to 5 enhance the visual content of puppets in the style of podcasts. The results of the study show that the character of *Buta Bodoran* has undergone a deterritorialization process, in which the visual elements of the puppet are removed from the context of the performance stage and placed in a digital studio with an AI version of digital design characters. This process does not stop at deterritorialization (root uprooting), but continues at digital reterritorialization. The use of modern attributes such as headsets and microphones on *Denawa* characters is an effort to provide a new identity that is 'familiar' with urban popular culture. Systematically, traditional aesthetics are forced into the 'in-between' space, where the identity of wayang remains but its meaning has been tamed to suit fast-paced social media consumption (Arditi, 2018). This visual transformation is a strategy to minimize the 'cultural distance' between the younger generation and traditions that have been considered ancient. Audio techniques, in terms of animation with lipsyn animation, are the art of harmonizing lip movements with the sound of recorded songs or dialogues, as if singing or speaking directly is known as lip syncronization. Entertainment shows, music videos, and social media content like TikTok use it frequently. Based on observations, the average AI Podcast video on the sample account gets a 40% higher engagement rate than conventional stage documentation videos. This proves that TikTok's audience responds more to content that has visual novelty (novelty).

The mechanism through which creative strategies trigger interaction algorithms without direct reliance on 'gift' features is structurally mapped in Figure 6. This process demonstrates how linguistic and visual manipulations serve as cross-generational hooks to generate organic engagement.

Table 1: Engagement Matrix

Video Title	**Likes**	**Comments**	**Share**
Lagam Urang Cianjur (Local Identity)	7.332	79	415
Si Budeg Meuli Handphone (Contemporary Humor)	2.553	35	145
Ngobrol Jeung Nu Mabok (Social Criticism)	670	26	57
Perkara Persib (Community Affiliates)	499	16	23

Table 1 explains the viewer's involvement in choosing the content they like. engagement metrics on @wayanggoleknusantara account serve as an indicator of the extent to which the audience interacts with the digital transformation of *Denawa's* characters. The engagement metrics in the context of *wayang golek* content include four main components: Likes, Comments, Bookmarks, and Shares. Likes: Shows the audience's level of approval or liking for the new visualization of *Denawa characters*. For example, the video *Lagam Urang Cianjur* received the highest number of 7,332 likes, which indicates that the hybridization between the character of *Buta Bodoran* and the podcast format is very well received by the TikTok audience. Comments (Dialectical interaction) serves as a discussion space where the audience gives a direct response to the narrative presented. Some comments show pride in local identity, such as users mentioning their home region (e.g. south Cianjur takokak) or giving appreciation in Sundanese. Shares: This metric indicates the extent to which content is considered relevant to be shared to the audience's network of friends. Videos with locality themes such as *Lagam Urang Cianjur* were shared 415 times, showing the potential for commodification of *Denawa/Buta* characters as an effective tool for promoting regional culture.

The high engagement rate in Table 1 shows a shift in the mechanism of cultural legitimacy. On the physical stage, the legitimacy of art is measured through direct appreciation in the form of communal applause or saweran, but on TikTok, the legitimacy is fragmented into data units in the form of likes and shares. This phenomenon confirms that in the attention economy, cultural content is no longer judged by its aesthetic depth, but rather by how effectively it triggers an audience's 'instant reaction' to interact with algorithms (Bucher, 2018). As a result, *Denawa's* character undergoes 'algorithmization' where digital popularity becomes the only indicator of preservation success, which often ignores whether the character's philosophical value really reaches the audience or just passes by on For Your Page (FYP). Bookmarks reflect the value of use or entertainment that is considered worthy of being saved and rewatched by users in the future.

Table 2: Digital Culture Capital Indicators on AI *Buta* Content

Indicator	**Observation Results**	**Strategic Analysis**
Visual AI	Characters using headsets/mics	Creating a contrast that sparks curiosity (visual hook).
Linguistik	Sunda Mix (Code Mixing)	Expand the reach of the audience to non-Sundanese speaking circles.
Interaction	Dominance *Likes* dan *Shares*	Build account authority through the For Your Page (FYP) algorithm.

The results of the study showed that @wayanggoleknusantara account transformed the character of *Denawa* or *Buta Bodoran* from a complementary figure in the Sundanese *wayang golek* show to a digital figure who acted as a carrier of humor, social criticism, and popular entertainment content on TikTok. In traditional performances, the character of *Denawa/Buta* is synonymous with the representation of the nature of anger, stupidity, and antagonistic power, then in AI-based digital content, the character undergoes a change in function to become a lighter, humorous, and closer communication medium to the

audience's daily life. This transformation shows that social media has changed traditional cultural production and consumption patterns to be more participatory and based on digital interaction (Gerbaudo, 2024).

The visual transformation is seen through the use of podcast studio settings, microphones, headsets, modern lighting, and TikTok's signature vertical video framing. These elements show the process of cultural deterritorialization, namely the transfer of the puppet context from a physical performance space to a digital space controlled by an algorithmic system. The *Denawa/Buta* character is no longer present as part of traditional puppet plays, but as digital figures who adapt to the media consumption patterns of the younger generation. This phenomenon shows how social media algorithms are reshaping cultural experiences through content personalization systems and visual distribution based on user engagement (Boeker & Urman, 2022).

This phenomenon shows the existence of cultural hybridity between the traditional aesthetics of *wayang golek* and popular culture on the internet. This hybridity can be seen in the combination of puppet visuals with modern podcast formats, the use of mixed Sundanese languages, and the discussion of daily issues such as football, drunkenness, mobile phones, and regional identity, political issues. The use of popular themes shows that content is no longer oriented towards conveying the philosophical value of puppetry in depth, but is more directed towards creating emotional connectedness (relatability) with digital audiences or netizens. In the context of TikTok, popular culture is produced through algorithmic logic that prioritizes emotional closeness and audience engagement (Kaye, Chen & Zeng, 2022).

Based on the observations, videos with locality themes such as *Lagam Urang* Cianjur obtained the highest level of engagement compared to other content. The high number of likes, comments, and shares shows that local identities still have strong appeal when packaged in a digital format that follows social media trends. In this context, the use of mixed Sundanese functions as a cultural glocalization strategy, namely an effort to maintain local identity through global mediums such as TikTok. Zeng, Abidin, and Schäfer's research explains that TikTok has evolved into a space for reproduction of local culture combined with the logic of global popular culture (Zeng, Abidin & Schäfer, 2021).

The dominance of engagement in certain videos shows that TikTok's algorithm has an important role in determining the distribution of digital culture. TikTok works through a recommendation system based on user interaction, so content that is able to trigger likes, comments, and shares tends to make it easier to get to the For Your Page (FYP) page. This condition encourages creators to produce content that is quick to understand, concise, and easy to provoke an audience's emotional response. This condition encourages creators to produce content that is quick to understand, concise, and easy to provoke an audience's emotional response. Baumann shows that TikTok's algorithm actively amplifies the distribution of content that has a high engagement tendency through algorithmic amplification mechanisms (Baumann et al. 2025).

In the perspective of the attention economy, audience attention turns into a new form of commodity that digital creators compete for. The character of *Denawa*, which previously had a symbolic and philosophical function in puppet performances, is now being commodified into a digital entertainment instrument to gain algorithmic visibility. The higher the user interaction, the greater the chance of an account gaining social legitimacy and audience growth. Montag, Yang, and Elhai's research explains that TikTok is a platform that relies heavily on digital attention mechanisms and user emotional engagement (Montag, Yang & Elhai, 2021).

This condition shows a shift in cultural function from performative experience to

digital media consumption based on speed and virality. The humor used in the *Buta* AI Podcast tends to be instant and situational to match the consumption patterns of TikTok users who have a short attention duration. In the attention economy, traditional art often undergoes "symbolic simplification" to make it easier to be consumed quickly by digital audiences who have short attention spans (Sunandar & Kurnia, 2023). As a result, the philosophical value of *Denawa's* character as a symbol of moral criticism has undergone simplification and reduction in meaning. This tendency presents a serious risk in the form of degradation of philosophical values. *Denawa,* which is a representation of the duality of human nature (good and bad), in this AI podcast is reduced to just a 'comedy agency' that loses its antagonistic dignity. When traditional characters are completely subservient to the logic of algorithms that prioritize engagement, there is an algorithmically driven culture process in which narrative depth is sacrificed for virality (Sujoko & Arini, 2023). This confirms concerns that digital adaptations without strong narrative controls will make traditional art lose its 'spirit' of originality and turn into mere entertainment content without transcendental meaning.

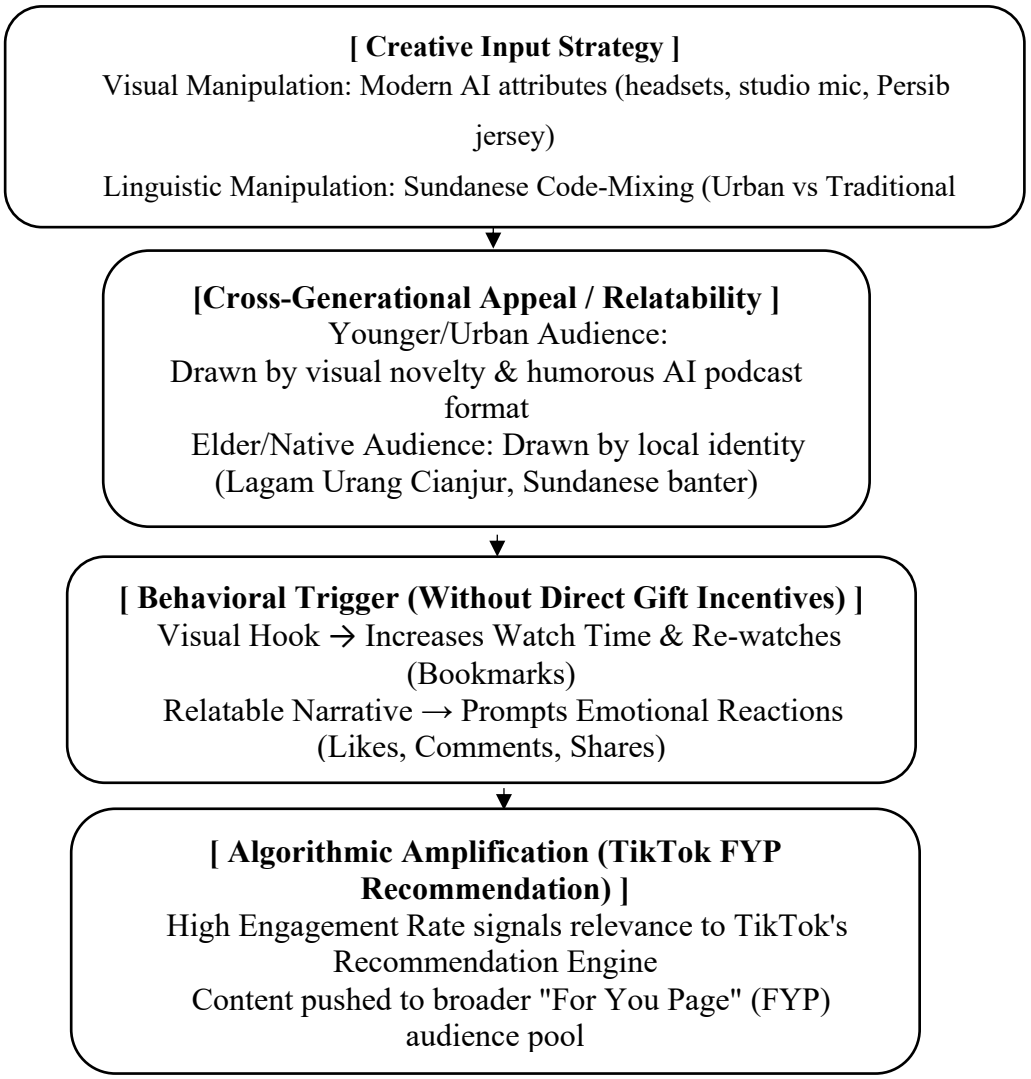


Figure 6. Algorithmic engagement mechanism visual-linguistic manipulation)
(Source: Author's documentation, 2026)

However, this transformation is not entirely seen as negative. The presence of puppet characters in social media shows that traditional culture is still able to adapt to the development of digital technology. The content of the *Buta* AI Podcast has succeeded in opening a new space for the younger generation to get to know the visuals of *wayang golek* through a medium that is more familiar with their lives. Thus, social media can be understood as a space for cultural negotiation, where traditions do not disappear completely, but undergo changes in form to survive in the digital ecosystem. Research by Islamy, Abdussalam, and Adzkia stated that the sustainability of *wayang golek* in the era of globalization is greatly influenced by the ability to adapt to new media and digital technology (Islamy, et al. 2021).

The findings of the study show that the digitization of *wayang golek* no longer functions just as cultural documentation, but has developed into a content production strategy that follows the logic of social media algorithms. The transformation of the *Denawa/Buta Bodoran* character in the AI Podcast shows the complex relationship between cultural preservation, digital commodification, and the economy of attention in the new media era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the transformation of *Buta Bodoran's* character into an AI podcast format on TikTok is a manifestation of 'cultural platformization', where traditional expressions are forced to submit to algorithmic standardization logic in order to gain visibility. This phenomenon underscores the theoretical contribution of the economy of attention in traditional art. Namely, that the sustainability of culture in the digital space is no longer only determined by the authority of the mastermind's expertise, but by the 'legitimacy of engagement' (likes and shares) that turn philosophical values into digital commodities. Although these innovations have succeeded in expanding the reach of young audiences, there is a real risk of decentralization of meaning due to the overly pragmatic process of territorialization.

Practically, this study formulates strategies for cultural content creators and traditional arts practitioners to apply 'narrative negotiation' in the digital adaptation process. Creators are advised not only to pursue the visual novelty of AI (novelty), but to maintain the original moral message structure in the podcast script to mitigate the risk of symbolic simplification. A balance can be achieved by making AI technology a visual 'entry point' to attract the audience's attention, while still directing the substance of the content to the value of cultural education so that the originality of traditional art is not completely eroded by the demands of virality.

This study has limitations because it only focuses on one character (*Denawa/Buta*) and one social media platform (TikTok), so these findings cannot be generalized to the entire spectrum of traditional digital art. Further research is recommended to expand the object of study on puppet characters with different traits, such as knight figures (*Arjuna* or *Gatotkaca*), or conduct cross-platform comparative analysis (for example, comparing audience interaction on YouTube Shorts and TikTok) to map cultural commodification patterns in a more holistic and comprehensive manner.

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