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From Community Ritual to Cultural Performance: The Transformation of Indonesian Traditional Dance in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT
In this study, Indonesian traditional dance from its community-based ritual practice to its contemporary cultural performance is discussed. The study in this paper is a descriptive analytical research approach was used, with the methodology utilized in this study is a thematic analysis for 14 selected journal studies related to traditional dancing and traditional dance ritual practices, tourism, commodification, modernization, digitalization and cultural preservation. The results show that the factors that contribute to transformation are effectively imposed tourism, modernization and commercialization, the rise of the digital media, the institutionalization, and the change in the expectations of the audiences. Traditional dances have spread to larger audiences and opened up new spaces of cultural visibility, preservation, and economic engagement through the process of adaptation, innovation, reinterpretation and changes in performance context. In addition, tensions can arise over ritual meaning or cultural authenticity when commercialisation and standardisation are occurring. The study concludes that a strategy of sustainable transformation is therefore essential and must involve communities, cultural sensitivity attitudes, responsible tourism and suitable digital preservation strategies.

Keywords: Indonesian Traditional Dance; Cultural Transformation; Ritual Performance; Cultural Performance; Cultural Identity; Tourism; Commodification; Cultural Preservation; Digitalization; Modernization

INTRODUCTION

The traditional dance in Indonesia is the part that is very important of intangible cultural heritage, important because it contains collective memory, religious beliefs, the relationship of people, history, and other cultural conventions, as well as local identity. Many traditional dances were not so much choreographed dances as they were dances that were a part of the community activity. The meanings they carried were linked to ritual, ritualized events, farming cycles, religious practices, beliefs to their ancestors, and communal festivities. This meant that there was sometimes a 'fuzziness' between ritual and performance. Today, however, in the Indonesian society the context of a production, transmission, presentation and consumption of traditional dances have changed significantly. Traditional dances have been situated in a new significance and are now becoming more and more a public performance in the process of modernization, tourism, cultural industries, formal arts education, mass media and digital platforms.

It is not necessarily a mere loss of tradition being achieved. Instead, it is an adaptation, reinterpretation, and commodification, institutionalization, and selective retention process. For instance, research into Balinese dance well illustrates the shift in focus from a primarily religious use of art to an economic function and a function in relation to the culture and tourism aspects; and the use of dance as an active expression of Balinese identity is continuing thanks to tourism (Abdillah et al., 2022). In the same way, the study of Barong dance in Batubulan shows that in the context of commercialization, different contexts can be generated, not to rule out the functions of ritual in this dance, as they do exist but are expertly packed to meet the requirements of tourists who come from the vender-back.Likewise, Barong research in Batubilan reveals that in the midst of the process of commercialization, it can be formed different contexts, not to contain ritual functions totally, ritual functions exist but are skillfully packaged by the exhibitor so they fit the target market of tourists from the vender-back.

The change can also be seen in the performances like Kecak. According to Sukatman and Wuryaningrum (2024), Kecak is a performance, in which the function of mythology, symbolism, collective memory and its linkage with ritual have been identified, and at the same time, currently, the development of these performances has become closer to the tourism services and cultural representation. So contemporary traditional dance can be considered to be a living tradition in which old traditions and inherited meanings are negotiated with new audiences, institutions, markets, technologies and social expectations.

Thus, the present study aims to focus on the community ritual to cultural performance in traditional dance of Indonesia. Its emphasis is on the impact of the changes in function, context, audience, presentation, meaning and transmission on the current role of traditional dance. The transformation in turn presents opportunities and tensions, as the visibility of public performance can help to generate economic benefits, reinforce cultural identity

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and trigger regeneration, while commercialization and standardization may result in changes to the ritual meanings and community control. In order to appreciate this change, one needs to transcend the self-evident opposition between tradition and modernity and treat traditional dance as a cultural construction ever on negotiation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The past studies already provide a clear knowledge of how function of the traditional dances has ebbed and flowed with the advent of tourism and modernization in Indonesia. Lestari (2014), studying about Cak Ramayana in Singapadu, concluded that the process of "commodification" in tourism affected the creation, consumption and distribution of cak ramayana. The transformation produced economic, employment and cultural-continuity impacts along with comments on aesthetic modification. As previously stated, the Dayakan Dance in Panusupan studied by Afianti et al. (2018) underwent changes in audience, duration, place, complexity, musical accompaniment, movement, and presentation since when it was included in tourism. Their results show that the contents of traditional performance, as well as its social identity, can be strongly changed through the mediation of 'commodity'.

Similarly, Komala (2021) continues this argument by performing research on Mak yong Mask Performance in Mantang Island. The study finds that the changes in the form of performance, time, stage and Degree of desacralization are caused by tourism packaging. Of note, however, this study suggests that the change can co-occur with the persisting function of the performance as a sign of community identity. Similarly, Abdillah et al. (2022) claim that innovative Balinese dance does not necessarily mean that the culture is being lost. Through their analyses, they can identify that dance is still a living cultural practice and is used in the service of tourism, was adopted for audienceexperience and for identities to be built.

More modern studies underscore the ambivalence of the sacred–already way of transition. In Banyuwangi, between 2002 and 2021, Seblang shifts from the realm of a sacred cleansing rite to a cultural tourist attraction to tourism, explained by Isnaini (2025). There were not consistent community reactions; while at one end there was identification of economic benefits, on the other some said they were concerned about spiritual and traditional losses. Likewise, Apriyulia et al. (2025) argued that the range of ritual beliefs and heritage practices linked to Lukah was redefining its meaning as the context became secular such that it could be performed during public and communal activities.

In the Balinese culture, the issue of ritual and tourism comes more to the fore in performance. However, Putra and Mahagangga (2021) have shown how Barong Dance is presented as a sacred cultural act at the same time being a tool for economic attractiveness to tourists, creating the basis for different modes of performance that can form separate audiences of ritual and commercial purpose. The symbolic, mythological, and ritual aspects of Kecak are also highlighted by Sukatman–Wuryaningrum (2024) who document the current role and impact of Kecak in the tourism market. Bestari et al. (2025) also theorize current Balinese practices in terms of two motifs, namely spectacle and " Disneyfication," which are concepts that explain current performances as being repackaged versions of ritual performances.

Preservation is also shown by the literature to be increasingly an adaptation process as well as a process of maintaining forms unchanged over time. According to Simanjuntak (2026), preservation strategies that are carried out in classical dance include philosophical education, traditional rules preservation, innovation, digital media, and intergenerational rejuvenation are seen as ways to overcome the challenges of modernization and digitalization in preserving Yogyakarta classical dance. Aiman and Basri (2025) also analyze how Rabbani Wahed Dancing has been preserved by using extra-curriculum learning and digitalization, implying a Learning institution can be one of the important places where the cultural thing is preserved. This study builds upon this idea by introducing an interactive, mobile-game-based preservation model for Riau Malay Persembahan Dance by Setiawan et al. (2025) that aims to preserve traditional knowledge through interactive technologies for the younger generation.

The need to digitize is thus a significant aspect of the modern culture transmission. Based on the systematic literature review, Hermansyah et al. (2023) concluded that the use of digital technologies has a positive impact on documentation, promotion, storage, teaching and development of traditional dances, but with technological and cultural challenges. A related approach suggested is the integrated preservation strategy by Khadijah et al. (2026) of digital preservation, community involvement, intellectual-property protection, and cultural regeneration.

Based on data obtained, literature reads that Indonesian traditional dance is not just going out of existence, but if the meaning is interpreted more carefully, it actually doesn't. Rather, it is reinterpreted as a tourist destination, as an educational site, as a medium for information in the digital age, as a cultural industry and as a new set of communal practices. But most of the literature available in the field focuses on a single dance or a particular aspect, like commodification, tourism and/or conservation. The interdisciplinary investigation of the overall process of the transition from ritual usage to cultural performance still has potential space for deeper cross-disciplinary exploration, especially if it integrates aspects of usage, meaning, audience, performance, identity, and transmission. This study tackles this in exploring the concept that transformation is a multi-dimensional process

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that includes an ongoing negotiation between tradition and community heritage, tradition and ritual meaning, tradition and cultural identity as well as between tradition and public performance and tradition and contemporary cultural consumption.

Conceptual Framework

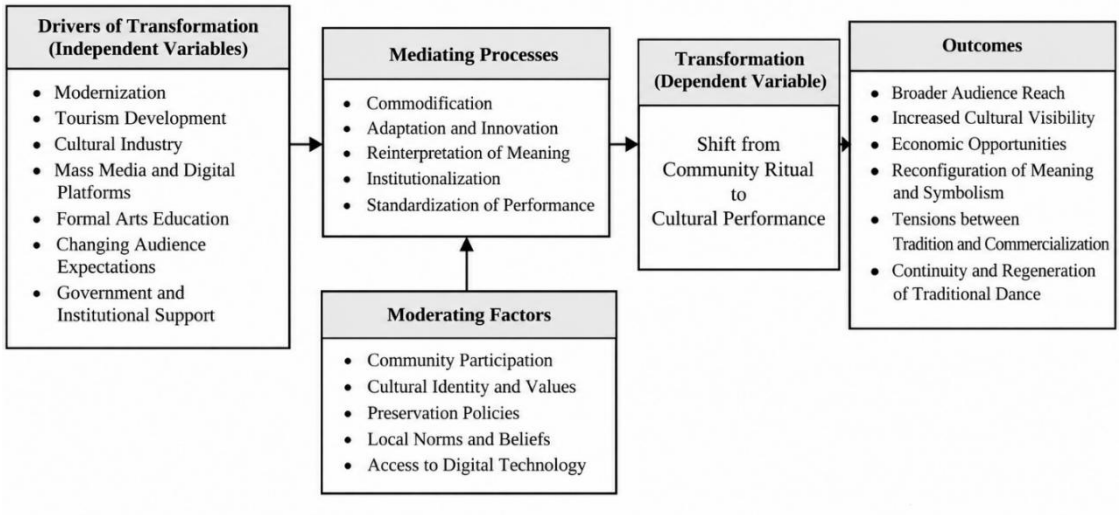


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is used to explain how Indonesian traditional dance developed from a ritual practice done by the communities to a cultural performance in the modern times. The modernization experience, the development of tourism, the cultural industries, mass media and digital platforms, formal arts education, a transformation of the audience and governmental or institutional support for arts are the key forces of change identified in the framework. All these events establish new environments in which traditional dances are played out, explained, learned, recommended and ingested. Thus the dance gradually detaches itself from its traditional contexts and rituallity and becomes a component of culture festival, tourist programmes, schools, public events, and as a part of modern cultural industries.

The framework also suggests and outlines that this change happens via various intermediate processes: Commodification, Adaptation and Innovation, Reinterpretation of culture meaning, Institutionalization, Standardisation of performance. Moderating factors like community engagement and/or participation, cultural identity and values, preservation policies, local norms and beliefs, access to digital technology, are all factors that influence the extent and direction of transformation. These can help to maintain continuity with traditional customs or enable more adaptation to modern situations. The dependent variable in the center is therefore the change from community ritual to cultural performance (what it does, place, purpose, audience, form, location, etc.).

Such a transformation can yield different results, such as: wider audience, more cultural awareness, cultural economic opportunities, reinterpretation of cultural meaning and symbolism, a balance of tradition and commerce, and the continuity or regeneration of traditional dance. Hence, the framework does not imply the downfall of tradition in the process of modernization. Instead it assists to conceptualise the traditional dance of Indonesia as a dynamic cultural phenomenon that involves ritual heritage, community identity, contemporary performance, tourism and technological change among them. This model can be used as a foundation to empirically study the re-contextualisation of Indonesian traditional dances in the current society.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, descriptive and analytical research methods are used, the idea of which is to examine the changes of the Indonesian traditional dance both as a ritual of the community and as a cultural performance for the modern times. This study focuses mostly on second hand sources which are gathered from peer-reviewed journals, books, reports by the government, cultural-heritage institutions, validated digital archive related to Indonesian traditional dances, culture commodification, cultural modernization, cultural digitalization, and culture preservation. Representative forms of traditional dances are selected using purposive sampling with special characteristics of changes in ritual functions, performance settings, audience, meanings and modes of transmission. Thematic content analysis is used to provide analysis of the selected literature and documentary evidence, and the key points

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of analysis capture the dimensions of drivers of transformation, mediating processes, community participation, cultural identity, commercialization, technological influence and preservation mechanisms. The conceptual framework organizes and interprets the evidence, and comparative analyses are used to detect and highlight patterns of similarities and differences between traditional community-based practices and their contemporary representations of performance. Cultural practitioners, communities, institutions and audiences are also discussed in relevant literature and served as study's focus. The methodology thus allows systematic interpretations of the recontextualization of the Indonesian traditional dance, keeping, modifying or re-negotiating some elements of its cultural and ritual heritage in contemporary society.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Fourteen journal studies were selected and the analysis was done on these studies. These studies were aggregated and coded thematically within the conceptual framework, which covers the main dimensions: drivers of transformation, mediating processes, changes in ritual and performance functions, and outcomes. The numbers below do not actually represent the frequency of the themes in surveys of individual respondents, but rather the frequency of the themes in the 14 selected studies, on which the present study is based.

Table 1. Major Drivers of Transformation Identified in the Literature

Drivers of Transformation	Frequency (n=14)	Percentage
Tourism and cultural tourism	10	71.4%
Modernization and social change	9	64.3%
Cultural commodification/commercialization	8	57.1%
Digital media and technology	7	50.0%
Formal education and institutionalization	6	42.9%
Changing audience expectations	6	42.9%
Government/institutional preservation initiatives	5	35.7%

Tourism was the most common identified driver identified and made an appearance in 10 of the 14 studies (71.4%). This means that the spread of the "cultural touristic" is significant in this movement of traditional dance away from its ethnic or ritual use. A growing number of traditional performances are realised for visitors, cultural festivals and tourism programmes. In 9 studies (64.3%), modernization and a wider social change were indicated as other factors affecting the evolution of the traditional dance culture, respectively. 8 studies (57.1%) showed that traditional dance had become a part of cultural markets and entertainment system, it is turning into the process of commodification.

In 7 studies (50.0%) digital media was identified as a medium of interesting recording, promotion, teaching and dissemination of traditional dances in contemporary technology. Education and institutionalization were identified in 6 studies (42.9%) as well as changing audience expectation in the same number of studies (42.9%). Government and institutional pathways to preservation were less common, but they are important when it comes to the continuity and formal recognition of traditional practices.

Table 2. Major Mediating Processes in the Transformation of Traditional Dance

Mediating Process	Frequency	Percentage
Adaptation and innovation	11	78.6%
Reinterpretation of cultural meaning	9	64.3%
Commodification and commercialization	8	57.1%
Institutionalization	7	50.0%
Standardization/modification of performance	7	50.0%
Change in performance context	10	71.4%

The results showed that adaptation and innovation is the most significant mediating process (11 studies, 78.6%). It indicates that there is no inherent contradiction between using the traditional dance forms and transformation. Rather than that, movement, length, music, arrangements, staging, costume, stories and presentation settings can be adapted for modern audiences and new environments in which they perform.

Performance context has undergone change in 10 studies (71.4%) which is an important characteristic of transition from ritual to cultural performance. A dance which had already been danced in some religioushood or the community may later be danced in a tourist stage, in some cultural festival, in some educational stage or anywhere in digital space. Fifteen studies (103.87%) interpreted Dance's cultural meaning and showed that the symbolic

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role of dance can transform when the dance users are transformed, and its role is transformed. The 8 studies (57.1%) referenced "commodification", while 7 studies (50.0%) referred to "institutionalization" and 7 studies (50.0%) to "standardization.

Table 3. Changes from Community Ritual to Contemporary Cultural Performance

Dimension	Traditional/Community-Oriented Context	Contemporary Performance Context
Primary purpose	Ritual, religious and communal functions	Cultural presentation, tourism, entertainment and education
Audience	Community members and ritual participants	Tourists, general public, students and digital audiences
Performance setting	Sacred/community spaces	Stages, festivals, tourism venues and digital platforms
Control of performance	Primarily community-based	Shared among communities, institutions and cultural industries
Meaning	Strongly associated with ritual and collective beliefs	Combination of traditional symbolism and contemporary interpretation
Duration and format	Determined by ritual requirements	Frequently adapted to audience and event requirements
Transmission	Oral, experiential and intergenerational	Community teaching, formal education and digital media
Economic dimension	Generally secondary	Increasingly connected with tourism and cultural industries

This is not just a matter of the dance movements as it is a matter of its context and function as part of old culture. Community rituals tend to take care of participation, sacredness of meaning, community identity and continuity. As far as modern cultural performances are concerned, however, they usually focus on presentation, nearness, audience participation, cultural representation, tourism and economic value. This seems to be recontextualization, that is the introduction of traditional dances into new social and institutional settings and selection of parts of their historical identity.

Table 4. Outcomes Associated with the Transformation

Outcome	Frequency	Percentage
Increased cultural visibility	10	71.4%
Wider audience reach	9	64.3%
Cultural preservation/continuity	8	57.1%
Economic opportunities	7	50.0%
Reinterpretation of cultural meaning	8	57.1%
Risk of commercialization	7	50.0%
Tension between ritual authenticity and contemporary presentation	6	42.9%
Intergenerational regeneration	6	42.9%

The most common result was increased cultural visibility reported in 10 studies (71.4%), followed by increased audience reach (64.3%). This indicates that by utilizing transformation, traditional dance can be given more publicity and some cultural types like dance that have been previously only performed by a certain group or ritual moment can be performed to the public at large. Contemporary adaptation to the site may even facilitate, not be an obstacle to cultural survival, as seen in 8 studies (57.1%). Some ways in which "To stitch the past together with the present" can occur involve using public actions, educational events or digital documentation.

Meanwhile, it points to considerable conflicts of interest. The six studies that concerned themselves with commercialization (50.0%), and six (42.9%) that noted conflicts between ritual authenticity and modern presentation, were identified. This indicates something about the negotiation process of the move from ritual to cultural performance. Changes to traditional dance to meet tourism or entertainment needs may result in the loss of specific ritual meaning, performance rules or the control of the process by the community.

The outcome demonstrates support for the central proposition of the conceptual framework, that external social and cultural influences shape the nature of traditional dance by processes of adaptation, commodification, institutionalisation and reinterpretation that ultimately lead to ritual practices becoming recontextualised as contemporary cultural performances. Among the relationships found in the literature, the most significant is that between the concepts of modernization/tourism and the change in performance context. Tourism generates

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demand for accessible and sight oriented performances, and modernization affects the social contexts for the transmission and practice of traditional practices.
The results also suggest that the shift must be seen as a cross from “traditional” to “modern,” and not as a linear progression. Instead, the Indonesian traditional dances seem to exist between the sphere of ritual acts and the sphere of cultural performances. Other dances have remain, continue or are revived for sacred, community, tourism, education, festivals and/or digital purposes. This transformation is impacted by community engagement, culture, policy, and technology. As a result, the finding indicates that contemporary Indonesian traditional dance is actually a result of cultural negotiation where the process of preserving, innovating, commercializing, and retaining dance culture are at play in performing it in public and maintaining its Indonesian identity.

OVERALL FINDINGS

From the analyses of the 14 studies above, it can be concluded that the traditional dance of the island of Java shows significant changes in terms of their functions and contexts. Focusing on what is happening outside the organization, the most prominent drivers mentioned are "tourism" (71,4%), "modernization" (64,3%) and "commodification" (57,1%). Regarding what is happening within the organization, the most commonly mentioned mechanisms mentioned are “transformation by adaptation”, (78,6%) and “transformation by changes in performance context”, (71,4%). Some of the positive impacts are increased cultural visibility, broader cultural audience base, and opportunities for cultural continuity; some challenges are cultural commercialization and tensions arising from ritual authenticity. It is therefore noticeable that the current transformation of the traditional Indonesian dances appears to be one of recontextualization and negotiation between traditional cultural elements and contemporary social, economic, institutional and technological worlds, and not just a complete erasure of the traditional elements of the ritual.

DISCUSSION

The results show that cultural recontextualization process in Indonesian traditional dance is a very intense process where the traditional practices in a community are often exhibited as cultural performances of wide audiences. The performance settings, the length of time, its presentation, the relation to the audience, and its meaning have changed because of tourism, modernization, commercialisation, digital media and institutional intervention. The leit motivation of adaptation and innovation indicates that dance is not only being usurped by contemporary dance forms, but selected traditional forms are being kept and the others modified based on the contemporary cultural and social settings.
Meanwhile, the results show that the struggle between keeping the culture alive and commercializing it exists. Traditional dance and its transmission can be improved through contemporary performance, which also brings economic opportunity, intergenerational transmission and introduction of the dance to younger and international audiences. But, the over-adaptation of a ritual can lead to the decay of the ritual meaning and less control by the community over their ritual practices. The metamorphosis would thus be regarded as a continuous negotiation through which Indonesian communities, actors, cultural institutions, the tourism sector and audiences continuously negotiate the use and meaning of the traditional dance in relation to the demands and needs of today's society.

CONCLUSIONS

From the research findings, it can be concluded that there is a significant dynamic change of the Indonesian traditional dance from ritual practices in the community to cultural performance in the present, which is dominated by modernization, tourism, commercialization, institutionalization, the anticipation of audiences and the process of digitalization. It is not a process in which the traditional dances are lost forever but is the process of recontextualization, adaptation and reinterpretation of traditional dances in new social, cultural, educational and touristic contexts. The findings are that traditional dance is becoming more and more multidimensional in a modern society in Indonesia, as indicated by performance adjustments, audience changes, presentation method as well as cultural changes.
The results also indicate opportunities and challenges associated with this shift. The use of contemporary performance for cultural visibility, audience reach, economic opportunity, and provides a tool for preservation via education and digital documentation. On the other hand, intense commercialism and standardization could undermine rituaization and lead to conflicts between realness and commercial portrayal. Thus, the sustainability of traditional dance in Indonesia should be done based on a combination of factors such as participation in the community, respect for the cultural and ritual aspects, cultural tourism according to the rules, support from institutions, and the use of digital technology. The future of traditional dance is, therefore, not : to preserve traditional dance in a theatrical form that permeates time, but : to give place to communities which can negotiate the meaningful ways of continuity and adaptation in the current society.

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IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following important implications for the preservation, development, and presentation of traditional arts in Indonesia in the present context.The study has several important implications to the preservation, development, and the present context with respect to traditional Indonesian dance. Culturally, the results have shown that preservation does not only need to focus on keeping the dancing movements and costumes, but also on safeguarding dance meanings, community knowledge, symbolic practices and cultural contexts for each kind of dance. Hence, cultural institutions and communities must co-evaluate the adaptation of traditional dances in the field of culture, tourism, education and public culture together.

The results indicate from the tourism and cultural-industry point of view that traditional dance can play a role in the cultural tourism industry if commercialization is done responsibly, so that it can become sustainable. Excessive standardisation or modification as an obligation for meeting the visitors' expectations is not desirable for tourism organizations and performance managers. Alternatively, use performances to provide context to historical and symbolic/ritual origins to the dance and allow an economy that is both economic and cultural.

The research also has implications for the education and digital preservation sectors. Structured learning programmes can be integrated with traditional dance in the school, university, cultural institutions and community groups, and digital platforms used for documenting, archiving, teaching and dissemination of traditional dance. These efforts may be effective in raising the interest of younger generation with the traditional way without discarding their historical and community environments.

Lastly, the investigation suggests that community involvement should continue to play a vital role in cultural change. It is important that government agencies, cultural institutions, tourism bodies and digital platforms connect with the people and know how to cater to the needs of practitioners and the community, instead of exploiting traditional dance as a cultural product. A participatory approach can be used to bridge innovation with continuity in creating a transition from ritual to contemporary performance that will enhance and/or reinforce Indonesian traditional dance culture into the future.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were some limitations to the study. First, it mainly relies on secondary sources, written texts, and records, and it doesn't reflect the experiences or perceptions of the dancer, the practitioner of the dance, the members of the community, the tourist, or the cultural administrator. Second, the analysis focuses on selected kinds of traditional dances in Indonesia which may not reflect the diversity that Indonesia has particularly from regional, ethnic, religious and cultural aspect. Thirdly, as the studies included to review date from different periods, geographical contexts and methodologies, one may not be able to draw direct comparison between cases. The analysis of the motives presented in this report does not represent possible nationwide statistical estimates – the thematic frequencies are a result of the literature selected and must not be interpreted as such. Last but not least, the recent socio-cultural dynamics of social media, digital platforms, tourism markets and the dynamics of the "new" cultural industries lead to the view that the metamorphosis of traditional dance is a growing phenomenon.

FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Empirical, comparative, and longitudinal studies of dancers, community practitioners, dancers' audience, tourists, cultural institutions, and government will be helpful in future study to overcome these limitations. Research can be conducted in study comparing various dance traditions and/or various areas of Indonesia regarding the relationship of ritual continuity, commercialization, cultural identity and innovation within each community. Quantitative audience perception could investigate aspects of what is authentic, what is culturally valued, and what aspects of it are more contemporary when presented, while the qualitative ethnographic could explore how the practitioners, when negotiating meaning and community ownership, negotiate the changes in ritual meanings. There is also a scope to explore the impact of social media, digital archival, virtual performance and even immersion on the transmission of the traditional dance to younger generations in further research. It would be especially useful to know if traditional culture continues to transform over time, or if its sustainable preservation is enhanced by the contemporary cultural performance.

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