



RECEIVED 25 April 2026
ACCEPTED 11 September 2026
PUBLISHED 31 October 2026

CITATION

Sonbai ACK, Singgih BJ, Ramonita L, (2026). From Tradition to the Contemporary Stage: Business Communication Strategies of Wayang Women. *Ilomata International Journal of Social Science*. 7 (4), 1-13.
doi: 10.61194/ijss.v7i4.2404

TYPE Original Research

PUBLISHED 31 October 2026
DOI 10.61194/ijss.v7i4.2744
VOL 7 Issue 4 October 2026

COPYRIGHT

© 2026 Sonbai, Singgih and Ramonita. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

From Tradition to the Contemporary Stage: Business Communication Strategies of Wayang Women

Angelique Camelita Korassa Sonbai¹, Belinda Jean Singgih², Latifa Ramonita³

¹²³LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

Correspondence: 24072210029@lspr.edu²

Abstract

The research problem addresses how traditional arts struggle to remain economically viable and relevant in modern, multicultural markets while navigating the tension between cultural authenticity and commercialization. The main objective of this study is to analyze the practices of Wayang Women as a representation of adaptive traditional art in Southeast Asia. Supporting objectives include identifying the operational challenges faced in product and market development and evaluating strategic solutions to these obstacles. This study adopts an interpretive qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted in a flexible and non-rigid manner to elicit honest, detailed information. The study involved four informants selected purposively based on their direct engagement with the subject. Primary data was supplemented by documentation, including relevant literature, project documents, and photographs. Data validity was ensured through methodological triangulation, cross-verifying the interview transcripts with the collected documentary evidence. The data reveals that Wayang Women integrates traditional art preservation with contemporary feminist and multicultural themes. The findings indicate that its development faces specific structural challenges: limited resources, a narrow target market segmentation, and an ongoing dilemma between maintaining cultural authenticity and pursuing commercial viability. The study interprets Wayang Women's approach not as a direct ideological confrontation, but as a collaborative negotiation between tradition and innovation. While the study does not assess long-term sustainability outcomes, it suggests a potential communication pathway through which traditional performing arts may enhance their visibility and relevance within niche multicultural markets.

KEYWORDS

wayang women; business communication; contemporary art; southeast asia; intercultural communication.

Introduction

The existence of wayang performances is not limited to Indonesia but extends throughout Southeast Asia. It can be said that wayang is one of Southeast Asia's distinctive art forms. Wayang kulit in various Southeast Asian countries possesses distinct characteristics and motifs, each reflecting its own uniqueness. Wayang kulit goes by different names in each country: in Cambodia it is known as Sbek Thom, in Malaysia it is called Wayang Kelantan, and in Thailand it is referred to as Nang Yai and Nang Talung (Ahmad, 2023).

Studies on Southeast Asian performing arts have highlighted the growing role of cross-border cultural networks, festivals, and collaborative productions in promoting shared cultural heritage and regional artistic exchange (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020; Ocón, 2021; Secretariat., 2016). One such initiative is the Wayang Women community, composed of women from various Southeast Asian countries. This community focuses on the revitalization and reinvention of the wayang kulit tradition. In practice, Wayang Women embodies the spirit of regional collaboration and the renewal of wayang art in the contemporary era.

Wayang Women is an all-female shadow puppet performance group founded by Illya

Sumanto. She is a puppeteer from the Kelantanese shadow puppet tradition in Malaysia who studied under male mentors and was inspired to form an all-female group due to the male dominance in the art of wayang. The group does not intend to be multinational, but rather formed organically through a small network of Southeast Asian artists, involving members from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Cambodia, with a total of eight core members who represent themselves as independent artists, not state representatives. Sarah from Malaysia acts as a co-producer who shares the workload, while Illya Sumanto, the founder, also serves as the lead puppeteer and musician. Other members serve as musicians, DJs, and designers.

Wayang Women operates as an independent, self-funded artist collective. Its vision and mission focus on promoting women's empowerment and gender equality through the reinterpretation of Southeast Asian female ghost stories—such as Kuyang, Penanggal, Manananggal, and Gumbel—which reflect suffering under patriarchy. These stories are combined with contemporary elements such as traditional instruments from various countries mixed with electronic sounds, as well as the opening scene of Kelantanese wayang kulit blended with self-designed puppets—primarily wayang kulit, not wayang orang or golek. Key activities include performances at feminist conferences in Bangkok and Chiang Mai, five performances in Kuala Lumpur and Ubud, Bali, and festivals such as Writers Fest.

These activities are promoted via Instagram, word of mouth, and press releases, and tickets are sold to cover the travel and production costs of the performances presented by Wayang Women.

Wayang Women is a multinational wayang kulit performance art community composed entirely of women. The community is dedicated to reviving the art of Southeast Asian wayang kulit. The group utilizes Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) to transform traditional performances into commercial cultural products.

The strategy employed combines integrated approaches across various digital platforms, live events, and partnerships. This IMC approach integrates social media such as Instagram @wayang.women, email campaigns, and festival branding to create a unified message that positions their feminist narrative as a premium cultural experience, increasing audience engagement and symbolic value within a male-dominated art form.

Within the cultural and creative industries, the commercialization of traditional performances is increasingly viewed as a strategy for sustaining artistic activities. Previous studies suggest that participation in festivals, ticketed performances, and institutional partnerships can help traditional arts organizations diversify funding sources while expanding audience reach and public visibility (Colbert, 2014; Güner & Gülaçtı, 2022; Jaeni, 2023).

Notable examples include their debut performance at Chiang Mai Design Week 2024 in Thailand, which combined traditional musical instruments with a modern soundscape to attract international visitors; a cultural exchange and debut in Kuala Lumpur at REX KL on October 17–18, 2025, featuring Q&A sessions, after-parties, and paid performances via CloudJoi to support economic recovery; as well as a performance at the Ubud Writers & Readers Festival, where ghost stories explore women's resilience, generating revenue while building brand loyalty through word-of-mouth recommendations and digital scalability. These performances exemplify opportunities driven by IMC, such as merchandise potential, corporate diversity partnerships, and global tours, which transform niche artistic expertise into a scalable model for cultural entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia.

Behind the formation of Wayang Women lies a feminist ethos that serves as the foundation of this community.

Wayang Women was formed out of the founders' concern over the scarcity of female puppeteers on wayang performance stages. It is known that wayang is traditionally a male-dominated art form. For them, this is the right time for female puppeteers to step forward and revolutionize this art form (Kyra, 2024).

The modern era has its own complexities, marked by the emergence of diverse forms of entertainment and art.

Nevertheless, wayang continues to hold a unique appeal for a loyal audience of art enthusiasts, both as recipients of cultural messages and as entertainment spectators. The niche market in wayang performance art refers to a very specific and unique market segment. The audience interested in this art form is typically a segment of society that appreciates the uniqueness and cultural value inherent in wayang.

Wayang has a narrow yet strong market due to its uniqueness and distinctiveness, which are hard to find in other performances. This is the experience of Wayang Women as one of the communities in the arts sector. Although it has a small target market, this audience is highly loyal and values both tradition and innovation in wayang performances. Consequently, the demand from art enthusiasts and communities committed to cultural preservation is likely to remain stable over time (I.S., Personal Communication, November 20, 2025).

Although Wayang Women operates within a niche cultural market, its activities reflect broader developments in the contemporary creative industries, where traditional performing arts increasingly rely on festivals, digital communication, and collaborative networks to reach audiences. Previous studies suggest that these approaches may enhance the visibility and public engagement of traditional arts, while also presenting ongoing challenges in balancing cultural preservation with commercial demands (Putri & Bisri, 2024). These developments provide the broader context for examining the business communication strategies employed by Wayang Women in this study.

The Transformation of Wayang Toward the Contemporary stage

Wayang in Indonesia has long been recognized as a form of traditional art that plays a significant role in the cultural life of the community. In addition to serving as entertainment, wayang performances also serve as a means of conveying moral values, character education, and cultural communication cultural that passed down from generation to generation.

UNESCO designated wayang as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003, affirming its status as a representation of Indonesia's cultural identity on the global stage (Fibiona I. et al., 2024; Purbasari & Carolina, 2023). To date, dozens of types of wayang have developed across various regions, supported by thousands of puppeteers and performance groups that remain active in preserving this tradition (Purbasari & Carolina, 2023). However, advancements in communication technology and shifts in public entertainment consumption patterns present new challenges for the art of wayang, particularly in maintaining the interest of an audience that is increasingly shifting toward digital entertainment media and modern performance formats.

Previous studies have shown that the art of wayang has undergone various forms of change in an effort to adapt to the needs of modern society. Putri & Bisri (2024) noted that wayang kulit performances have begun to incorporate elements of popular music to attract a broader audience. Another study by (Mudana & Ribek, 2017) demonstrated how the visual elements of Kamasan wayang have been developed into larger-scale productions to support cultural tourism activities (Gusti I. et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Setianingsih & Rylita (2024) demonstrate that the digitization of suket wayang performances is undertaken as an effort to reach

younger generations who are more familiar with digital media. These various studies indicate that wayang art continues to undergo adaptations to remain relevant to an ever-changing society (Setianingsih & Rylita, 2024).

From the perspective of cultural business communication, these various forms of adaptation not only reflect changes in the performance format but also demonstrate the efforts of artists to build more effective communication with their audience. Adaptations through performance packaging, the use of digital media, and promotional activities form part of the communication strategies employed to expand the reach of wayang performances. Such communication strategies play a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of traditional arts amidst the competition of the modern entertainment industry.

Research on the marketing communication of traditional arts also indicates that the success of preserving the existence of performing arts is significantly influenced by the ability of artists to establish sustained communication with the audience, whether through social media, live performances, or interpersonal communication (Wibowo P. N. et al., 2024). This indicates that the development of wayang art is not only related to changes in performance formats but also to the communication strategies used to reach an increasingly diverse audience.

Based on this discussion, the transformation of wayang can be understood as a process that bridges tradition with the needs of contemporary audiences through various communication strategies. While previous studies have primarily examined wayang from the perspectives of cultural preservation, digital adaptation, and gender representation, this study offers a novel contribution by analyzing Wayang Women as a women-led, transnational Southeast Asian cultural enterprise that employs business communication strategies to sustain traditional arts and engage contemporary audiences.

Business Communication and Contemporary Art

Business communication in contemporary art positions artworks not only as a means of aesthetic expression, but also as products managed to generate economic value. A strategic process of conveying messages, values, and brand identity in a coordinated manner through various communication channels to build relationships with consumers, create image consistency, and drive the achievement of corporate goals (Cui & Fan, 2024; Funk, 2013; Suherman, 2017). The integrated marketing communication approach helps maintain message consistency, build brand image, and expand audience reach (Güner & Gülaçtı, 2022; Ningsih I. N. D. K. et al., 2023; Xu, 2023). The use of digital technology means museums and galleries are no longer dependent on physical exhibition spaces. Exhibitions can be marketed and accessed online, thereby increasing the value and commercial appeal of artworks (ANKYIAH, 2023; Güner & Gülaçtı, 2022). In this way, contemporary art is able to combine cultural recognition with economic opportunities.

In practice, business communication strategies focus on creating direct experiences and leveraging social media.

Experience-based marketing has proven effective in positioning performing arts as tourist destinations while fostering emotional connections with visitors (Emerald & Paramita, 2024; Jaeni, 2023). For example, the MACAN Museum uses public relations marketing to introduce modern art to urban communities, while the Jogja Biennale leverages Instagram to attract attention across generations (Ningsih I. N. D. K. et al., 2023). Such approaches demonstrate that both traditional and contemporary art can thrive when packaged as valuable experiences, supported by digital promotion, and through diverse business models.

Business communication also plays a role in

strengthening regional cultural identity and expanding international networks. Studies on visual arts marketing in East Asia highlight the importance of visual arts marketing strategies for expanding access to global markets (Chang & Preece, 2018). Through the use of digitalization, social media, and cross-border collaboration, Southeast Asian contemporary art demonstrates how business communication strategies can combine artistic value, economic sustainability, and a cultural image capable of competing on the international stage.

The Transformation and Development of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia

Contemporary art in Southeast Asia emerged after the modern era and is characterized by diversity, cultural fusion, and engagement with social and political issues. (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020; Harahap C. et al., 2024; Secretariat., 2016) emphasize that this art serves not only as a medium for expressing beauty but also as a space where local traditions meet global media, with issues such as colonialism, identity, and gender receiving significant attention. The use of multimedia, digital projections, and online platforms reinforces this shift, enabling art to adapt to the times.

At the regional level, contemporary art is also utilized as a tool for cultural diplomacy and the shaping of a shared ASEAN identity. (Harahap C. et al., 2024, Ocón, 2021; Secretariat., 2016) indicate that festivals, exhibitions, and cross-border collaborations serve as the primary means for Southeast Asian artists to exchange ideas, expand international networks, and foster solidarity. Through these activities, performing and visual arts serve not merely as entertainment but also introduce Southeast Asia as a region with a dynamic and transboundary.

Wayang, as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage, has also undergone renewal within the context of contemporary art, particularly when used for social critique and the empowerment of gender roles. (Cohen, 2007; Hidajat R. et al., 2025; Ramonita L. et al., 2023) indicate that wayang is now not only used for ceremonies or old traditions but also serves as a space for artistic creation and for discussing various social issues.

Performance Group Identity as a Communication Strategy

The evolution of traditional performing arts demonstrates that the success of an arts group is determined not only by the quality of its performances, but also by how well the group is recognized by its audience. Many arts groups have begun to emphasize certain distinctive characteristics to make themselves more easily recognizable and distinguishable from other groups. These distinctive features can stem from the performance concept, presentation style, or the characters of the performers. Such an identity often serves as the starting point for audiences to get to know a performance group, while also becoming a crucial component of the communication strategy used to attract the audience's attention (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2010; Kotler & Keller, 2012).

An intriguing phenomenon is evident in the emergence of wayang performance groups where all performers are women. Unlike traditional wayang performances, which are typically associated with male puppeteers, groups such as Wayang Women feature an all-female cast of performers consisting entirely of women, from the puppeteer to the supporting cast. This characteristic is the first thing audiences typically recognize when they hear or see the group's name. This uniqueness not only influences the form of the performance presented but also how the performance is introduced to the public through various promotional media.

The distinctive characteristics of a performance group often serve as a distinguishing feature that helps the audience remember and recognize the performance more easily. Research on marketing communication in the performing arts indicates that a clear identity can help capture audience attention while strengthening interest in a performance

(Colbert, 2014; Fillis, 2011). Therefore, the characteristics of the performers and the performance concept are not merely part of the performance itself but also serve as a message conveyed to the audience.

From a business communication perspective, the existence of Wayang Women as a performance group composed entirely of women can be viewed as part of the performance's identity that distinguishes it from other wayang groups. This identity is then communicated through various promotional activities and performances, thereby helping to build appeal while expanding the audience reach amid shifting public entertainment preferences.

Sociocultural theory posits that art emerges and evolves from the interplay between society, local values, and ongoing social change. In sociocultural theory, culture is not merely viewed as a backdrop; rather, it is a primary shaper of cognitive processes.

Sociocultural diversity can be summarized through three concepts (Nasution F. et al., 2023):

- a. Cultural identity: Refers to the distinctive cultural traits that distinguish one group from another.
- b. Pluralism: An attitude that supports and respects diversity within society.
- c. Multiculturalism: An approach that not only acknowledges but also values and actively promotes various cultures within a community.

Business communication is an integrated process that coordinates all elements of marketing communication to convey consistent and meaningful messages to the target audience. In the context of contemporary art development, IMC theory serves as the foundation of business communication, explaining how the process of art commodification can be strategically managed without eroding the cultural value and artistic identity of the artwork (Suherman, 2017).

Research Questions

Based on the background presented above, three research questions have been formulated for this study, namely:

1. What are the business communication strategies for Wayang Women's traditional art practices in Southeast Asia?
2. What challenges does Wayang Women face in creating, developing, and managing its products and markets?
3. What strategic solutions and potential alternatives does Wayang Women implement to overcome its product and market development challenges?

Research Objectives

Referring to the research questions established above, the objectives of this study include:

1. To identify and analyse Wayang Women's business communication practices as a representation of traditional art in Southeast Asia.
2. To identify and analyse the challenges faced by Wayang Women in creating, developing, and managing its products and markets.
3. To analyse the strategic solutions and potential alternatives implemented by Wayang Women to address its product and market development challenges.

Research Benefits

Academic Benefits

Academically, the researcher hopes this study will broaden perspectives and enrich academic discourse on business strategies for traditional arts, particularly Wayang Women, within the context of contemporary art transformation in Southeast Asia. This research is also expected to contribute to the fields of business

communication and arts marketing, particularly regarding communication strategies for transforming traditional arts into marketable commodities.

Finally, this research can serve as a reference for researchers and academics interested in the study of art, culture, and the creative economy in Southeast Asia 240

Practical Benefits

This research is expected to provide a deep understanding for artists and arts business practitioners on how to manage and develop Wayang Women as a cultural product, as well as identify opportunities and challenges in marketing efforts that align with cultural and market contexts. It is hoped that this research will assist artists and arts managers in understanding business communication to enhance the economic value and sustainability of traditional art. Through this research, it is hoped that it can indirectly support efforts to preserve and transform traditional art into contemporary art forms that are more relevant and appealing to the modern market in Southeast Asia.

Methods

Research Method

This study was conducted in November and December 2025 using qualitative research methods to obtain comprehensive data. Qualitative research aims to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by examining the issue from the perspective of the research subjects (Cresswell, 2009).

This study employs an interpretive paradigm. This paradigm posits that social reality is shaped by how people understand and assign meaning to their experiences. Humans are viewed as conscious beings with agency who act based on the understandings and values they hold (Rahardjo, 2018).

Data Sources

Obtaining comprehensive data requires reliable data sources to ensure the research yields accurate understanding and conclusions. According to Sutopo, data sources include informants, events, places, objects, images, recordings, and documents (Wahyuni & Ulum, 2025). The selection of informants is crucial in qualitative research to generate relevant, in-depth, and valid data regarding the phenomenon under study. Data from appropriate informants will provide a comprehensive picture, enable in-depth analysis, and ensure that research findings can be scientifically validated (Azungah, 2018). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Participants agreed to be identified by their initials in the study, and all participation was voluntary.

- a. Internal Informant: Wayang Women Founder, Ilyia Sumanto (I.S.) She is the person responsible for founding and managing Wayang Women and possesses in-depth knowledge of Wayang Women's history, vision, and business communication practices. As a key actor, the founder has firsthand experience in creating, developing, and managing products and business strategies for this traditional art form. Information from the founder is crucial for understanding the challenges and solutions adopted within the context of contemporary business and art.
- b. External Informant: Wayang Women Instagram Follower, Nissa Aziz (N.A) The Instagram follower was purposively selected based on her active engagement with Wayang Women's Instagram content and her residence in Malaysia. The informant provided insights into audience perceptions of Wayang Women's digital communication and promotional activities. These interview data were compared with the community's Instagram posts, captions,

and promotional materials, as well as with the interview accounts of the founder, the performance audience member, and the performing arts expert as part of the data source triangulation process.

- c. External Informant: Wayang Women Performance Audience Member, Azzad Madhizir (A.M) The criteria for Wayang Women performance audiences are those who have directly experienced watching and enjoying this art performance. Live audiences provide insights into how art and business communication operate within the performance context, as well as the challenges they face in enjoying commercialized traditional art.
- d. Expert Informant: Renata Tirta, M.Si (R.T) Expert informants provide critical analysis and strategic solutions regarding the business challenges faced by Wayang Women. Additionally, expert informants are specialists in the field of performing arts and have frequently served as key figures behind the scenes of performances, offering a broader perspective on the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia. The criteria for expert informants in this study are professionals or academics with expertise in the arts business, particularly performing arts and contemporary arts development. 289

Data Collection Procedures

In qualitative research, data collection involves the use of multiple sources and techniques to enhance the credibility of findings (Denzin., 2009). This study employed interactive data collection techniques, namely:

1. In-depth interviews Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author using an interview guide developed directly from the three research questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, and English according to the participants' preferences. The interview guide consisted of three sections corresponding to the study's objectives: (1) business communication practices, (2) product and market challenges, and (3) strategic solutions adopted by Wayang Women.
2. Documentation Collecting data from literature, documents, and photographs relevant to the research theme. 302

Data Validity

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed data source triangulation (Denzin., 2009). Data obtained from interviews with the founder of Wayang Women, the Instagram follower, the performance audience member, and the performing arts expert were systematically compared with documentary evidence, including the community's Instagram posts, captions, promotional materials, project documents, and photographs. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing interview accounts with documentary materials to identify patterns of convergence, partial agreement, and divergence. When interview accounts were consistent with documentary evidence, the interpretation was considered strongly supported and incorporated into the findings. Where data sources partially agreed, the interpretation reflected the complementary perspectives provided by different participants. When contradictions emerged between interview accounts or between interviews and documentary materials, these differences were not treated as errors but were examined in relation to each participant's role, experience, and perspective. Divergent accounts were retained in the analysis when they contributed to a richer understanding of Wayang Women's business communication practices rather than being eliminated in favor of a single

interpretation. 317

Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman, qualitative data analysis consists of three stages that occur continuously throughout the research, even before all data is collected: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Wahyuni & Ulum, 2025).

This study adopts a qualitative method, which requires more time to analyze the interactions between the research subjects and objects. This study employs sociocultural and feminist theories, allowing for perspectives that differ from those that would emerge if other theories were used. This study also focuses on the Wayang Women community as the primary subject, meaning aspects related to other wayang art communities are excluded from the scope of this research. Additionally, the study is time-bound until December 2025, meaning all data and analyses collected and used are derived solely from that period.

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim immediately after data collection and read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Documentary materials, including Instagram posts, captions, promotional materials, project documents, and photographs, were reviewed alongside the interview transcripts to maintain contextual consistency throughout the analysis.

Initial coding was conducted manually by identifying meaningful segments related to the study's three research objectives, including business communication practices, product and market development challenges, and strategic solutions adopted by Wayang Women. Similar codes were then grouped into broader analytical categories, which were iteratively refined into themes through repeated comparison across interviews and documentary evidence.

Theme development involved reviewing whether the coded data accurately represented the participants' accounts and adequately addressed each research question.

Furthermore, analytical decisions, including code refinement and theme development, were documented throughout the analysis to enhance transparency and consistency. Because this study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach, researcher reflexivity was maintained by continuously comparing emerging interpretations with the original interview transcripts and documentary materials, while considering the different roles and perspectives of the founder, audience member, Instagram follower, and performing arts expert. This iterative analytical process informed the final interpretation that is presented in the following section. 345

Result and Discussion

Wayang Women's Business Communication Practices as a Representation of Traditional Art in Southeast

Asia I.S. explained that this community performs a mandatory opening scene using traditional puppets, which then transitions into stories of Southeast Asian female ghosts featuring puppets of their own design. Traditional elements such as established conventions, puppeteering techniques, and the use of screens and backdrops are reimagined within new narratives that are more relevant to contemporary audiences, without severing ties to tradition. This demonstrates that the transformation of formats into "performance packages" is a common pattern of traditional art commodification in Indonesia.

Wayang Women represent Southeast Asia not only through claims of identity but through the composition of its members and daily collaborative practices. I.S explains that "We are very diverse. We have women from different parts of Southeast Asia—Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar—and two of our

members live in Cambodia” (I.S., Personal Communication, November 17, 2025). Each member has a role ranging from puppeteers, puppet designers, traditional musicians, to DJs. Offline audiences and followers observe that socio-cultural diversity is evident in language, dialects, attire, and cross-national musical instruments, so that the performance is perceived as “Southeast Asia speaking through the bodies and shadows of women.”

The findings suggest that Wayang Women’s business communication practices are closely linked to its use of social media, participation in cultural festivals, and collaboration among artists from several Southeast Asian countries. Through these activities, the group promotes wayang kulit beyond its local context while supporting cultural preservation and regional artistic exchange, a pattern that reflects the growing role of cross-border cultural networks in Southeast Asian arts (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020; Ocón, 2021; Secretariat., 2016). An interview with founder Illya Sumanto reveals that the group views wayang not merely as a performing art, but as a cultural pulse sustained through an all-female ensemble that reinterprets Kelantan wayang kulit with narratives of female ghosts from regional folklore, enriched by live music blending traditional instruments and electronic soundscapes. This approach is reflected in their offline performances, which attract an average of 250–300 attendees per event, as noted by offline audience member Azzad Madhzir, who highlighted the immersive experience that fosters loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion. Expert Renata Tirta emphasizes how these practices challenge male-dominated traditions, transforming wayang into a vehicle for feminist expression while preserving its authenticity.

Digital communication via Instagram further strengthens this representation, with followers across Southeast Asian countries engaging through stories of resilience, sorrow, and cultural pride, as shared by follower Nissa. This multichannel strategy integrates live performances at events like the Ubud Writers Festival and Chiang Mai Design Week with social media narratives, creating a commercialized cultural experience that fosters virtual presence and community, aligning with Illya’s vision of economic empowerment for female artists. Results demonstrate consistent audience appreciation for Wayang Women’s hybrid model, where traditional elements like wayang and storytelling are updated for global resonance while remaining deeply rooted in regional identity, evidenced by praise at international forums such as the AWID event in Bangkok attended by over 3,500 delegates. 384 Overall, these practices position Wayang Women as a case-specific example of business communication in traditional performing arts, illustrating how communication strategies can be used to negotiate the relationship between commodification and cultural integrity. 388

Challenges Facing Wayang Women in Product and Market Development

Wayang Women operates in a very specific niche market for contemporary traditional art. R.T., a performing arts expert, emphasized that contemporary traditional arts attract niche audiences with specific interests in cultural and social issues. Consequently, paid advertising is often perceived as less cost-effective, as audience members in this study reported discovering Wayang Women mainly through artistic communities, festival networks, and interpersonal recommendations rather than through mass promotional campaigns.

This situation aligns with creative industry literature that highlights demand uncertainty, narrow audience segmentation, and the difficulty of predicting market responses to highly unique art products. On the other hand, A.M.’s experience as an audience member shows that initial interest is not formed through widespread exposure, as she

stated: “Illya is my colleague, and I have been an admirer and follower of her work. I believe in her vision.

Beyond that, the poster and trailer caught my eye. I had never seen anything like it before. The portrayal of the hantu character by an all-women troupe is the highlight for me. As well as the wayang character in their poster artwork.” (A.M., Personal Communication, December 8, 2025).

From a product perspective, Wayang Women faces the challenge of packaging traditional art—rich in meaning—into a contemporary format that remains accessible to audiences across borders. A.M. identifies a blend of new character designs that remain true to the forms and aesthetics of classical wayang kulit, the use of opening chants, analog and digital music, and a focus on female ghost figures as an artistic differentiation strategy. Meanwhile, N.A. perceives Wayang Women’s cultural identity as a cultural tapestry that blends tradition, contemporary aesthetics, and cross-cultural elements. This artistic depth complicates the standardization of the product for repetitive commercial purposes, as each performance tends to be positioned as a unique experience, not a commodity that is easily replicated.

In terms of market development, Wayang Women faces financial and institutional resource constraints, preventing them from relying on large-scale marketing infrastructure. R.T. argues that “In my opinion, sales promotion is important, but paid advertising isn’t very effective. “If we use paid ads, the results won’t be worth it, especially for a traditional arts community like Wayang Women with such a narrow niche” (RT, Personal Communication, November 6, 2025).

This approach aligns with the trend among small arts organizations that rely on low-budget strategies such as social media, direct marketing, and word of mouth to build a loyal audience base. A.M.’s experience reinforces the importance of direct marketing and personal communication. A.M. noted that information about performances was almost exclusively received through Instagram and personal conversations with I.S., which fostered trust and emotional closeness. According to R.T., direct marketing and personal selling provide a more authentic way for artists to engage with loyal audiences than impersonal mass promotions. Within the context of Wayang Women, this perception indicates a potential communication pathway for fostering audience engagement, although the study does not examine the long-term durability of such relationships.

This situation indicates that Wayang Women’s market development is highly labor-intensive at the interpersonal level, making it vulnerable to human resource burnout and limited scalability.

As a multinational collective involving artists from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries, Wayang Women faces unique challenges in cross-border audience development. On one hand, this diversity serves as a key selling point that attracts audiences, as acknowledged by R.T. and A.M., who highlight the appeal of physical performances, costumes, and instruments representing diverse cultural backgrounds. On social media, N.A. senses cross-border solidarity among women, but audience engagement remains predominantly emotional and cultural in nature, not always translating into stable economic support.

Wayang Women faces a dilemma between maintaining public accessibility and the need to build a sustainable business model. R.T. believes that paid events are important so that the public feels a sense of responsibility to attend, and so that the art is more valued and has explicit economic value. A.M. acknowledges that their inclusion in festivals such as the UWRF provides international legitimacy, which raises expectations and perceptions of the value of Wayang Women’s performances. However, structurally, traditional arts in this region still face a lack of sponsors, the risk of low audience turnout, and high production costs, as identified in studies on

the sustainability of traditional arts and the creative industries in Asia. On the other hand, R.T. points out that Wayang Women's narrow audience segment makes paid advertising and mass promotion strategies disproportionate to the results. Therefore, a combination of paid event strategies, festival collaborations, and strengthening the audience community through social media. The challenge is that this model relies heavily on networks of curators, arts institutions, and festivals, so Wayang Women's bargaining position within the broader cultural industry structure remains relatively fragile.

Wayang Women also bear a symbolic burden as a women's collective championing feminist narratives within the wayang kulit tradition. This, in turn, shapes public and media expectations regarding the "message" they must convey. N.A. interprets their work as a form of resistance against patriarchy. For instance, when the figure of a female ghost is reinterpreted as a symbol of strength and as a means to examine broader constructions of gender identity beyond traditional categories. On the other hand, R.T. emphasizes that Wayang Women is more an artistic innovation and differentiation than an explicit movement against patriarchy or a structured gender equality project.

This mismatch in expectations poses a challenge in crafting the right brand narrative. On one hand, feminist narratives and cross-national women's solidarity serve as strong draws on social media and in media coverage. On the other hand, Wayang Women must be careful not to get trapped by an "activism" label that overlooks the entertainment value and artistic complexity of their performances. For Wayang Women, balancing their role as an entertaining art form, a medium for preserving wayang, and a symbol of women's empowerment is an ongoing branding effort that requires a well-thought-out communication strategy.

Overall, the interview findings indicate that Wayang Women's primary challenges in product and market development extend beyond simply finding an audience. Rather, the challenges lie in managing the structural tensions between tradition and innovation, between niche appeal and sustainability, and between a cultural-feminist mission and the economic realities of Southeast Asia's contemporary arts industry. Integrating community-based approaches, such as direct marketing, word of mouth, and cross-border solidarity with appropriate curatorial strategies and stronger institutional support appears to be a crucial prerequisite for making Wayang Women an economically empowered and sustainable artistic entity.

Solutions and Development Strategies for Wayang Women

The development of Wayang Women as a contemporary wayang performance group is inseparable from the need to adapt to changes in audience characteristics and the dynamics of the performing arts in the Southeast Asian region.

Based on interviews with the founders, art experts, audience members, and social media followers, it is evident that Wayang Women develops strategies that are not isolated but interconnected, linking performance formats, group characteristics, and their methods of engaging with the audience. According to interview findings, these strategies were not formally planned as marketing models but developed gradually through performance experiences and direct interaction with audiences. Several adaptations, including multilingual narration and community-based promotion, emerged in response to audience engagement and performance opportunities.

One of the most evident strategies is the adaptation of performance forms to make them more accessible to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. Wayang Women retain the core elements of wayang kulit, such as the

use of the kelir screen, the puppeteer's performance techniques, and the performance structure, while simultaneously incorporating elements that resonate more with contemporary audiences. The use of English is one of the clearest examples, as it allows the performance to be followed by an international audience without relying on an understanding of a specific regional language. Additionally, the group's original character designs, the use of cross-cultural music, and the integration of analog and digital instruments make the performance feel more accessible to audiences without a prior cultural background in wayang.

These adaptations demonstrate that wayang performances are not maintained in a completely static form, but rather are developed to remain relevant to today's audiences. Art expert R.T. asserts that, "If it is to survive, wayang must indeed be able to adapt to today's audiences without losing its roots." (R.T., Personal Communication, November 6, 2025). This statement reflects the view that the sustainability of wayang performances depends heavily on the performance group's ability to understand audience changes and adapt their presentation methods. In the context of Wayang Women, adapting the performance format is a crucial element in building appeal while expanding the audience reach.

Beyond the performance format, Wayang Women's development strategy is also evident in how the group builds easily recognizable performance characteristics. Wayang Women presents performances involving members from various Southeast Asian countries, and this diversity is clear in their daily performance practices. Differences in language, dialect, costumes, and musical instruments create a performance atmosphere that feels cross-cultural without needing to be explicitly explained to the audience. One audience member, N.A., noted that Wayang Women's multicultural practices feel organic and unforced (N.A., Personal Communication, November 26, 2025).

This observation suggests that the diversity of members serves not only as the group's social backdrop but also as an integral part of the performance experience directly felt by the audience.

The fact that the group consists entirely of women is also a distinguishing feature that sets Wayang Women apart from other wayang performance groups. However, based on an interview with arts expert R.T., this characteristic is better understood as a form of performance innovation rather than a specific ideological statement. R.T. explained that, "This is more about differentiation and innovation, not directly about gender equality." (R.T., Personal Communication, November 6, 2025). This perspective suggests that the group's characteristic can be viewed as part of a differentiation strategy that helps Wayang Women establish a distinctive position among other wayang performance groups. For some audience members, these characteristics are the first things to catch their attention and make it easier for them to remember Wayang Women's performances.

In terms of communication, Wayang Women tend to adopt a direct and personal approach. Based on interview findings, social media serves as the primary channel for sharing information about performances, documenting the group's activities, and maintaining relationships with past audiences. Instagram is the most frequently used platform because it allows for visual communication while also providing a space for interaction between the performance group and its followers. Through photo posts, short videos, and performance documentation, Wayang Women gradually build a picture of their performances.

The communication approach used also indicates that Wayang Women rely more on personal relationships than on large-scale promotion. Art expert R.T. opines that, "The audience is niche, so a personal approach and word of mouth are far more effective." (R.T., Personal Communication,

November 6, 2025). This finding indicates that Wayang Women's communication develops through social networks, art communities, and that have been established previously. Information about performances often spreads through personal recommendations or through people who have been familiar with Wayang Women's activities for some time.

In addition to social media, interpersonal communication also plays a crucial role in reaching the audience. Some audience members learn about Wayang Women's performances through direct connections with group members or through shared art communities. This approach fosters a closer bond between the performance group and the audience, though it simultaneously requires greater effort to maintain. Such an approach indicates that Wayang Women's audience development occurs gradually through repeated interactions, rather than through instant promotional efforts.

Overall, the research findings indicate that Wayang Women's audience development strategy is shaped by a combination of adapting the performance format, reinforcing the group's distinctive characteristics, and employing more personal and sustained communication. These three elements mutually support one another in building a relationship between the wayang performance and an increasingly diverse audience. Through this strategy, Wayang Women not only preserves wayang as part of tradition but also develops the performance as a form of contemporary art that can be understood and enjoyed by audiences across nations.

The Characteristics of Wayang Women as a Performance Identity

One of the most easily recognizable aspects of Wayang Women is the composition of the group, consisting entirely of women. This characteristic is evident across their various activities, both during performances and through promotional materials distributed to the public. From the moment they first see a poster, performance trailer, or social media post, audiences can usually tell that Wayang Women is a performance group that features women as the main performers. Without needing a lengthy explanation, this trait immediately creates a strong first impression of the group.

Women are not merely present as supporting elements but take on leading roles such as puppeteer, musician, and storyteller. Each member is actively involved as needed for the performance, making the division of roles feel quite flexible. Some members even take turns performing different functions on different occasions. This dynamic adds a unique flair to Wayang Women's performances and makes the group's workflow feel more fluid. For audiences, the presence of women in various roles often becomes one of the most striking and memorable aspects after watching the performance.

Audience experiences indicate that this characteristic often serves as the starting point for interest in Wayang Women. Audience member A.M. noted that the group's uniqueness was one of the reasons why she was drawn to attend the performance. However, A.M. did not see the involvement of women as a fundamental shift in wayang tradition. He stated that he had never heard of any prohibition against women becoming wayang practitioners, so the presence of women in Wayang Women is better understood as a variation in performance practice rather than something entirely new (A.M., Personal Communication, December 8, 2025). This perspective suggests that the distinctive characteristics of Wayang Women can be accepted without necessarily being interpreted as a form of radical change.

Some of Wayang Women's social media followers have a somewhat different impression. N.A., one follower who follows the group's activities via Instagram, noted that Wayang Women offers a fresh perspective on wayang performances that feels more open and diverse (N.A., Personal

Communication, November 26, 2025). According to her, the group's appeal stems not only from the stories or performance techniques but also from how Wayang Women present themselves as a collective with a distinct identity. The performance documentation uploaded periodically helps followers understand the atmosphere of the performances while offering insight into the group's working process.

Wayang Women's distinctive style is also evident in how stories are structured and characters are chosen. In some performances, female characters take center stage and drive the plot. This approach offers a different feel compared to the wayang performances more familiar to some audiences. Many viewers find that the stories presented are easier to follow, especially for those seeing a wayang performance for the first time.

The group's identity is shaped not only by its membership but also by how members collaborate. Wayang Women comprises members from various Southeast Asian countries with diverse artistic backgrounds. These differences are evident in the use of everyday language during rehearsals and performance preparations. English is often used as the *lingua franca*, but conversations are still interspersed with the regional languages of each member. This creates an intimate working atmosphere while also demonstrating that cross-national collaboration is an integral part of the group's activities.

The diversity of the members' backgrounds is also reflected in their choice of costumes, musical instruments, and performance styles. Some members bring their own cultural influences, which then manifest through specific musical choices or presentation styles. Audiences often perceive these elements as emerging naturally, rather than as something deliberately highlighted. Precisely because they appear without a contrived feel, Wayang Women's performances evoke a distinct atmosphere compared to more conventional wayang shows.

An interview with arts expert R.T. indicates that Wayang Women's distinctive characteristics can be understood as part of the group's effort to establish a clear performance identity. According to R.T., the existence of a group composed entirely of women makes Wayang Women more memorable to the audience because this characteristic is rarely found in other wayang groups. He assesses that this characteristic is better viewed as a form of performance differentiation that helps Wayang Women occupy a distinctive position among other wayang groups (R.T., Personal Communication, November 6, 2025).

The group's distinctive characteristics also facilitate communication with the audience. When viewing posters or performance documentation, the audience can immediately associate Wayang Women with the traits they have previously recognized. This recognition process occurs gradually through viewing experiences as well as exposure via social media. Without lengthy explanations, many audience members are already able to recognize Wayang Women through their visual presentation and the group's composition.

A consistent group identity also helps Wayang Women build long-term relationships with the audience. Some viewers who have attended performances admit they can still recall the group even after a long time without seeing them again. These memories are typically linked to visual impressions or performance experiences considered distinct from other wayang performances. These experiences demonstrate that the group's distinctive characteristics play a crucial role in shaping lasting impressions for the audience.

Research findings indicate that Wayang Women's distinctive characteristic which is being a performance group composed entirely of women, is a key element shaping their performance identity. This characteristic emerges through daily performance practices as well as through the way the group

communicates with the audience. The identity formed through this characteristic helps Wayang Women be more easily recognized while strengthening their position as a contemporary wayang performance group with an approach distinct from other wayang groups.

Wayang Women's Business Communication in the Context of Southeast Asian Traditional Arts

In line with [Cohen \(2007\)](#) view, Wayang Women can be categorized as a wave of contemporary wayang—a hybrid practice born from the pressures of globalization, shifts in patronage, and the search for new forms beyond conventional patronage patterns. Like other contemporary wayang forms, Wayang Women blends traditional puppets, puppeteering techniques, and instruments with electronic music, new dramaturgy, and political-cultural issues such as feminism. The presence of wayang is no longer merely an exotic product but a means of articulating women's experiences as regional subjects rather than colonial objects.

The reinterpretation of wayang demonstrates how traditional performance forms can be adapted to contemporary cultural contexts while maintaining their connection to tradition. This transformation reflects broader trends in the adaptation and commodification of traditional performing arts, where artistic forms are reconfigured to engage contemporary audiences and support their sustainability. A similar pattern has been identified in studies of Malang mask puppetry, where performance formats have been redesigned as cultural and tourism products to respond to changing market demands while supporting the creative economy.

Wayang Women's practice shifts the position of "the other" from an external enemy to a central subject that speaks.

In classical conventions, the roles of women, ghosts, and comic figures are often positioned as "the other"—those with odd bodies, dark skin, or associated with latent powers that must be controlled by the refined main character ([Foley, 2023](#)). Wayang Women, however, reverses this dynamic by positioning female ghosts—who in tradition are often portrayed as frightening and marginalized figures—as the center of discourse and a source of critique against patriarchy. In the eyes of festivals and the media, this image reinforces Wayang Women's market value as a bold new representation of Southeast Asian tradition that brings internal alterity, such as women, to the forefront.

When linked to studies of arts communication and cultural tourism, the commodification of Wayang Women can be understood as an arts communication practice that creates new performance spaces outside the context of local rituals. Jaeni emphasizes that when traditional art is brought to festivals, tourist spaces, and the media, there is a shift from ritual function to a multi-directional communicative function: between artists, the public, and economic stakeholders ([Jaeni, 2023](#)). Wayang Women operates under a similar logic: performing at literary festivals, feminist conferences, and transnational art spaces.

Wayang Women utilizes these spaces as channels for communicating the values of feminism, solidarity, and the preservation of tradition, while also serving as arenas of commodification where tickets, branding, and media coverage support the community's sustainability. From a marketing and promotional perspective, the practices of Wayang Women align with studies on advertising, promotion, and arts marketing that emphasize market commercialization and the importance of digital strategies over mass advertising. Art marketing literature indicates that art with a narrow target audience and high cultural value tends to be more effectively promoted through internet marketing, word of mouth, festivals, and communities, rather than through

mass-market paid advertising ([Funk, 2013](#)). Wayang Women possesses a strong visual identity, intensive use of Instagram, a personal network of members, and legitimacy through international festivals. Thus, they operate according to a logic aligned with mobile and digital marketing theory in the arts industry: building emotional connection and a fan community through interaction and storytelling, rather than mere advertising impressions.

Wayang Women's business communication strategy adopts a product-oriented approach characteristic of the arts sector. An artistic prototype, a reimagined wayang kulit performance by a multinational group of women from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries, serves as the driving force behind their marketing efforts.

Referring to the definition of marketing ([Colbert, 2014](#)), this aligns with a non-profit cultural organization that prioritizes creative action over market demands, limiting marketing control to price, place, and promotion, while positioning the unique wayang kulit prototype, fused with electronic music, spoken poetry, and ghostly narratives of women from Southeast Asian folklore. Findings from recent interviews demonstrate the effectiveness of this strategy: offline performances attract an average of 250–300 attendees, facilitate regional collaboration and cultural renewal, while Instagram followers span Southeast Asia, indicating organic reach through hedonistic appeal and emotionally evocative experiences such as sadness, resilience, and anger. This aligns with Colbert's emphasis on the evolution from descriptive consumer profiling to psychological tactics and loyalty-building, such as blending diverse genres to establish a hierarchy subscriber-donor hierarchy, although Wayang Women's transnational focus strengthens cross-cultural resonance rather than local segmentation. These findings confirm consistency with the evolution of arts marketing toward omnivorous audiences and experiential consumption, yet expand upon it by demonstrating how women-led innovations sustain the pulse of wayang kulit in contemporary Southeast Asia, with international stages like the Queen Sirikit Centre in Bangkok attracting over 3,500 global attendees ([Wibawa, 2024](#)).

Wayang Women leverages wayang kulit as a cultural pulse resonating across Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, elevating it beyond mere art to promote preservation through in-person performances, which typically draw 250–300 attendees and an Instagram following spanning various Southeast Asian nations. This aligns with the theory of cultural connectivity in contemporary Asian art, where traditional forms facilitate the formation of a shared world and intra-regional relationships, as seen in exhibitions like the Asia-Pacific Triennial, which highlights shared artistic networks without Euro-American mediation. Compared to previous studies on relational aesthetics, the Wayang Women approach is innovative in combining offline community gatherings with digital reach, creating an emotional bridge that sparks empathy and generosity across national borders ([Antoinette et al., 2014](#)).

These findings support previous research on cross-cultural and digital arts practices and contribute by demonstrating how Wayang Women engages diverse Southeast Asian audiences through the integration of traditional performance and digital communication.

Challenges Facing Wayang Women from the Perspectives of Business Communication and Contemporary

Art Wayang Women faces difficulties in predicting market responses. Wayang Women aligns with findings that traditional performing arts "repackaged" as contemporary products operate within a high-uncertainty space, as they blend socio-cultural values, tourism, and entertainment into a single package that is not always easily understood by consumers. Jaeni's Arts Communication Model demonstrates that

performing arts operate within the relationship between subjective values and ideal values (Jaeni, 2023). This means that public response is determined not only by market tastes but also by the extent to which cultural and aesthetic messages can be translated into experiences that are relevant to the audience. In this context, Wayang Women does not merely provide entertainment, but also offers multilayered meanings, namely, ASEAN multiculturalism, a reinterpretation of female ghosts, and cultural diplomacy. Consequently, the market response to Wayang Women tends to be volatile and difficult to predict, as is also the case for many festivals and arts institutions that seek to connect local traditions with a global audience.

The standardization challenges faced by Wayang Women underscore that the development of contemporary performing arts almost always requires an idiomatic collaboration between various traditional and contemporary elements. In the development of the Kromong festival, for example, Jaeni demonstrates that each performance is deliberately tailored differently according to the spatial context, local mythology, and the combination of music-dance-theater elements (Jaeni, 2023). Thus, the resulting work takes the form of a flexible curatorial model, not a uniform product like an industrial good. Wayang Women does something similar by blending Kelantanese traditions, cross-national instruments, narratives of female ghosts, and the wayang kulit medium in combinations that adapt to the space whether at literary festivals, feminist conferences, or independent venues. This results in efforts to create standardized packages that are easy to replicate constantly clashing with the fundamental nature of art as situational symbolic communication.

The resource constraints financial, human, and digital infrastructure faced by Wayang Women align with the findings of Güner & Gülaçtı, (2022). According to them, contemporary art institutions in the digital era are forced to transform into organizations with hybrid business models that demand both artistic and digital competencies. The study indicates that contemporary museums and galleries now require new roles such as digital strategy managers, digital collection curators, and online community managers to ensure sustainability. On the other hand many arts institutions still rely on personal networks, cross-functional roles, and the founders' self-funded investments in production, marketing, and media relations. The operational model of Wayang Women, where the founder serves as both puppeteer, curator, producer, Instagram manager, and media liaison can theoretically be interpreted as an early-stage hybrid business model. In this phase, the organization lacks the capacity to separate communication, artistic, and managerial functions, making the risks of burnout and over-reliance on key figures significant structural challenges.

The diversity of Wayang Women's audience and its value proposition reflect the multi-segmented cultural markets within the arts industry (ANKYIAH, 2023). Mobile marketing research in the arts industry indicates that contemporary art audiences now consume works across various channels, such as on-site events, websites, social media, and mobile platforms, driven by diverse motivations. A study of the 16th Jogja Biennale revealed that Gen Z is interested not only in the artworks themselves but also in the exhibition atmosphere, artists' narratives, and visual branding on Instagram (Ningsih I. N. D. K. et al., 2023). This aligns with Wayang Women's audience, which engages through posters, Reels, and behind-the-scenes content. Wayang Women faces the challenge of formulating a value proposition that is consistent yet flexible enough to reach a heterogeneous audience, without oversimplifying the cultural and gender complexities of its message.

Interview findings indicate that Wayang Women faces a trade-off between broadening public access and securing

financial resources for its activities. This challenge highlights the importance of business communication strategies that expand audience engagement while supporting the group's long-term organizational development.

The Arts Communication Model asserts that performing arts can only serve as a space for preservation and local economic empowerment if positioned as a valuable cultural tourism product; thus, paid ticketing and collaborations with festivals or institutions become integral parts of a sustainability strategy, not merely commercialization. In the digital era, arts institutions are encouraged to adopt a hybrid model, combining revenue from ticketed events, grants, corporate partnerships, digital products (virtual tours, AR/VR content), and e-commerce merchandise to avoid reliance on a single funding source (Güner & Gülaçtı, 2022). Wayang Women, which still relies on a combination of festival invitations, performance tickets, and member volunteer work. From a theoretical perspective, Wayang Women is in a transitional phase from a "project-based art collective" toward an "art institution" that must negotiate the boundaries between affordability, the symbolic value of art, and practical financial needs.

Public expectations regarding the messages conveyed by Wayang Women, primarily related to feminism, resistance to patriarchy, and cultural diplomacy, can be examined through the framework of the art communication model and integrated marketing communication (IMC) within the cultural industry. Jaeni (2023) explains that performing arts always carry a "relation of values," where the public not only evaluates artistic form but also interprets the implicit social, political, and ideological messages. On the other hand, IMC literature notes that cultural brands often face issues of "unclear communication objectives" and "message fragmentation" when they attempt to cater to multiple stakeholders simultaneously, such as local communities, global audiences, potential sponsors, and the media—without a consistent positioning framework. In the case of Wayang Women, the choice to emphasize narratives of innovation, multiculturalism, and space for women rather than overt activism appears to be a communication strategy aimed at maintaining broad appeal; however, theoretically, it also opens the potential for ambiguity between the creators' intentions and the public's perception of the gender and political messages they convey.

The challenge of branding ensuring that it is not perceived solely as an activist movement but retains a strong identity within the realm of contemporary art can be explained through the concepts of corporate/arts image advertising and digital branding in arts institutions. Belch & Belch highlight that arts advertising is often aimed at building an institution's image as a credible and socially relevant arts organization without always explicitly campaigning on political issues, for example by emphasizing artistic quality, cultural contributions, and community collaboration.

Meanwhile, in the digital ecosystem, arts institutions are required to develop branding strategies that distinguish between the brand as an arts institution and the brand as an activist entity (Güner & Gülaçtı, 2022).

The success of a digital strategy depends on the ability to create an aesthetic experience that preserves the aura of the work while leveraging technology. Wayang Women can theoretically position itself as the leading inclusive feminist contemporary wayang platform, where activism functions as a layer of meaning within narratives and curation rather than as the brand's primary label, thereby reducing the risk of activist brand stereotypes while remaining consistent with the values of equality and multiculturalism they practice.

Wayang Women's Strategies and Solutions from the Perspective of Art Transformation and Business

Communication When linked to studies on the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, the strategies

implemented by Wayang Women demonstrate that traditional art can continue to evolve through a process of adaptation to changes in the performance environment. Research on contemporary art in this region indicates that artistic practices no longer stand as static forms of tradition but continue to evolve in response to technological advancements, artist mobility, and the characteristics of an increasingly diverse audience (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020; Ocón, 2021; Secretariat., 2016). The findings of this study reveal a trend consistent with these studies. Wayang Women develops performances that remain rooted in traditional wayang forms but are presented through an approach that is more accessible to a cross-national audience.

This transformation is evident in the use of English as the primary language of the performance, the development of character designs tailored to the story's needs, and the fusion of traditional music with modern instruments.

Additionally, the use of digital media and consistent visual documentation helps Wayang Women's performances reach audiences who are not always present in person. Practices such as these demonstrate that wayang performances no longer rely entirely on physical performance spaces but also evolve through communication media that enable the performances to be known by a wider audience. These findings support previous research indicating that the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia occurs through the intersection of local traditions and increasingly open global networks (Goodlander, 2018; Sunardi S. et al., 2023).

The research results also indicate that the transformations undertaken by Wayang Women are not only evident in the form of the performances but also in how the performances are introduced to the audience. The use of social media, performance documentation, and art community networks has become key tools for building relationships with the audience. Such approaches demonstrate that the development of performing arts is increasingly tied to communication strategies capable of reaching audiences sustainably. The practices implemented by Wayang Women show that performance communication serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of building long-term relationships between the performance group and the audience.

Wayang Women's identity as a performance group composed entirely of women also plays a significant role in shaping the group's position among other wayang performances. Research findings indicate that this characteristic is more often perceived as a form of performance differentiation rather than as a specific ideological statement. The presence of women in various roles, such as puppeteers, musicians, and production support staff—creates a visual identity that is easily recognizable to the audience. This characteristic helps build a consistent performance identity while making it easier for the audience to recall Wayang Women after watching a performance or seeing their promotional materials.

These findings indicate that group identity serves as part of the performance's communication strategy. A clear identity helps the performance group establish strong associations in the audience's mind and distinguish itself from other performance groups with similar styles. The research results show that audiences often first became familiar with Wayang Women through their visual identity and group composition before fully understanding the nature of their performances. This process of familiarization occurred through repeated viewing experiences as well as exposure via social media.

The strategies employed by Wayang Women also reflect a connection to the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, which increasingly emphasizes cross-border collaboration. The collaboration among members from

various Southeast Asian countries adds a unique dimension to Wayang Women's performances while reinforcing their position as a performance group thriving within a regional context. Research on Southeast Asian contemporary art indicates that cross-border collaboration is a key means for art groups to expand their networks and reach a broader audience (Ocón, 2021; Secretariat., 2016). These findings suggest that Wayang Women's practices align with this trend, even as they develop within a relatively small community-scale context.

The communication strategies employed by Wayang Women show a tendency to rely more on a personal approach rather than large-scale promotion. Approaches such as direct communication, recommendations from previous audience members, and interactions via social media serve as the primary means of reaching audiences. This approach indicates that Wayang Women's audience development occurs gradually through relationships built over time. The relatively limited nature of the audience makes personal communication more effective than mass promotion.

Research findings indicate that the strategies developed by Wayang Women did not emerge as a formally designed communication model from the outset, but rather took shape through ongoing performance experiences and interactions with the audience. Adjustments to performance formats, the strengthening of group identity, and the use of digital media evolved simultaneously and supported one another. This approach demonstrates that performance communication strategies often develop organically in response to the group's needs and audience feedback.

The strategies implemented by Wayang Women demonstrate that wayang performances can continue to evolve through a combination of adapting the performance format and employing communication methods that better align with the characteristics of today's audience. The findings of this study indicate that the sustainability of wayang performances depends not only on the ability to preserve traditional elements but also on the performance group's ability to build lasting relationships with the audience through appropriate communication strategies.

Wayang Women's Characteristics as a Performance Differentiator

The characteristics of Wayang Women as a performance group composed entirely of women can be understood as a key element shaping their performance identity. This identity is not only evident in the group's composition but is also reflected in how the performance is structured and presented to the public. Research on Southeast Asian contemporary art indicates that art groups often develop specific distinctive traits to make themselves more recognizable to an increasingly diverse audience (Antoinette & Maravillas, 2020; Ocón, 2021). The findings of this study reveal a similar trend in Wayang Women, where the group's characteristics have become an integral part of how they establish their position among other wayang performance groups. The involvement of women as puppeteers, musicians, and lead performers creates a consistent and easily recognizable visual identity.

Audiences encountering Wayang Women for the first time often immediately associate the group with a cast composition that differs from typical wayang performances. Without lengthy explanation, this characteristic helps shape the initial impression of the performance group. Such an identity plays a crucial role as it helps audiences distinguish Wayang Women from other performance groups that share a similar performance format.

Research findings indicate that these characteristics are more often understood as a form of performance differentiation rather than as a specific message intentionally conveyed explicitly. An interview with arts expert R.T. reveals that women's involvement in various performance roles is

better viewed as an artistic innovation that brings a fresh perspective to wayang performances. This perspective suggests that the group's distinctive traits serve as markers of performance identity, helping Wayang Women establish a clear position among other performance groups.

Beyond the composition of its members, the characteristics of Wayang Women are also evident in the choice of stories and characters presented. Female characters often serve as the central focus of the narrative and drive the plot of the performance. This choice offers a distinct nuance compared to the wayang performances more familiar to some audiences. For viewers with no prior experience watching wayang, such an approach often makes the story easier to follow and more engaging to watch.

Research findings also indicate that the use of female characters as the story's focal point contributes to shaping Wayang Women's image as a performance group with a distinctive approach. These figures serve not only as narrative elements but also create a strong visual impression for the audience. Through performance documentation circulating on social media and promotional materials, these characters frequently appear as elements representing the identity of Wayang Women's performances.

Consistent group characteristics help strengthen the communication process with the audience. When the audience views performance documentation or promotional materials, they can quickly recognize Wayang Women through the visual traits and group composition displayed. This recognition process develops gradually through the experience of watching the performances as well as through repeated exposure on social media. The identity formed through these distinctive features helps Wayang Women build a more stable relationship with audiences who have previously experienced their performances.

The findings of this study indicate that performance identity plays a significant role in Wayang Women's communication strategy. The group's distinctive characteristics help build strong associations in the audience's mind while facilitating the process of recognizing the performance. Through a consistent identity, Wayang Women are able to distinguish themselves from other performance groups while strengthening their position as a contemporary wayang performance group with a unique approach.

These characteristics also indicate that performance identity is formed not only through messages conveyed directly but also through the visual and viewing experiences perceived by the audience. The impressions formed from these experiences help the audience remember Wayang Women as a with distinct characteristics. The identity formed through these experiences becomes a crucial element supporting Wayang Women's communication strategy in reaching a broader audience.

Implications

Practically, this study provides an understanding that models of performing arts practices such as Wayang Women can serve as a reference for artists, cultural institutions, and policymakers in managing the transformation of traditional arts in the global era. Academically, these findings expand interdisciplinary studies between performing arts, cultural feminism, and the creative economy. Wayang Women demonstrates how the concept of feminism can be interpreted through aesthetic, affective, and cultural dimensions without necessarily transforming into a confrontational ideological movement. This represents a significant contribution to feminist studies in Southeast Asian art, which has traditionally been viewed primarily from a Western perspective.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research could explore in greater depth the economic and managerial dynamics surrounding the sustainability of Wayang Women and similar artistic practices. Studies on alternative funding models, cross-border distribution systems for works, and the role of curatorial institutions in shaping the narrative of legitimacy for contemporary Southeast Asian art remain scarce. Specifically, in interpreting the feminist values and cultural identities presented in these performances. Cross-national reception studies will help understand how cultural and symbolic messages are received in different social contexts. Finally, future research could also examine the role of digital technology and interactive media in expanding reach. Further research could examine how the implementation of online performances presents an opportunity to understand new relationships between tradition, feminism, and technological innovation in the global cultural sphere.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Wayang Women has adapted wayang kulit for contemporary audiences in Southeast Asia through the integration of traditional performance elements, new narratives, cross-border collaboration, and community-based and social media communication strategies. The findings indicate that these communication practices have contributed to the development of a distinctive performance identity and supported audience engagement within multicultural contexts.

The study also identifies several challenges faced by Wayang Women, including its niche audience, limited organizational resources, performance standardization, and the need to balance artistic, cultural, and economic considerations in sustaining its activities. Rather than demonstrating that these challenges have been fully resolved, the findings highlight how communication strategies are continuously negotiated in response to changing audience expectations and the realities of the contemporary performing arts environment.

Overall, this study contributes a case-specific understanding of how business communication can support the positioning and development of contemporary traditional performing arts. While the study does not assess long-term sustainability outcomes, it suggests that artistic innovation, community engagement, and regional collaboration may provide a communication pathway for strengthening the visibility and cultural relevance of traditional performing arts in multicultural settings.

This study contributes a context-specific understanding of business communication within Wayang Women as a contemporary traditional performing arts community. Because the analysis is based on a single case and four purposively selected informants, the findings should be understood as analytical insights rather than broadly generalizable conclusions. Future studies may extend this work by comparing multiple performing arts organizations, adopting longitudinal research designs, and incorporating financial and organizational indicators to examine the longer-term implications of business communication strategies.

Author Contribution

ACKS contributed to conceptualization, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, and original draft preparation. BS contributed to methodology development, validation, and critical revision of the manuscript. LR contributed to supervision, project administration, and final manuscript review. All authors contributed substantially to the article and

approved the final submitted version

References

- Ahmad, F. F. (2023). *4 Jenis Wayang Kulit di Asia Tenggara Selain Indonesia, Apa Saja? [Four Types of Shadow Puppetry in Southeast Asia Besides Indonesia: What Are They?]* IDN Times. <https://www.idntimes.com/life/education/4-jenis-wayang-kulit-di-asia-tenggara-selain-indonesia-apa-saja-01-dh9nm-k20839>
- ANKYIAH, F. (2023). Mobile Marketing in the Art Industry. *Journal of Social Media Marketing*, 2(2), 20–34. <https://doi.org/10.33422/jsmm.v2i2.1124>
- Antoinette, M., & Maravillas, F. (2020). Positioning contemporary art worlds and art publics in Southeast Asia. *World Art*, 10(2-3), 161–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2020.1821761>
- Antoinette, Michelle., Turner, & Caroline. (2014). *Contemporary Asian art and exhibitions: connectivities and world-making*.
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative Research Journal Article information. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(4), 383–400. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>
- Chang, Y. C., & Preece, C. (2018). Visual arts marketing in East Asia. *Arts and the Market*, 8(2), 118–122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAM-10-2018-031>
- Cohen, M. I. (2007). Contemporary Wayang in global contexts. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 24(2), 338–369. <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2007.0032>
- Colbert, F. (2014). The Arts Sector: A Marketing Definition. *Psychology and Marketing*, 31(8), 563–565. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20717>
- Cresswell, J. W. (2009). *RESEARCH DESIGN: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cui, X., & Fan, J. (2024). Don Schultz: Integrated Marketing Communication Theory and the Internationalization Path of Chinese Enterprises. *Journal of Applied Economics and Policy Studies*, 8(1), 6–8. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2977-5701/8/2024081>
- Denzin, N. K. (2009). *The research act: a theoretical introduction to sociological methods (1st ed.)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134543>
- Emerald, S., & Paramita, S. (2024). *Marketing Public Relations dalam Mempopulerkan Seni Modern dan Kontemporer di Museum*.
- Fibona I., Ariwibowo G A, Sumarno Mumfngati T, Nurwanti Y H, & Dwinanto, A. (2024). HERITAGE IN MOTION: SAFEGUARDING THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF WAYANG KULIT KEDU, INDONESIA. *Trames*, 28(2), 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.3176/tr.2024.2.06>
- Fillis, I. (2011). The evolution and development of arts marketing research. *Arts Marketing: An International Journal*, 1(1), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.1108/204420811111129842>
- Foley, K. (2023). *The Other in Southeast Asian Puppetry*. https://digitalcommons.lib.uconn.edu/ballinst_alterity/9
- Funk, T. (2013). Advertising and Promotion. In *Advanced Social Media Marketing*. Apress, Berkeley, CA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4302-4408-0_4
- Goodlander, J. (2018). Intercultural Theatre and Community in Southeast Asia: The ASEAN Puppet Exchange in Jakarta. *Asian Theatre Journal*, 35(1), 27–52. <https://doi.org/10.1353/atj.2018.0011>
- Güner, A., & Gülaçtı, İ. E. (2022). Business models transformed by digitalization in contemporary art museums and galleries. *Journal of Graphic Engineering and Design*, 13(1), 13–20. <https://doi.org/10.24867/JGED-2022-1-013>
- Gusti I., Agung L, Putra R, Mahardika W, & Wiratama, P. (2024). Pengembangan Aplikasi Tatapurwa: Inovasi Digital Kerajinan Lukisan Wayang Kamasan Berbasis Augmented Reality [Development of the Tatapurwa Application: A Digital Innovation for Kamasan Wayang Painting Crafts Based on Augmented Reality]. *SENARI*, 9, 234–244. <https://e-proceeding.undiksha.ac.id/index.php/SENARI/article/view/845/429>
- Harahap C., Yuasa M, Andrews, H., Hawcroft, A., Thomas, I. , A. F., & Aqilah Ali, N. (2024). *Arts and Technologies in ASEAN: Interconnected Parts*. www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight
- Hidajat R., Suprihatin E W D P, Jamnongsarn S, & Hasyimy, M. A. (2025). Commodification of Kecak Ramayana as Tourism Art in Melasti Beach, Ungasan Village, District of Kuta Selatan, Badung, Bali. *Manusya*, 28, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-20252806>
- Jaeni, J. (2023). Arts Communication Model: The Development of Performing Arts through Empowering Cultural Art-Based Tourism. *Harmonia: Journal of Arts Research and Education*, 23(2), 318–332. <https://doi.org/10.15294/harmonia.v23i2.41463>
- Kitchen, P. J., & Burgmann, I. (2010). Integrated Marketing Communication. In *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444316568.wiem04001>
- Kotler, Philip., & Keller, K. Lane. (2012). *Marketing management (14th ed.)*. Prentice Hall.
- Kyra, I. (2024). *Feminism in the Shadows: A New Chapter for Wayang Kulit*. <https://www.eksentrika.com/all-women-wayang-kulit/>
- Mudana, I. W., & Ribek, P. K. (2017). Komodifikasi Seni Lukis Wayang Kamasan Sebagai Produk Industri Kreatif Penunjang Pariwisata. *Mudra Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 32(1), 68–80. <https://doi.org/10.31091/mudra.v32i1.83>
- Nasution F., Sartika M, Farhan M, Nanda D, & Nazhira, A. D. (2023). Keragaman Sosiokultural Masyarakat [Sociocultural Diversity of Society]. *LOKAKARYA-Journal Research and Education Studies*, 2(1).
- Ningsih I. N. D. K., Syamila M R, & Prastya, N. M. (2023). INSTAGRAM FOR MARKETING COMMUNICATION ART EVENTS DURING COVID-19 (CASE STUDY OF 2021 BIENNALE JOGA IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA). *Journal of Creative Industry and Sustainable Culture*, 2, 34–51. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jcisc2023.2.3>
- Ocón, D. (2021). Cultural Diplomacy and Co-operation in ASEAN: The Role of Arts and Culture Festivals. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 17(2), 277–305. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191X-bja10081>
- Purbasari, M., & Carrollina, D. (2023). Traditional Wayang Research Productivity: A Bibliometric Analysis. *Humaniora*, 14(3), 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v14i3.9211>
- Putri, V. Y. A., & Bisri, Moh. H. (2024). Laskar Muda Organizational Management of Wayang Orang Ngesti Pandawa Performance in Semarang. *Jurnal Seni Tari*, 13(1). <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/jst/article/view/10168/1144>
- Rahardjo, M. (2018). *Paradigma Interpretif [The Interpretive Paradigm]*. <https://repository.uin-malang.ac.id/2437/>
- Ramonita L., Setiawan J H, Sukandar R, & Aruman, E. (2023). Pemberdayaan Perempuan dalam Pertunjukan Wayang Kulit: Upaya Penyetaraan Gender oleh Dalang Perempuan [Women's Empowerment in Shadow Puppet Performances: Gender Equality Efforts by Female Puppeteers]. *Jurnal Komunikasi Pembangunan*, 21(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.46937/21202344712>
- Secretariat, A. (2016). 2015 ASEAN socio-cultural community (ASCC) scorecard.
- Setianingsih, D. M., & Ryolita, W. P. (2024). Mengembangkan Wayang Suket untuk Memperkuat Identitas Budaya Masyarakat Purbalingga [Developing Wayang Suket to Strengthen the Cultural Identity of the Purbalingga Community]. *Jurnal Budaya FIB UB*, 5(2), 83–86.
- Suherman, U. D. (2017). Kajian terhadap Integrated Marketing Communication sebagai Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran [A Review of Integrated Marketing Communication as a Marketing Communication Strategy]. *SMART-Study & Management Research*, XIV(3).
- Sunardi S., Rianto J, Sulastuti K I, Harpawati T, Asmoro P, & Sugihartono, R. A. (2023). The aesthetics of virtual wayang performances during the covid-19 pandemic. *Gelar: Jurnal Seni Budaya*, 21(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.33153/glr.v21i1.4571>
- Wahyuni, N. S., & Ulum, Moh. (2025). Implementasi Metode Outdoor Learning dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Siswa pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam [Implementation of the outdoor learning method to improve students' learning motivation in Islamic religious education]. *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 8(6), 6117–6124. <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v8i6.8295>
- Wibawa, A. B. (2024). Analyzing the Evolution of Indonesian Wayang Puppetry and Its Fusion with Modern Theater and Performance Arts. *Studies in Art and Architecture*, 3(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.56397/saa.2024.03.01>
- Wibowo P. N., Suryo H, & Widiyowati, E. (2024). Word of Mouth Sebagai Strategi Komunikasi Pemasaran Sanggar Wayang Purwanto [Word of mouth as a marketing communication strategy for Sanggar Wayang Purwanto]. *Solidaritas*, 8(2). <http://ejournal.unisri.ac.id/index.php/sldrts/article/view/11394/5987>
- Xu, Z. (2023). Research on Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy of Cultural Industry Brand. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, 11(1), 164–170. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/11/20230535>