

Indonesian Songket Virtual Exhibition as a Form of Digital Culture to Preserve the Heritage of Traditional Wastra

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Abstract

Songket is part of the intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia. *Songket* is one of the *wastra* of Indonesia. *Wastra* is derived from a Sanskrit word and means ‘fabric with cultural content’. The objective of the paper is to analyse songket Indonesia’s virtual exhibition as a form of digital cultural method to preserve the intangible culture of Indonesia. Digital culture is a popular topic in the world of cultural heritage preservation. The National Museum of Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture held a virtual exhibition of Songket Indonesia on December 13, 2021, called ‘Songket Indonesia Connected the Universe’. The event launched the website of the Songket Indonesia museum. Indonesia has more than 1582 items of intangible cultural heritage. This exhibition featured forty songket wastra from all over Indonesia including Aceh, Padang, Palembang, and Bali. This paper takes the form and method of a case study. The analysis through in-depth historical reviews and analysis of variables, measures, relationships, and patterns that emerged throughout the study on fashion marketing mix theory, and the promotion mix methods by the fashion marketing digital funnel. The successes and failures of digital heritage campaigns in the form of a virtual songket exhibition were identified in the review of literature, and were analysed, adapted, and enumerated according to findings from the case study. The results are limited to the study of one virtual exhibition of songket Indonesia. The research was identified as digital heritage that could be used to study other virtual exhibitions and digital events for cultural preservation.

Keywords

Digital Culture, Fashion-marketing, Heritage, Songket, Virtual-exhibition.

1. Introduction

‘Connecting the Universe’ was the tagline of an Indonesian songket virtual exhibition held by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The tagline represented the centuries of history of the culture heritage of wastra Indonesia. The past ‘universe’ came from the late Dong Son culture from 8 – 2 BC, in Vietnam where they made backstrap loom and warp-ikat (TFR/Thefineryreport.com, 2019). Dong Son culture arrived and influenced Indonesia. Because of the location of Indonesia as an archipelago located between two continents, Australia and Asia, Indonesia became the strategic place to have trade relations. India, Saudi Arabia, China, and other countries in Indochina traded relations and disseminated their religious beliefs. The trade relations with India since 2 AD meant Indonesian wastra was influenced by Indian traders.

The traditional wastra of Indonesia appeared more than 1,300 years from the Sriwijaya kingdom to the Palembang sultanate (1821). Songket in Palembang, thought to be the Sriwijaya kingdom capital city, was influenced by India, China and Saudia Arabia. The golden thread made in China and Siam inspired the royalty of Sriwijaya kingdom to make wastra for themselves. With golden, shimmering fabrics they believed the king and the royal family would be

glamorous and regal; the Sriwijaya kingdom had abundant gold. The royalty sends the gold to China and Siam and asked them to make golden thread. The royalty at that time were single ladies waiting for husbands and to pass the time they made the songket wastra. The warp machine at that time was called 'gedog' and was operated by humans. The history of wastra songket was started by the royal family in Sriwijaya. The songket was not only the costume for the king, queen and family; it also could be a gift or offering for the king and queen.

The National Museum of Indonesia and the Ministry of Education and Culture held a virtual exhibition of Songket Indonesia on December 13, 2021, called 'Songket Indonesia Connected the Universe'. The event launched the website based of the Songket Indonesia museum. Indonesia has more than 1582 items of intangible cultural heritage. This exhibition featured forty Songket wastra from all over Indonesia, including Aceh, Padang, Palembang, and Bali now presented with detailed and subtle visuals (Nufrida, 2021).

Songket Palembang Nago Besaung from the Sriwijaya Kingdom became one of the most precious collections; Nago Besaung symbolizing the power and influence of General Cheng Ho appeared on the Songket Lepus Palembang.

Heritage preservation was needed to pass this fashion culture to the next generation. McKinsey conducted research about Generation Z in Asia Pacific in 2021, and data from that research was applicable to this paper. A virtual exhibition of songket could be the medium to connect the heritage from the past to the next (digital) generation. Generation Z is interested to know more about songket and preserve this heritage fashion culture.

The Indonesian songket virtual exhibition was opened by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Nadim Anwar Makarim. He said that Indonesians should be proud to have so diverse a culture heritage, whether tangible or intangible, and the citizens should nurture and actively support cultural preservation by the government. "As Indonesian citizens we must be independent and cultural," Nadim said when he opened the virtual exhibition of songket.

Songket in Indonesia spread from Sabang to Merauke and Timor to Talaud. Each area has a different form of songket. Although there were differences in form, colors, fabrics, techniques, and philosophies of each songket, the wastra songket of Indonesia has a golden thread in each of songket. Golden thread represented the power and glory of the king.

Songket Lepus Palembang Nago Besaung is proof of relations between the Sriwijaya kingdom and China. China was led by Cheng Ho, who always wore a robe with a dragon on it. Dragons in golden fabrics influenced the Sriwijaya kingdom. The dragon was called 'Nago Besaung' which was a power keeper, and it took majesty to sustain the power from it.

1.1 Objectives

The objective of this paper was to analyse a songket Indonesia virtual exhibition as a form of digital culture method to preserve the intangible culture of Indonesia, songket wastra. The case study uses the theory of the marketing mix. Promotion theory needed to be conducted, to form an evaluation or basic research for the next virtual exhibition, in the realm of fashion culture heritage.

2. Literature Review

"The Digital Culture project aims to establish and position criteria and actions aimed at the production, ownership, circulation of content and communicational and cultural strategies in digital media, understanding that a large part of the creative industries is supported today by the development of information and communication technologies (ICT)" (Unesco, 2020, para 1). The digital world started from the birth of the World Wide Web as created by British scientist, Tim Berners-Lee in 1989 (CERN, 2022).

The method of Virtual exhibition of songket Indonesia related with current condition. Public could access the event from everywhere anytime they would love to do it. The experience as the audience presents in the real exhibition offered in the section of virtual venue. Although it needed much more technology in realizing the experience, it was good and the traditional wastra presented beautifully.

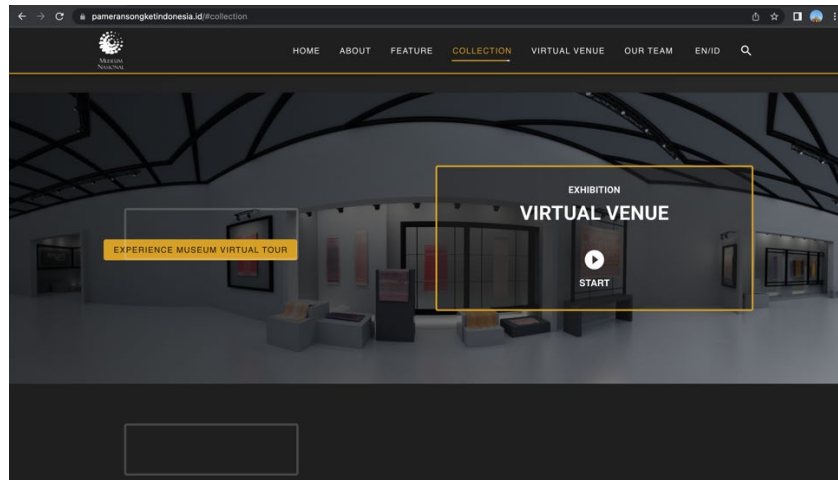


Figure 1. Website of the Virtual Exhibition of Songket Indonesia, www.pameransongketindonesia.id

The virtual exhibition appeared on a website (pameransongketindonesia.id). The features of the website of the virtual exhibition consisted of sections such as: Home, About, Features, Collection, Virtual Venue, Our Team, and language choices of either Bahasa Indonesia or English.

In the Home section all the features appeared. The About page is the background and rationale of the virtual exhibition of wastra songket Indonesia. Features presents the virtual exhibition, pictures, curatorial text and more about other features. Virtual Venue is a 3D representation of the virtual Indonesian songket wastra exhibition as if they were collections in a museum. Our Team consisted of a list of the profiles of those who contributed and were responsible for this event.

This paper analyzed seven papers that conducted digital culture with technology, from digital usage for education and culture preservation until 3D model analysis for a museum in Prague. The concept of culture is as illustrated below: (Figure 2)

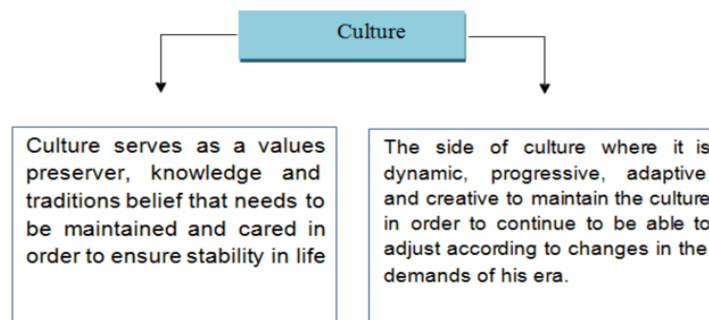


Figure 2. Culture concept by Tjetjep Rohendi Rohidi, 2015.

The interconnection of culture demonstrated that preservation in digital era must be done (Rohidi, 2015). “Digital culture refers to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of people interacting on digital networks that may recreate tangible-world cultures or create new strains of cultural thought and practice native to digital networks” (Poepsel, 2022). Scientists of digital 3D made further 3D animation studies for 3D visualization of virtual museum development, and analysed and share these studies for the next step of digital culture preservation. The design of digital interactive encyclopaedias with local cultural content is expected to protect and preserve Indonesian culture as well as act as evidence of cultural travel from generation to generation. Sari (2019) wrote that an application tool for junior high school students in Indonesia was a great step to help the next generation study about songket, especially songket Palembang (Sari, 2019). Regarding development of a digital encyclopaedia about wastra songket, another researcher

wrote about an Indonesian culture digital library: the role of community is to protect and preserve Indonesian culture. Culture, which is part of people's lives, is used and shared as a national identity. The community plays a significant role in the protection, development, and use of culture (Kusumaningtyas, 2022). A digital library is another form of digital culture, with an active response from society to make it more complete. This should be a process of cultural digital information.

In an analysis of the marketing mix, the activity of a virtual exhibition of songket Indonesia would be the part of promotion. Digital Marketing Funnel created by E. St. Elmo Lewis in 1898. The digital marketing funnel developed into the new digital marketing funnel by Karen Taylor in 2018. The new modern marketing digital funnel one of the best and integrated model to analyse the virtual exhibition of songket Indonesia. The funnel would be like the Figure 3 below and it was taken from digital fashion studies.



Figure 3. Fashion Digital Marketing Funnel by Digital Fashion Academy

Awareness was built by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology with the Indonesian National Museum, with digital advertising through websites and the Instagram account of Indonesian National Museum. The event press release was sent to mostly digital media in Indonesia. The PR testimonials had not been made.

For the 'discovery' goals, like first time visitors could be mapped, profiled and segmented. This could help for the evaluation for the next event to be a better one. On the 'consideration' goals, retargeting the visitors was conducted and it is better to participate in micro conversion. It also made followers into subscribers for this virtual exhibition of songket Indonesia. The conversion step, and macro conversion steps were analysed to see which area was not viewed by visitors. The virtual museum features must be evaluated to add to or to subtract the unnecessary part(s) of the virtual museum.

In the lower part of the funnel, the 'retention' goals consist of loyalty and advocacy. At the loyalty step there must be great customer service as part of this virtual museum. For example, there has to be a contact person who is ready to answer inquiries from visitors through multiple communication channels. This step also encourages visitors to engage in loyalty programs with the museum. The last goal is advocacy. At the advocacy step the virtual museum asks the visitor to review the virtual museum. This social program must have a reward program to be more attractive to participate in.

3. Methods

This paper used a qualitative research method, with a case study of a virtual museum, and a content analysis of digital culture-related papers. The virtual exhibition was analyzed as the object of research. While the object was studied, the study literature study of seven papers about digital culture and digital fashion was conducted. The papers were studied and contributed knowledge and experience.

This literature study was the first stage of the research. The second stage was the study using the fashion marketing digital funnel method (Digital Fashion Academy, 2022). The analysis of the virtual museum was connected with marketing mix, in the promotion phase. The virtual exhibition was part of promotion in the marketing activities. The method of fashion marketing digital funnel consists of segments, goals, strategy, and tools. The funnel was divided into three levels (lower, middle, and upper). The third stage was the conclusion of the analysis that led to the results and discussion.

4. Results and Discussion

The result of the research stated that: 1. The awareness for the media was quite good. However, the right target market, especially for the young generations (for example Generation Z) is low. 2. The content of the virtual museum needs to be improved to attract young visitors to come. 3. The virtual museum activity was well accepted to maintain the knowledge about traditional fabrics or wastra songket Indonesia. The more knowledge gained by visitors, both young and old, the more likely it is to preserve Indonesian culture.

The Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology must take his next actions seriously to encourage participation in culture preservation. If possible, the ministry should ask the next generation's key opinion leaders to participate in the evaluation process. Generation Z needs to participate in heritage preservation, since they are the ones who will be leaders in the future.

The songket wastra although the original one contents of golden thread, has limitation. Someday the fabrics would be broken. Digital technology documentation could be one strategy to keep this heritage alive for the future generation. As the participants in the future, generation Z who familiar with digital technology should be learnt and developed the strategy in digital cultural preservation.

4.1. Limitations of the study

The findings of this study have to be seen in the light of some limitations. The primary limitation was the generalizability of these results was the depth of analysis on digital cultural preservation methods. Secondly would be the focus of the research itself; it is better to focus on which elements of this virtual exhibition would be central to the research, and thirdly would be time constraints.

4.2 Opportunities for future research

With the findings of the study mentioned above, this study has opportunities for future research. Future research could be about the methods to study digital culture preservation. One element could be chosen from this research. For example, a study about traditional fabrics such as wastra songket could be related to Generation Z interest and could be focused on one particular discipline such as fashion marketing communication as part of promoting wastra songket in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

The Indonesian songket virtual exhibition as a form of digital culture to preserve the heritage of traditional wastra was a positive gesture from the government of Indonesia as an answer to challenging pandemic conditions. The method of the virtual exhibition was well accepted. The virtual exhibition needed to be evaluated to achieve the goals as cultural preservation and the heritage of songket wastra Indonesia.

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Biographies

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