

Reverse Engineering Sacracry: An Ethnography of Repositioning The Totality of Traditional Arts At The Intersection of Virtual Infrastructure and Digital Communal Resistance

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines the challenges arising from the encounter between the sacred totality of traditional art and the logic of virtual infrastructure, which drives the process of sacrality reengineering. This process involves the deconstruction of the inseparable unity of ritual, art, community, and cosmology, detaching them from their sacred contexts and reassembling them within digital platform formats. **Method:** Employing a literature review methodology, the study analyzes ethnographic books, national and international scholarly journal articles, and relevant research reports. **Results:** The findings reveal four principal insights. First, the morphology of sacredness in traditional art within the pre-digital context is constituted by elements of sacred space, sacred time, heirloom objects, and the roles of ritual performers, forming an indivisible totality. Second, the mechanism of sacrality reengineering unfolds in three stages: the disintegration of aesthetic elements from the ritual core, reformatting in accordance with platform algorithmic logic, and the repositioning of meaning into entertainment content, virtual identity, and digital tourism commodities. Third, a crossroads emerges where customary authority intersects with digital metrics, prompting negotiations of identity for traditional artists transitioning into content creators and causing cultural legitimacy dissonance. **Novelty:** Fourth, indigenous communities develop a spectrum of digital communal resistance, ranging from passive resistance through access restrictions and platform neglect to active-adaptive resistance via sacred digital archives, counter-narratives, and the creation of exclusive communally based digital spaces. The study's implications underscore the necessity of formulating cultural heritage protection policies grounded in the digital sovereignty of indigenous communities.

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has ushered in an unprecedented wave of transformation in the history of human civilization, permeating even the most profound realms of cultural practices that have been safeguarded for centuries by a veil of sacredness. Traditional arts, which in the pre-digital context existed as an inseparable totality encompassing ritual, art, community, and cosmology, now confront a virtual infrastructure characterized by its own distinct logic, values, and mechanisms. This encounter represents not merely the meeting of two disparate media but a fundamental epistemological clash: on one side, traditional arts are rooted in esoteric knowledge transmitted in closed contexts and experienced within limited sacred spaces; on the other, virtual infrastructure is predicated on principles of openness, speed, reproducibility, and an attention economy that drives all phenomena to become accessible, disseminable, and monetizable content. This tension constitutes the point of departure for the present study, which seeks specifically to examine the phenomenon of the reverse engineering of

sacredness through an ethnographic perspective on the repositioning of the totality of traditional arts at the intersection of virtual infrastructure and emergent digital communal resistance. The transformation of culture in the digital era has become a significant concern among various stakeholders at both global and national levels. Advances in digital technology and artificial intelligence have multidimensionally impacted the rights of indigenous communities, particularly in how they manage, represent, and protect their cultural heritage [1].

Digitalization has introduced profound changes in the ways culture is presented and consumed by the public, including within the realms of art and tradition that were previously subject to strict access limitations. A pertinent example currently under scrutiny is the sacred Bedhaya Semang dance, a heritage of the Yogyakarta Kraton imbued with philosophical and spiritual values, which now faces critical questions regarding whether such sacred cultural practices can maintain their purity or risk being reduced to mere content devoid of their essential meaning [2]. These concerns are far from unwarranted. Social media has evolved into a space where culture is frequently transformed into viral content without adequate comprehension of its historical and spiritual significance. While digital technology facilitates broader cultural exposure, the potential for meaning degradation represents a tangible threat when sacred boundaries are transgressed in pursuit of digital popularity.

A more tangible phenomenon can be observed in various digital ethnographic studies conducted on traditional art practices in social media. Research by Larasati (2025) on the performance art of Ebeg Banyumas on social media reveals that digital platforms have facilitated a redefinition process, transforming Ebeg from a sacred ritual into an aesthetic object capable of reaching a broader audience. This transformation, in turn, has generated new roles previously unknown within the traditional art ecosystem, such as efforts to preserve traditions through digital content, the promotion of nationalist narratives via local identities, and the creation of new economic spaces reliant on cultural commodification. These findings provide an important preliminary insight into how virtual infrastructures do not merely serve as transmission media but also function as arenas for the production of new meanings that potentially redefine the essence of sacredness itself. The negotiation processes occurring within digital spaces indicate that traditional arts are not entirely subject to platform logic but also undergo complex adaptation and hybridization [3].

The tension between sacredness and digitalization can also be understood through the conceptual framework developed in studies on digital authenticity. Allen-Perkins (2025), in their research on contemporary pilgrims of the Camino de Santiago, identifies four interrelated digital authentication strategies: temporal regulation concerning when to connect and when to disconnect, spatial restrictions defining appropriate locations for technology use, social negotiation regarding group norms on digital device usage, and narrative curation through selective digital storytelling. Rather than abandoning technology or experiencing fragmented authenticity, pilgrims cultivate reflective

practices that integrate both physical and digital dimensions while maintaining a subjective experience of spiritual legitimacy. The concept of connected liminality, introduced by Allen-Perkins, describes a digitally mediated liminal condition wherein transformation occurs amid continuous connectivity, providing a productive analytical framework to understand how sacredness is not simply lost in digital spaces but undergoes complex processes of transformation and negotiation. These findings challenge classical anthropological models that position pilgrimage as a complete separation from everyday life, instead offering a novel understanding of authenticity emerging through attentional discipline rather than the absence of technology [4].

In Indonesia, the challenges faced by indigenous communities in the context of digitalization cannot be separated from the multiple simultaneous pressures they endure. The second Southeast Asian Forum on Indigenous Rights and Climate Change in the Digital Era, held in August 2025 in Bogor, echoed profound concerns regarding how the climate crisis and digitalization concurrently threaten the existence of indigenous peoples. Digitalization and artificial intelligence have significantly impacted indigenous rights, particularly with the increasing adoption of digital identity and biometric programs by ASEAN countries to access public services. There is an urgent concern over the misuse of indigenous data by exploitative corporations, given that sacred and vital communal data, which should remain protected, are now readable and accessible through technological infrastructures [1]. Nevertheless, the forum also highlighted potentials for resistance and empowerment. When digital technology infrastructure is controlled and utilized by indigenous communities themselves for communal benefit, detrimental ecological and cultural impacts can be minimized. A key recommendation emerging from the forum was the imperative to ensure data sovereignty and digital rights for indigenous peoples, including the establishment of policies granting indigenous communities the authority to control and regulate their own data resources [1].

Efforts to integrate cultural preservation with digital platforms have been undertaken by various indigenous communities in Indonesia. Research on the Dukuh Indigenous Village conducted by Lahpan et al. (2025) demonstrates how digital platforms can be developed to promote the richness of traditional customs and culture within an indigenous community while simultaneously safeguarding its sacred values through documentation that adheres to prevailing customary etiquette and regulations. This study found that the younger generation of Kampung Dukuh exhibits strong adaptive capabilities, utilizing digital platforms as spaces for expression while maintaining local wisdom values by presenting accurate information from an insider perspective. These findings confirm that digital communal resistance does not necessarily manifest as outright rejection of technology but can take the form of adaptation governed by the community itself in accordance with the customary principles they steadfastly uphold [5].

The revitalization of traditions amid modernization also represents a response undertaken by various communities to sustain their cultural heritage. Research by Kurniawan et al. (2025) on the revitalization of the Jamasan tradition in Dawuhan Village, Banyumas, illustrates how efforts to increase community participation in customary traditions can be conducted through a series of cultural events promoted via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. This strategy has proven effective in enhancing the interest of younger generations and village residents in appreciating and preserving their cultural heritage, demonstrating that social media can serve as a powerful instrument for reviving traditions that are gradually being abandoned. Nevertheless, critical questions remain regarding the extent to which this digitally based revitalization process preserves the sacred dimension of the traditions being revitalized, and the degree to which it may instead foster transformations of meaning that distance the traditions from their spiritual roots [6].

The core issue of this research centers on the contradictory phenomenon that arises when traditional art forms, deeply embedded with sacrality, are compelled to enter a virtual infrastructure ecosystem governed by algorithmic logic and attention economy. The totality of traditional art, originally an integrated weaving of ritual, art, community, and cosmology, now undergoes a process of deconstruction and reconfiguration, wherein its sacred elements are dissected, separated, and reassembled into fragmented digital content formats. The fundamental problem lies in the disintegration of meaning that occurs when sacred dances are detached from their spatial, temporal, and heirloom contexts conditions essential to the presence of sacrality thus transforming them into mere aesthetic spectacles devoid of their transcendental foundation. The second issue concerns the shift in authority over meaning, where interpretative legitimacy, previously tightly controlled by traditional elders and communal structures, must now be negotiated through digital metrics such as likes, shares, and online comments, which often lack adequate understanding of the spiritual context. The third problem relates to the ambivalence in the identity of traditional art practitioners, who find themselves at the intersection of a spiritual calling as custodians of tradition and the demands of content creators obliged to meet algorithmic preferences to maintain relevance and economic sustainability. At this juncture, a fundamental tension emerges between pragmatic adaptation to digital demands and efforts to preserve sacrality, which necessitates restricted access dilemma that remains systematically unexplored in contemporary digital ethnographic studies.

The objectives of this study are systematically directed toward addressing the four formulated subtopics. First, the research aims to map and reconstruct the morphology of sacrality and the totality of traditional art within a pre-digital context by identifying core elements such as sacred space, sacred time, heirloom objects, and the roles of ritual participants, which collectively form an inseparable unity between rites, art, community, and cosmology. Second, the study seeks to reveal the mechanisms of sacrality's reverse engineering within virtual infrastructures through three interconnected stages: a

disintegration process that separates aesthetic elements from the ritual core, a reformatting phase that adapts duration and visual aesthetics to the algorithmic logic of the platform, and a repositioning of meaning that transforms sacred art into entertainment content, virtual identity, or digital tourism commodities. Third, the research intends to explore the dynamics of identity and authority negotiation between tradition and digital metrics at their paradoxical intersection, including how the transformation of traditional artists into content creators impacts cultural legitimacy. Fourth, the study aims to identify and map the spectrum of digital communal resistance strategies developed by indigenous communities, ranging from passive approaches such as access restrictions and platform avoidance to active-adaptive methods including the creation of sacred digital archives, the construction of counter-narratives, and the establishment of exclusive communal digital spaces that reject prevailing algorithmic logics. Arising from this gap in knowledge, the present study seeks to address an uncharted area within academic discourse concerning the relationship between the sacrality of traditional art and virtual infrastructure. Specifically, this research aims to investigate the phenomenon termed as the reverse engineering of sacrality, a mechanism whereby the totality of traditional art is deconstructed, detached from its sacred context, and reassembled within new formats and logics compatible with digital platforms. Employing an ethnographic perspective, the study will explore how this repositioning of totality occurs at the intersection of customary demands and digital metrics, as well as how indigenous communities develop communal digital resistance strategies that navigate the dual poles of adaptation and purification.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a library research methodology, which is an approach centered on the examination and analysis of various literary sources without conducting direct field research. In library research, data and information are not gathered through interviews, observations, or questionnaires distributed to respondents; instead, they are obtained through the exploration, reading, recording, and processing of written materials relevant to the research topic. These materials include scholarly books, national and international journal articles, research reports, encyclopedias, and other documents substantively related to the focus of the study. Library research allows the researcher to develop a robust theoretical argument, identify existing knowledge gaps, and formulate an original conceptual synthesis based on a critical review of the available literature [7].

The data sources for this study are categorized into two main types: primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources refer to documents that directly contain information about the subject under investigation, including classical ethnographic books documenting traditional art practices and their sacrality, books on digital anthropology, research methodology texts, and research reports published by credible research institutions. Secondary data sources comprise national and international scientific journal articles, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations, as well as

other supporting documents that provide additional context, alternative perspectives, or supplementary data to enrich the analysis of primary sources. The selection of data sources is conducted purposively, considering criteria such as topic relevance, author credibility, publisher reputation, and the currency of publication, limited to a specific time frame to ensure the timeliness of the information used in the research [8].

The data collection technique in this study was conducted through a series of systematic steps beginning with the identification and inventory of potential bibliographic sources. The initial step involved conducting an online literature search across various academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and accredited national journal portals, using predetermined keywords including "sacrality of traditional arts," "ritual digitalization," "cultural repositioning in social media," and "digital communal resistance." Once relevant sources were identified, the researcher performed an initial screening based on titles and abstracts to assess their relevance to the research focus. Subsequently, an in-depth reading of the selected sources was carried out, during which key information was noted, significant quotations were identified, and critical annotations were made to connect findings across different sources. This data collection process was iterative, allowing the researcher to revisit additional searches if new references were cited in the reviewed sources or if informational gaps emerged. Methodologically, the researcher also employed documentation techniques by creating a digital archiving system to store and categorize all bibliographic sources according to predetermined subthemes, thereby facilitating the analysis and citation processes in later stages [9].

The data analysis technique employed in this study is qualitative content analysis, conducted through several stages to ensure depth and rigor in interpretation. The first stage involves data condensation, where the researcher reduces the large volume of data from various literature sources into more manageable units of information by sorting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting key findings relevant to the four research subheadings. The second stage is data presentation, which entails organizing the condensed information into a structured and systematic narrative, thereby making patterns of relationships between concepts, similarities in findings across sources, and differences in perspectives between literatures clearly visible. The third stage involves drawing conclusions and verification, in which the researcher interprets the presented data to formulate substantive findings that address the research questions, while continuously verifying by referring back to the original sources to ensure that the conclusions drawn are supported by strong empirical and theoretical foundations [10].

The validity testing techniques employed in this literature review study are implemented through several strategies adapted from the frameworks of validity and reliability in qualitative research. The first strategy is source triangulation, which involves comparing and corroborating information obtained from various types of sources, such as contrasting findings from classical ethnographic books with those from contemporary journal articles, or confirming data from national sources with

international sources addressing similar phenomena. The objective is to identify both consistencies and contradictions within the literature, thereby producing a comprehensive analysis that is not biased toward a single perspective. The second strategy is enhancing observational perseverance, manifested in this context by repeated and thorough readings of the collected sources, enabling the researcher to develop a truly comprehensive understanding of the content, context, and nuances of the arguments presented by each author. The third strategy is referential adequacy, which ensures that the analysis and interpretation are supported by an adequate number and quality of references, rather than relying solely on one or two sources. The fourth strategy is peer debriefing, wherein the researcher discusses preliminary findings with colleagues or supervisors who possess expertise in the relevant field to obtain critical feedback, identify weaknesses in the arguments, and refine the analysis prior to formulating final conclusions [11].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Morphology of the Sacredness and Totality of Traditional Arts in a Pre-Digital Context

Entering the discussion of the research findings, it is essential first to trace and reconstruct the original form of sacra inherent in traditional art before it encountered the influence of virtual infrastructure logic. Based on an extensive literature review, it was found that traditional art was initially not an autonomous entity existing merely as spectacle or entertainment. Rather, it constituted an integrated mosaic tightly woven into the fabric of traditional community life, a phenomenon referred to in this study as "totality." Totality can be defined as an inseparable unity among four principal pillars: ritual, art, community, and cosmology. These four elements do not simply complement one another but form a living web of meaning collectively experienced and internalized. Within the worldview of indigenous societies, a dance never appears solely as an aesthetic bodily movement; it is a prayer manifested through motion. Similarly, a musical melody is not merely a composition of pleasing sounds but a frequency vibration believed to mediate communication between the human realm and the transcendent domain. These findings align with classical ethnographic studies that document sacred art functioning as a medium to approach the Supreme Being, thereby illustrating a fundamental vertical relationship between humanity and the divine [12].

Further mapping of the morphology of sacra identifies several core elements that constitute the foundation and indispensable conditions for the presence of such "totality." The first element is space. In the pre-digital context, sacred space is not merely a geographic location but a territory that has been consecrated and symbolically delineated. Artistic performances cannot be conducted arbitrarily; they are bound to specific places such as temple courtyards, village centers, springs, forbidden forests, or ancestral burial grounds considered to possess magical-religious power. This concept is embodied in ritual practices that emphasize that sacred relations must take place within

sacred spaces [12]. The second element is time. The timing of traditional art performances is also not chosen arbitrarily. It is closely linked to cosmological calendars, agricultural cycles, lunar phases, or transitional life moments such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death. Sacred time is a time "cut off" from the profane daily routine, marking a pause for the community to collectively engage with ancestors and supernatural forces. The third equally important element is heirlooms or offerings. Material objects such as masks, kris daggers, deity statues (arca), traditional textiles, and various types of ceremonial food are not ordinary performance props. These objects serve as spiritual bridges endowed with agency, power, and their own narratives, whose presence is essential to activate the sacred dimension within the ritual.

The fourth element pertains to the role of ritual practitioners. Within this communal structure, the artist is not an individual creating works to express personal emotions. Instead, they serve as a spiritual servant, a priest of the arts. Their identity merges with their function as ritual leaders, guardians of tradition, and intermediaries between the community and their ancestors. This role demands strict spiritual conduct, specific prohibitions, and recognition from the entire community rather than from an external audience. These five core elements—sacred space, sacred time, sacred heirlooms, and the sacred role of ritual practitioners—intertwine to form a cohesive ecosystem of meaning. This totality constitutes the "soul" of traditional art, where values of spiritual obedience and transcendence represent the ultimate orientation of every performance.

Discussion of the research findings must begin with a thorough reconstruction of the original sacredness inherently connected to traditional art before this ecosystem intersects with the disruptive logic of virtual infrastructure. Based on comprehensive literature review, it is evident that traditional art in the pre-digital context is not merely an artistic practice separable from the social life of its community; rather, it embodies an existential totality that integrates ritual, aesthetic, social, and cosmological dimensions into an inseparable web of meaning. This concept of totality refers to a condition in which dance, music, prayers, offerings, space, time, performers, and the entire community involved constitute a harmonious sacred ecosystem, where each element is interdependent and mutually reinforcing within an organic, rather than mechanistic, relationship. Within the worldview of indigenous communities, a sacred dance never appears as an individual expression aimed at applause or mere aesthetic appreciation but is instead a collective act intended to maintain cosmic balance, honor ancestors, and ensure the continued harmony of life cycles among the human realm, the spiritual realm, and the universe [13].

Further mapping of the morphology of sacrality identifies spatial elements as the primary foundation determining the presence of sacred dimensions within traditional art forms. In the pre-digital context, sacred space is not merely a neutral or interchangeable geographic location but rather a territory that has undergone processes of purification, symbolic delimitation, and strict customary regulation, thereby possessing an ontological quality distinct from the surrounding profane spaces. The performance of traditional arts

is inextricably bound to specific sites such as temple courtyards, customary village centers, sacred springs, forbidden forests, or ancestral burial grounds, which are believed to serve as points of convergence between the human and transcendent realms. These sacred spaces function not only as performance backdrops but also as integral components of the ritual itself, as the presence of magical-religious power is believed to be accessible and activated exclusively through these traditionally designated locations. Violations of these spatial prescriptions are thought to incur serious spiritual and social consequences, given that sacred space is understood as a cosmological contract that cannot be renegotiated by human will alone [14].

The element of time constitutes the second foundational pillar shaping the architecture of sacredness in traditional art within the pre-digital totality. The timing of ritualistic artistic performances is not determined by practical calculation or administrative agreement but is strictly bound to a cosmological calendar governing the natural and spiritual cycles of the community. The designation of sacred time is based on a complex calculation involving lunar phases, agricultural cycles, seasonal transitions, and critical life events such as birth, rites of passage into adulthood, marriage, and death. From the perspective of indigenous societies, sacred time represents a temporal segment distinct from the mundane daily routine, a liminal pause wherein the community collectively enters a different temporal dimension to communicate with ancestors and supernatural forces. This adherence to the cosmological calendar demonstrates that traditional art is not a cultural product that may be performed arbitrarily upon demand but rather a spiritual event occurring only at specific junctures where divine will and communal readiness intersectan understanding fundamentally at odds with the logic of instantaneous temporality characteristic of digital platforms [15].

Besides the dimensions of space and time, the material elements embodied in heirloom objects and offerings play a crucial role in activating and sustaining the sacredness of traditional art forms. Items such as sacred masks, heirloom kris, deity statues, sanctified traditional fabrics, and various types of ceremonial food offerings are not merely performance props or visual accessories that can be replaced by modern replicas. Each heirloom object possesses its own spiritual agency, encapsulating history, power, and personality recognized by the entire community as a living ancestral heritage. The presence of these objects in performances is not optional but an absolute requirement that determines whether a dance or musical presentation can be classified as a sacred act rather than mere profane entertainment. The processes of consecrating heirloom objects, their routine maintenance, and the accompanying prohibitions establish a material ecosystem that reinforces the bond between contemporary generations and their ancestral legacy, while also serving as visual and spiritual markers that distinguish traditional arts from contemporary performative art forms, which can be produced and reproduced without metaphysical constraints ([16].

The fourth element that completes the totality of sacredness is the role of the ritual performers, whose status and responsibilities extend far beyond the modern definition

of an artist. Within the communal structure of indigenous societies, sacred art practitioners are chosen not solely based on artistic talent but rather on their spiritual eligibility, recognized through an extensive customary selection process that involves transcendental dimensions such as dreams, divine revelations, or other supernatural signs. Their identity as artists merges into a more fundamental function as ritual leaders, custodians of oral traditions, and mediators between the community and the ancestral realm. This role demands strict spiritual conduct, mastery of certain mantras, adherence to various prohibitions such as abstaining from specific foods or observing fasting periods prior to performances and recognition by the entire community, which positions them as authorities not only in aesthetic matters but also in moral and spiritual domains. Consequently, traditional artistic performances cannot be executed by just anyone who learns the movements or melodies, as sacredness does not reside in outward forms that can be imitated, but rather in the inner state and spiritual authority possessed exclusively by those who have undergone legitimate customary initiation processes [17].

The interrelation of the four elements—sacred space, sacred time, heirloom objects, and the ritual actors who are themselves sacralized—constitutes a totality that cannot be reduced to any single component. This totality forms the essence of traditional art, fundamentally distinguishing it from modern performing arts, which can be staged anywhere, anytime, by anyone, and with any props. Within this totality, aesthetic value does not exist independently as an ultimate goal; rather, it serves as a vehicle for transcendental values that direct the community's attention toward vertical relations with God, ancestors, and cosmic forces beyond human comprehension. Understanding this totality provides a critical foundation for analyzing the effects that arise when virtual infrastructure, governed by an entirely different logic, enters and initiates a process identified in this study as the reverse engineering of sacredness—a phenomenon that will be examined in detail in the subsequent section.

Reverse Engineering Mechanism of Sacredness in Virtual Infrastructure

After comprehending the morphology of sacra as an integrated totality, this study subsequently reveals a disruptive phenomenon occurring when this ecosystem encounters virtual infrastructure. Within the framework of this research, this process is termed "reverse engineering of sacra," a mechanism whereby the totality of traditional art is deconstructed (disintegration), fragmented into isolated components, and then reassembled (repositioned) into new formats and logics compatible with digital platforms. The first identified mechanism is the disintegration process. At this stage, the logic of virtual infrastructure—characterized by speed, brevity, and fragmentation—selects the most sensational and photogenic aesthetic elements from the unity of the ritual. Dynamic dance movements, colorful costumes, or unique musical tones are detached from the cosmological narratives, prayers, offerings, and the sacred spatiotemporal contexts that originally enveloped them. Art forms that were once cohesive and holistic rituals are now reduced merely to audiovisual data ready for packaging.

The second mechanism involves reformatting. After aesthetic elements are uprooted from their ritualistic origins, they are forced into templates provided by digital platforms. This adaptation is particularly evident in the imposed duration adjustments: rituals that traditionally span hours or even days are truncated into segments lasting thirty to sixty seconds to comply with the standards of Reels or TikTok. Profound mystical narratives are replaced by trending voice-overs or provocative short texts. Visual aesthetics, once produced by torchlight or sunlight in open spaces, are now engineered through digital filters and cinematic filming techniques to align with algorithmic preferences favoring high-contrast visuals and rapid movements. A study on the shift of sacra and entertainment among indigenous communities demonstrates how a tradition's stable musical structures undergo significant transformations in duration and presentation context when subjected to the demands of modern entertainment stages [18].

The culmination of this reverse engineering mechanism is the repositioning of meaning, which constitutes the third stage. Once a sacred dance has been disintegrated and reformatted, the meaning attached to it undergoes a fundamental transformation. The sacredness, originally oriented vertically towards God and ancestors, is now repositioned horizontally to serve the logic of the market, tourism, and digital attention economy. Sacred art transforms into three new forms. First, it becomes mere entertainment content, where transcendental values are replaced by the number of views, likes, and comments from internet users. Second, it becomes a shaper of virtual identity, where social media users employ this cultural imagery as an accessory to construct an "ethnic" or "traditional" persona in cyberspace, without possessing a deep understanding of its spiritual roots. Third, it becomes a digital tourism commodity used to promote cultural destinations, packaging sacred rituals into tourist products that can be consumed and scheduled. A study on the shift in the sacred meaning of Reog art in Ponorogo confirms this phenomenon, demonstrating that art once rich in spiritual values and functioning as a medium to draw closer to God has now shifted in meaning to become a form of entertainment and a means of generating income amid social change and modernization [19].

After examining the morphology of sacra as an organic and integrated totality, the subsequent discussion turns to a crucial finding regarding the disruptive processes that occur when the ecosystem of traditional arts encounters virtual infrastructure. Conceptually, this process is termed the reverse engineering of sacra, a mechanism whereby the entirety of traditional arts is systematically deconstructed systematic here implying a comprehensive consideration of all components, their respective roles, and their interactions to ensure that the set objectives are fully achieved. The harmonious or heterogeneous interactions among elements influence the outcomes and determine the success of these objectives [20]. This totality is broken down into isolated components, which are then reassembled in new formats and logics that fully comply with the operational demands of digital platforms. This reverse engineering transcends mere

technical adaptation or the medium shift from offline to online; it constitutes a fundamental dismantling of the meaning architecture that has supported the existence of traditional arts for centuries. Digital platforms, with their features and algorithms, are not designed to accommodate the sacral totality requiring the integrity of space, time, material, and spirit; rather, they demand fragmentation, acceleration, and simplification to enable effective circulation of content within the attention economy ecosystem that underpins the virtual world [21].

The first mechanism identified in this reverse engineering process is disintegration, which involves the sorting and separation of the most sensational, photogenic, and attractive aesthetic elements from the complex overall structure of the ritual. The logic of virtual infrastructure, which prioritizes rapid reception and visual appeal, motivates content creators, both from within the community and externally, to select specific fragments of traditional art deemed to have the highest viral potential. Dynamic and acrobatic dance movements are detached from the cosmological narrative that underpins their philosophical foundation; colorful and exotic costumes are separated from the symbolic meanings of their motifs and colors; unique musical arrangements are extracted from their ritual functions as accompaniments to prayers and calls to ancestral spirits. Art forms that were originally holistic performative unities are now reduced to collections of audiovisual data that can be edited, cut, and curated according to digital market preferences, no longer bound by the necessity to preserve the integrity of their sacred contextual framework. This disintegration process marks the initial stage of the commodification of ritual, wherein sacred elements are transformed into commodified signs ready for exchange within the global attention economy [22].

Once the aesthetic elements have been successfully severed from their sacred roots, the second mechanism that ensues is reformatting a process of forcibly adapting these fragments into templates and technical standards prescribed by digital platforms. This adaptation is particularly evident in the aspect of duration, where traditional ritualistic art forms that naturally extend for hours, or in some cases even days, are drastically truncated into segments lasting thirty to sixty seconds to comply with the short-form content requirements of platforms such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, or YouTube Shorts. This temporal reduction not only eliminates a significant portion of the ritual sequence but also fundamentally transforms the sacred temporal experience, which is meant to be slowly and deeply internalized, into a rapid and superficial visual consumption. Complex mystical narratives that demand profound understanding of local cosmology are replaced by trend-following voice-overs, irrelevant background music, or brief sensational and often misleading texts. Visual aesthetics that were originally shaped organically through torchlight, sunlight in open spaces, or the dimness of ritual rooms are now digitally reconstructed using filters, cinematic filming techniques, and visual effects aimed at enhancing engagement metrics rather than preserving an authentic sacred atmosphere [23].

The culmination of the entire reverse engineering mechanism lies in the repositioning of meaning, which represents the most critical and problematic stage in the process of transforming traditional art within the digital realm. Once a sacred dance is disintegrated from its ritual context and reformatted according to platform standards, the meaning attached to it undergoes a fundamental and paradigmatic shift. Originally, the sacredness oriented vertically, directing the community's attention and devotion toward God, ancestors, and the cosmic order. It is now repositioned horizontally to serve three dominant logics driving virtual infrastructure: the logic of entertainment, the logic of virtual identity, and the logic of tourism commodification. First, sacred art transforms into mere entertainment content, where the transcendental values that once formed the core of the performance are replaced by a focus on view counts, likes, comments, and shares, which serve as success metrics within the attention economy. Second, fragments of traditional art are employed as accessories for constructing virtual identities by social media users who create ethnic or traditional personas online without adequate knowledge of the spiritual roots, philosophy, and ethics underpinning these cultural practices. Third, supported by algorithms promoting tourist destinations, sacred rituals are packaged and marketed as digital tourism commodities, which can be scheduled and sold to tourists seeking exotic experiences [24].

The phenomenon of meaning repositioning has been documented in various case studies across Indonesia, revealing similar patterns. Research on the Reog Ponorogo art form illustrates how this cultural practice, initially serving a sacred function as a medium to connect communities with spiritual forces and ancestors, has undergone a significant shift in meaning, becoming primarily a form of entertainment and a means of livelihood amid the pressures of modernization and market economy. This transformation is neither natural nor neutral; rather, it results from a series of structural pressures compelling the community to sacrifice the sacred dimension to meet economic demands and maintain social relevance in the contemporary era. Furthermore, this repositioning of meaning generates a reinforcing cycle: the increasing dissemination of traditional art-based entertainment content on digital platforms strengthens public perception that such art is merely spectacle, devoid of its sacred context. This, in turn, motivates content creators to continue producing similar content to satisfy established market expectations. This cycle gradually but surely erodes the sacred foundation that once constituted the essence of traditional art forms [25].

Crossroads: Negotiating Identity and Authority between Custom and Digital Metrics

This study sharpens its analysis by revealing a paradoxical arena that emerges as a consequence of the phenomenon of totality repositioning. This space, metaphorically termed the "crossroads," serves as a field of negotiation and conflictual contestation between two fundamentally distinct authorities. On one hand, there is the customary authority, characterized by its hierarchical, closed nature, grounded in ancestral heritage and communal recognition. On the other hand, there exists the digital metric authority, which is decentralized, open, and entirely reliant on engagement metrics such as likes,

shares, comments, and virality. This crossroads generates a dynamic tension and frequent contestation. The authority over meaning, traditionally an absolute prerogative of customary elders, shamans, ritual leaders, or indigenous council structures, is now challenged and renegotiated by an anonymous digital audience. A social media post featuring fragments of sacred dance is no longer interpreted solely through cosmological narratives validated by customary custodians but is freely reinterpreted, modified, parodied, or even ascribed entirely new meanings by netizens via comment sections and reaction features. An ethnographic study of Nusantara arts underscores an inseparable thread linking art, ritual, and socio-cultural identity that shapes society an integrated unity now undergoing significant trials in the era of digital disruption [26].

Amidst this tension, the identity of the "traditional artist" undergoes a significant and ambivalent transformation. They are no longer solely spiritual servants dedicated exclusively to tradition, but increasingly positioned as "content creators." Their status and influence are now measured not only by the depth of their mastery over mantras or their adherence to spiritual practices, but also by digital popularity metrics such as follower counts, viewership numbers, and their ability to generate monetizable narratives. This phenomenon introduces a new dichotomy between those deemed digitally competent and those respected within customary frameworks. The impact on cultural legitimacy is profoundly complex. An individual possessing deep knowledge of a tradition's spiritual core may wield less public influence compared to a content creator who presents merely the aesthetic surface yet attracts millions of viewers. Legitimacy, once qualitative and profound, must now negotiate with visible quantitative legitimacy. This shift reveals a liminal dynamic, where sacred identity and entertainment coexist at a threshold, not fully transitioning to either pole permanently but continuously generating tension [18].

Discussion on the reverse engineering of sacra leads the analysis into a more complex and tension-filled arena, metaphorically described as a crossroads a meeting point and battleground between two fundamentally opposing regimes of authority. On one side stands customary authority, characterized by its hierarchical, closed, esoteric nature, grounded in ancestral heritage and communal recognition attained through prolonged engagement within the community. On the other side is digital metric authority, which is decentralized, open, democratic in the sense that anyone can participate, and entirely reliant on quantitative engagement metrics such as follower counts, likes, shares, comments, and levels of virality. This crossroads creates a dynamic, unstable, and often conflictual field of negotiation, wherein claims to truth of meaning, legitimacy of representation, and the right to speak on behalf of tradition are continuously contested. Within this fluid digital space, no single voice can dictate meaning, as each post remains open to interpretation, modification, appropriation, and even parody by an anonymous audience that may lack understanding of the original cultural context [27].

One of the most striking dimensions of this intersection is the shift in identity experienced by traditional art practitioners, who gradually but inevitably transition from

being traditional artists to content creators. Their status, influence, and even economic sustainability are no longer solely determined by the depth of their mastery over sacred rituals, the rigor of their spiritual discipline, or the recognition they receive from customary councils and communities. New factors such as the number of social media followers, the ability to produce engaging and easily digestible content, and the capacity to monetize posts through platform features like advertising, endorsements, or live streaming have become primary determinants of one's position within the digitally mediated traditional art ecosystem. This phenomenon generates profound tensions, as content creators who present only the aesthetic and entertaining aspects of traditional art often gain significantly greater public influence compared to customary elders possessing deep spiritual knowledge but lacking presence on digital platforms or the ability to package their knowledge in formats aligned with algorithmic preferences [28].

The consequences of this shift in authority for cultural legitimacy are profound and multifaceted. Previously, legitimacy was qualitative, deeply rooted, and attained through community recognition based on stringent customary criteria. It must now contend with a quantitative legitimacy that is visible and instantly measurable through digital metrics. Within this context, questions regarding who holds the right to represent, interpret, and speak on behalf of tradition become increasingly ambiguous and problematic. A content creator who garners millions of viewers with a short-form version of a sacred dance may be perceived by digital audiences as an authoritative representative of that tradition, despite lacking formal authorization from the customary community to present or elucidate its meaning. This situation engenders what can be termed epistemic dissonance, characterized by a widening gap between knowledge acknowledged as legitimate by the customary community and the knowledge circulated and accepted by the broader digital public [29].

Tensions between customary authority and digital metrics give rise to an ambivalent and liminal phenomenon of identity negotiation. Indigenous artists entering digital spaces do not wholly abandon their sacred identities, nor do they fully adopt the logic of digital content production. They occupy an intermediary position, continuously negotiating and compromising between the imperative to preserve the sanctity of tradition and the necessity of maintaining relevance and economic viability in the digital era. This negotiation often results in complex adaptive strategies, such as selectively determining which aspects of rituals may be recorded and disseminated, embedding sacred contextual explanations within descriptions or comments to educate audiences, or utilizing digital platforms primarily as teasers to attract interest for experiencing the full ritual in physical spaces. These findings demonstrate that the intersection of customary practices and digital metrics is not a binary arena where sacredness is entirely lost or preserved; rather, it is a dynamic space characterized by ongoing strategies, tactics, and negotiations undertaken by cultural actors who exercise agency, albeit within structural constraints imposed by platform logics [30].

Forms and Strategies of Digital Communal Resistance: Between Adaptation and Purification

In response to the wave of reverse engineering and the tension-filled intersections it engenders, this literature review finds that indigenous communities are not merely passive victims of technological determinism. Rather, they demonstrate robust agency by developing a variety of forms and strategies of communal digital resistance. This resistance manifests along two primary spectra, ranging from passive to progressive-adaptive approaches. At the passive resistance pole, strategies focus on purification and total protection. These take the form of strict restrictions on access to the most sacred moments within rituals. Communities consciously decide to prohibit all forms of recording, whether visual or auditory, of ritual pinnacles, certain heirlooms, or processes deemed highly private and mystical. Another strategy involves the deliberate neglect of digital platforms, wherein all customary activities are confined entirely to physical spaces without efforts to archive or share them digitally. This stance firmly asserts that sacredness is not to be uploaded, shared, or commodified. Such an approach reflects a profound understanding of the divisive threats posed by digital logic, leading to solutions that tightly seal the doors of tradition from external influence.

Moving to a more complex dimension, there exists an active-adaptive resistance strategy that does not outright reject virtual infrastructure but rather seeks to "ride" it in order to purify and reinforce the position of sacredness. This strategy exemplifies tactical intelligence in utilizing the tools of the adversary to resist them. First, indigenous communities begin to construct sacred digital archives that are strictly and confidentially controlled. These archives are not publicly accessible but are limited to community members or select researchers under stringent customary protocols, serving as a preservation effort that safeguards knowledge without commodifying it. Second, social media is employed to formulate counter-narratives. Instead of allowing fragmented interpretations of their dance traditions to be freely misconstrued by online users, indigenous youth are empowered to create content that elucidates the original context, philosophy, and sacred rules underlying these practices. Algorithmic metrics are leveraged to educate the public, correct misconceptions, and reconstruct digital audiences' respect for cultural roots. Third, and most advanced, is the creation of exclusive communal digital spaces. This initiative may take the form of platforms based on websites or applications fully managed by the community, where access is regulated and, importantly, the design and operational logic resist conventional algorithmic norms such as addictive recommendation systems or popularity metrics. These spaces function as "virtual customary lands," digital enclaves where sacredness can be re-presented in novel forms without losing the integrity of their totality.

In response to the previously outlined wave of sacra and complexity engineering at road intersections, this study presents compelling evidence that indigenous communities are not entirely passive victims of the determinism imposed by virtual infrastructure. Instead, they exhibit significant agency by developing a variety of forms

and strategies of communal digital resistance. These can be mapped along two primary spectra, ranging from the most conservative to the most progressive poles. This spectrum reflects the diversity of indigenous communities' responses to digitalization pressures, which cannot be reduced to outright rejection or unconditional acceptance. Rather, it constitutes a complex continuum wherein each community, and even each individual within it, locates their position based on specific contextual considerations [31].

Within the framework of passive resistance, the strategy implemented is oriented towards the purification and total protection of the sacred core of tradition from any form of digital penetration. The most fundamental manifestation of this strategy involves the strict restriction of access to the most sacred moments of rituals, wherein the community consciously and collectively decides to prohibit any form of recording whether visual or auditory of the ritual's pinnacle events, such as the ancestral spirit summoning processions, the descent of heirloom objects, or other phases deemed too sacred and secret to be consumed by the public outside the community. This prohibition is enforced not only through oral regulations but also via stringent social control mechanisms, whereby every community member present is responsible for ensuring that no violations occur. Another strategy within this spectrum is the deliberate and systematic neglect of digital platforms, with the community choosing to confine all indigenous artistic activities exclusively to physical spaces, without efforts to document, archive, or disseminate them in the digital realm. This decision reflects a resolute stance affirming that sacrality, ontologically speaking, is incompatible with the logic of digital reproducibility and circulation; thus, the most appropriate solution is to tightly seal off external access to the most sacred dimensions of tradition [32].

Moving towards a more progressive and tactical pole, there exists a spectrum of active-adaptive resistance that does not outright reject virtual infrastructure but rather seeks to harness and direct it to serve the interests of purifying and reinforcing the sacred position within the digital flow. The foremost strategy within this spectrum is the development of sacred digital archives managed in a closed and exclusive manner by the community. Unlike typical digital archives that prioritize open access principles, these archives are designed as repositories of knowledge accessible only to specific community members or researchers granted permission under strict customary protocols. This initiative enables communities to utilize digital technology for the preservation of their sacred knowledge and practices without compromising the principles of confidentiality and exclusivity that underpin the very foundation of sacredness. Such digital archives function as a defensive bastion of knowledge amidst the threat of oral tradition extinction, while maintaining full community control over who may access the archives, when, and under what conditions access is granted [33].

The second active-adaptive strategy identified in this literature review is the utilization of social media by indigenous communities, particularly the youth who are well-versed in digital technology, to construct and disseminate counter-narratives aimed at correcting misconceptions and educating the public about the authentic context,

philosophy, and sacred regulations governing traditional arts. Rather than allowing fragmented representations of their dances to circulate unchecked and be misinterpreted by online audiences lacking contextual understanding, indigenous youth take the initiative to produce educational content that elucidates the philosophical meanings behind specific movements, the history and function of heirloom objects, and the ethical considerations required when observing or recording performances. This strategy leverages the same algorithmic logic that has previously contributed to the disintegration and commodification of indigenous arts, but repurposes it to reconstruct knowledge, respect, and deeper public appreciation for the sacred origins of traditional art forms. Such counter-narratives serve as a form of epistemic resistance, seeking to reclaim authority over meaning from anonymous digital audiences and restore it to the community's custodianship [34].

The most advanced and visionary strategy within the spectrum of active-adaptive resistance involves the creation of exclusive digital spaces based on communal principles, entirely managed by indigenous communities, with design and operational logic fundamentally distinct from mainstream social media platforms. Such initiatives may include the development of community websites, specialized mobile applications, or blockchain-based platforms where access is regulated according to indigenous knowledge hierarchies. In this model, publicly oriented content is widely accessible, whereas more esoteric materials are restricted to individuals who meet specific criteria. A critical aspect of this strategy is its rejection of the prevailing algorithmic logic that dominates mainstream platforms such as recommendation systems promoting addictive consumption, popularity metrics reducing value to quantifiable measures, and business models predicated on user data extraction. These communal digital spaces function as virtual indigenous territories, digital enclaves with sovereignty wherein communities can present, preserve, discuss, and transmit the totality of their sacredness in formats that align with their values and needs rather than those imposed by global technology corporations. Such initiatives represent the most radical form of resistance, as they oppose not only inappropriate content but also the underlying infrastructure itself by constructing alternatives rooted in the digital sovereignty of indigenous communities [35].

The entire spectrum of resistance mapped herein demonstrates that indigenous communities are not static entities merely lamenting the loss of sacredness in the digital era; rather, they are actors possessing reflective and strategic capacities to respond to temporal change. The choice between passive resistance and active-adaptive resistance is not mutually exclusive; instead, these strategies may be implemented simultaneously and complement one another according to the specific contexts encountered. The unifying thread throughout this spectrum is the endeavor to maintain community control over their sacred knowledge and practices an epistemic and cultural sovereignty that constitutes a prerequisite for the sustained vitality of indigenous artistic traditions amid the relentless advance of virtual infrastructures.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: The reverse engineering of sacrality represents a disruptive phenomenon that deconstructs the totality of traditional art from the cohesive unity of ritual, art, community, and cosmology into aesthetic fragments repositioned within the logic of virtual infrastructure. This process occurs through three hierarchical mechanisms, beginning with the disintegration of sacred elements that separate dance and music from their ritual contexts, followed by reformatting that adapts duration and visual aesthetics to the algorithmic demands of digital platforms, culminating in the repositioning of meaning that transforms sacred art into entertainment content, virtual identity, and digital tourism commodities. **Implication:** The implementation of this research aims to formulate a community-based intangible cultural heritage protection policy model in the digital era, which goes beyond superficial documentation or promotion of traditional arts, instead respecting and accommodating the sacred dimensions and communal control mechanisms still upheld by indigenous communities. Practically, these findings can be transformed into ethical guidelines for content creators, digital tourism industry actors, and social media platform managers to prevent unauthorized appropriation and commodification of sacred arts without adequate contextual understanding. **Limitation:** At this juncture, a paradoxical and conflictual crossroads emerges, where the authority over meaning, previously held hierarchically by customary elders and communal structures, must now be negotiated with digital metrics such as likes, shares, and virality, as well as the free interpretations of online communities. The shift of indigenous artists' identities into content creators generates cultural legitimacy tensions between the qualitative spiritual depth and the quantitative nature of digital popularity. **Future Research:** Furthermore, this study advocates for the development of alternative digital infrastructures designed from the ground up by indigenous communities themselves, enabling them to present, preserve, and transmit the totality of sacrality in virtual spaces without being fully subjected to the attention economy logic dominating mainstream platforms.

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