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## Digitalizing Malangan Mask Art for Cultural Preservation: An Elaboration Likelihood Model Study of Generation Z on Instagram and TikTok

Ni Made Savitri Paramita<sup>1\*</sup> and Galih Edy Nur Widyaningsih<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Languages and Literature, Brawijaya University, Malang, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The digital era demands new approaches to cultural preservation, including the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage such as the Malangan mask dance of Malang Regency. This study examines how Generation Z engages with and processes digitalized Malangan mask content on social media, using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Content was published on two dummy accounts (@topeng\_ngalaman on Instagram and TikTok) and evaluated through a mixed-methods design combining a questionnaire of 22 Generation Z respondents with qualitative thematic analysis. Addressing the gap left by prior promotion-focused research, the study proposes a five-indicator content model content creativity, cultural narrative, audience engagement, information accessibility, and media optimization. The results show that content creativity and cultural narrative most strongly influenced engagement, yet most respondents followed the peripheral route, showing shallow elaboration of cultural-religious meaning. The findings indicate that digital preservation must move beyond visual appeal and algorithmic reach toward deliberate support for meaning-making and value transmission. As an exploratory pilot study with a small convenience sample (n = 22), the findings are indicative rather than generalizable.

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### Correspondence Address:

[made.savitri@ub.ac.id](mailto:made.savitri@ub.ac.id)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in digital technology have reshaped many aspects of life, including the conservation of cultural heritage. UNESCO distinguishes tangible from intangible cultural heritage, the latter encompassing living traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, social practices, and craftsmanship passed from one generation to the next. Malangan mask dance, a traditional performing art of Malang Regency rooted in the Panji stories and the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics (Kamal, 2013; Melany, 2013), is one such intangible heritage now in decline as fewer young people learn the form. Among the institutions working to sustain it is the Asmorobangun padepokan in Pakisaji, founded in 1982 by Mbah Karimun and now led by Handoyo, with the mission of preserving Malangan masked puppetry (Kamal, 2013).

Beyond its artistic form, Malangan mask theatre is deeply embedded in Javanese cultural and spiritual life. Rooted in the Panji cycle and the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, its characters embody moral and philosophical teachings such as virtue, self-restraint, loyalty, and the enduring struggle between good and evil that have long served as vehicles for ethical and spiritual formation in Javanese society. As a living tradition shaped by centuries of Hindu–Buddhist and Islamic acculturation, the mask art reflects the syncretic religiosity characteristic of Nusantara culture, in which aesthetic expression and religious–ethical values are inseparable. Preserving Malangan mask art is therefore not merely safeguarding a performance genre but sustaining a repository of cultural–religious meaning; communicating these deeper values, rather than surface aesthetics alone, is central to its continuity.

Among contemporary preservation strategies, digitalization through social media has become one of the most accessible and cost-effective ways to widen cultural reach. In Indonesia, internet use is dominated by the Millennial generation (93.17%) and Generation Z (87.03%), most of whom use it to access social media platforms (APJII, 2024) that turn communication into interactive, image-, video-, and narrative-rich dialogue (Coulson, 2013). The Asmorobangun padepokan maintains accounts on Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, yet engagement across them remains low, suggesting that mere presence on social media does not guarantee effective cultural transmission.

The digitalization of intangible cultural heritage through social media is increasingly understood not as a promotional add-on but as a participatory preservation strategy in its own right. Rather than presenting culture as information to be passively consumed, digital heritage practice repositions audiences as co-creators who interact with, reinterpret, and help sustain cultural meaning (Bertrand et al., 2021). For living traditions such as Malangan Mask art, this participatory dimension is essential because safeguarding intangible heritage depends less on documentation alone than on the continued transmission of meaning, values, and practice to younger generations (Yu, 2023). Recent international studies reinforce this view: social-media interaction and ease of access have been identified as primary determinants of user engagement with digital heritage, making

participatory platforms a necessary rather than optional component of preservation efforts (Gao, 2025), while people-centered frameworks argue that heritage value is best sustained when communities co-construct it through digital platforms (Teller, 2025). This is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose intention to engage with cultural heritage communication is shaped by immersive, flow-inducing digital experiences (Cao et al., 2024).

Prior research supports this participatory turn. Bertrand et al. (2021) document a shift in heritage communication from one-way ‘readership’ to participatory ‘usership’, in which audiences co-create cultural meaning paralleling the peripheral route of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), in which visual elements, concise narratives, and cultural symbols serve as persuasive cues. Argyridou et al. (2023) and Mendoza et al. (2023) further argue that effective digital preservation must convey the symbolic, historical, and value-laden dimensions of heritage rather than its visual form alone, and that message strategies aligned with audience characteristics can activate the ELM central route. Yu (2023) and Boeri et al. (2023) similarly stress that safeguarding intangible heritage depends on human-centered communication that transmits meaning and values, extending the ‘cultural life’ of heritage through audience participation.

Despite this, existing research has largely treated promotional reach and engagement metrics as the measures of content success (Widjanarko et al., 2022), leaving a critical gap: there is no structured, operational framework explaining how social media content can be deliberately designed to enhance audience elaboration of cultural–religious messages rather than merely increasing surface-level engagement. This gap is especially significant in Indonesia, where cultural heritage is closely intertwined with religious values and social ethics, and in community-based institutions such as the Asmorobangun padepokan, where digital strategies have yet to be translated into an integrated content model.

Addressing this gap, the present study develops a content indicator model for digital cultural preservation comprising five interrelated dimensions: content creativity, cultural narrative, audience engagement, information accessibility, and media optimization, analyzed through the ELM. Whereas previous ELM-based studies, including Wika and Ciptadi (2023), have not offered a concrete framework for designing such content, the novelty of this study lies not in applying the ELM but in proposing a model that is both analytical and design-oriented, specifying how these elements jointly shape the way Generation Z processes cultural messages through central and peripheral routes. The strategy also supports Brawijaya University’s contribution to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 17 (Partnerships to Achieve the Goals).

Accordingly, this study asks how Generation Z processes Malangan mask content on Instagram and TikTok through the central and peripheral routes of the ELM; which of the five content indicators most strongly influences their engagement with that content;

and to what extent these audiences understand and internalize the cultural, social, and ethical values embedded in Malangan mask characters. Together, these questions frame an inquiry that moves beyond shallow engagement toward more meaningful digital cultural communication.

## **2. METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study primarily employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative descriptive analysis with qualitative thematic analysis. The mixed-methods design follows Creswell's (2016) framework, which emphasizes the integration of quantitative and qualitative data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of research problems. While the core data collection method involved questionnaires, the study also explored deeper qualitative insights through open-ended questions. The quantitative descriptive analysis was used to examine respondents' preferences, with results expressed as percentages, while thematic analysis of open-ended responses followed the six-phase procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and reporting.

The primary data were obtained from a questionnaire administered to 22 Generation Z respondents (ages 12–27) regarding their opinions on social media posts about the Malangan Mask. These posts were featured on two dummy accounts: @topeng\_ngalaman on Instagram and @topeng\_ngalaman on TikTok (Topeng Ngalaman, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). The questionnaire included a combination of closed-ended questions measuring various aspects of engagement and open-ended questions to allow more detailed qualitative responses.

This study integrates both cultural and religious values within the content creation model. While previous studies have primarily focused on content formats such as captions, music, hashtags, and animation for engagement, this research incorporates indicators of religious and social ethics into the content analysis. The instrument used for this study includes specific questions targeting religious and ethical values, such as the portrayal of moral lessons from the Malangan Mask performances, the depiction of social roles and ethics in the narratives, and the alignment of content with religious values (e.g., harmony, respect, and social responsibility). The content creation on Instagram and TikTok is assessed not only by its entertainment value but also by how well it communicates these ethical principles.

The data collection began by documenting the Malangan masks at the Asmorobangun Padepokan, which were then used to create content for Instagram and TikTok. In designing this content, existing Malangan mask accounts were also reviewed as references, including those of the padepokan and its master artist (Handoyo Topeng Malangan, n.d.; Padepokan Asmorobangun, n.d.; Padepokan Seni Topeng ASBA, n.d.; Padepokan Seni Topeng Malangan Asmorobangun, n.d.). The content, featuring videos

of the Malangan Mask, was designed to represent the cultural aspect of the tradition, aimed at engaging Generation Z. Based on the 2024 APJII survey, Generation Z is a major consumer of entertainment, culture, and tourism content on these platforms, which directly aligns with the content created for the dummy accounts. The questionnaire was distributed using a convenience sampling method, targeting users of Instagram and TikTok who were part of the Generation Z demographic. In the case of respondents aged 12-17, ethical considerations were adhered to by obtaining consent from parents or guardians before participation. Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of respondents.

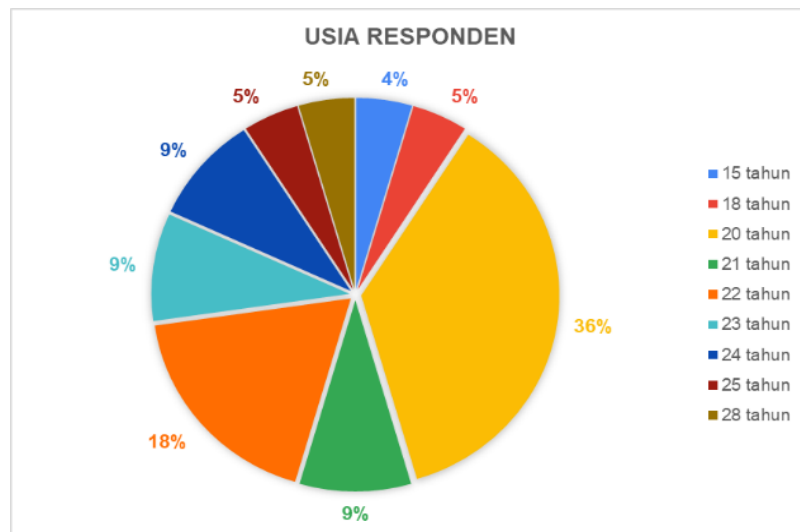


Diagram 1. Respondent Age Distribution

### Exploratory Content-Based Design

This study employed an exploratory content-based design to examine how Generation Z audiences respond to variations of digitalized Malangan Mask content on social media. Rather than a controlled experimental setup, this study presents a set of prototype content variations uploaded to two dummy accounts, namely @topeng\_ngalaman on Instagram and TikTok, to observe audience perceptions and responses. The videos were designed to introduce Malangan Mask characters and their symbolic meanings. Each video had a duration of less than one minute, aligning with Generation Z's media consumption preferences and short-form video norms on social media platforms.

The content variations presented in this study include differences in visual presentation (such as static rotating mask imagery versus more varied visual elements), narrative style (caption-based explanations versus in-video text narration), audio elements (use of traditional Javanese gending music adapted to character traits), and information accessibility (presence or absence of subtitles and explanatory text). These variations were not treated as controlled experimental manipulations but as naturally differing

content formats intended to explore audience perceptions of engagement and message understanding.

A limited number of content posts were uploaded over a short observation period with consistent thematic focus across platforms to maintain comparability of audience responses. This design enables exploratory insight into how different content characteristics may relate to audience engagement and message interpretation, without claiming causal relationships or controlled experimental effects.

### Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended items. The instrument was developed based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), digital heritage communication studies, and social media engagement literature. The questionnaire measured audience responses to content engagement, message elaboration, cultural understanding, and perceived transmission of cultural–religious values.

The main constructs measured in this study included audience engagement, message elaboration, content creativity, cultural narrative, information accessibility, media optimization, and cultural–religious values. Closed-ended items used a Likert-type scale to capture respondents’ perceptions, while open-ended questions assessed the depth of audience understanding and interpretation of the content. Together, these constructs operationalize the five content indicators of the proposed model content creativity, cultural narrative, audience engagement, information accessibility, and media optimization while message elaboration and cultural–religious values serve as the ELM-based outcomes through which content effectiveness was assessed.

Table 1 presents the study’s research instrument, mapping each construct to its indicators, example items, measurement scale, and theoretical source.

**Table 1.** Research Instrument

Construct	Indicator	Example Item	Scale	Theoretical Source
Audience Engagement	Interest & interaction	“This video makes me interested in watching until the end”	Likert 1–5	Delahaye Paine (2011); Hutchinson et al. (2024)
Message Elaboration	Depth of understanding	“Explain the message or meaning you obtained from the video”	Open-ended	Petty & Briñol (2012)
Content Creativity	Visual & audiovisual appeal	“The visuals and editing make the content attractive”	Likert 1–5	Digital heritage communication literature
Cultural Narrative	Story & symbolism	“The video helps me understand the character and its meaning”	Likert 1–5	Cultural transmission studies
Cultural–Religious Values	Moral & ethical meaning	“The content reflects values such as respect, wisdom, or morality”	Likert 1–5	Cultural–religious studies
Information Accessibility	Clarity & comprehensibility	“Captions or subtitles help me understand the content”	Likert 1–5	Digital heritage communication literature

Construct	Indicator	Example Item	Scale	Theoretical Source
Media Optimization	Format, duration & discoverability	“Video length, format, and hashtags make the content easy to find and follow”	Likert 1–5	Social media engagement literature

### Research Scope and Sample Positioning

The study involved 22 respondents from Generation Z, selected through convenience sampling based on their active use of Instagram and TikTok. Due to the limited sample size, this research is an exploratory, pilot study aimed at identifying patterns of audience engagement and message processing rather than generalizing the findings to the entire Generation Z population. The results are therefore interpreted as indicative insights that can inform future large-scale or experimental studies on digital cultural heritage communication.

### Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using the Elaboration Likelihood Model by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), focusing on how messages conveyed by content on mass media (Instagram and TikTok) are conveyed to audiences, particularly Generation Z. This study also utilized Katie Delahaye Paine's perspective on social media usage and the components that make up social media content to examine the effectiveness of content in achieving message delivery to audiences.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentages, to measure user preferences and engagement indicators. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, to identify key patterns in how Generation Z interprets and responds to cultural and religious values embedded in Malangan Mask content. This combined approach provides a more robust and holistic understanding of audience engagement and message processing.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Communication Through Social Media

Social media is an online platform and set of tools for people to interact, share information, and communicate. Communication via social media is interactive, using websites or mobile technology, making it easier for individuals to connect with one another. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and others have become part of most people's lives. In addition to serving as a communication medium, social media can also serve as a means of raising awareness of social conditions in the community (Khyat et al., 2024). This research focuses on the role of social media in preserving regional culture. Documentation of the Malangan mask at the Asmorobangun Padepokan is used as material to create content about the Malangan mask on Instagram and TikTok. This aligns with the importance of preserving traditional

culture and introducing it to Generation Z through the medium most familiar to them: social media.

Based on the results of a survey by the Indonesian Internet Network Users Association (APJII), across all age demographics, the most frequently visited entertainment internet content is online video (76.31%), where online video display is one of the upload forms on the Instagram platform and the main upload form on the TikTok platform. The APJII survey on users of both social media is dominated by Generation Z, with 51.9% on Instagram and 46.34% on TikTok (Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII), 2024). Based on the results of this survey, dummy accounts were created for the Malangan mask on Instagram and TikTok, considering several components of social media communication.

In creating content on social media, it is necessary to pay attention to several components, as mentioned by Katie Delahaye Paine in her book *Measure What Matters*, namely: 1) what is the purpose of the content being created, 2) who is the target audience, 3) related to the content, what is important to the audience, 4) what motivates the audience to buy the product, 5) what is the main message of the content being displayed (Delahaye Paine, 2011). Based on these five components, content is designed on the Instagram and TikTok platforms as follows.

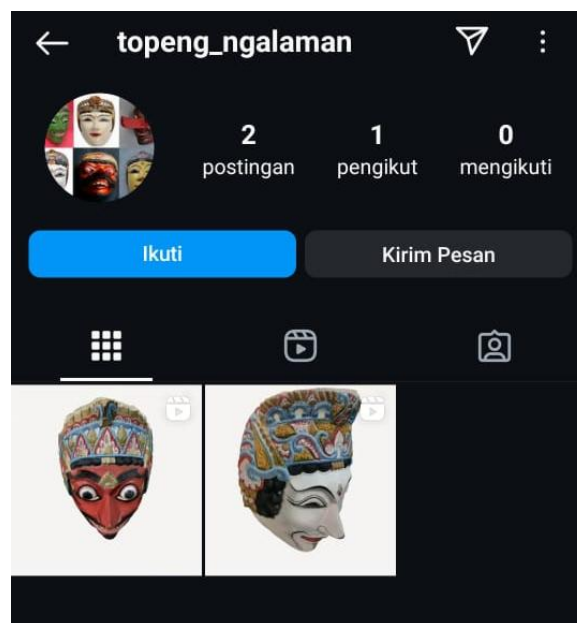


Figure 2. Display of the Instagram account @topeng\_ngalaman

Figure 2 shows the Instagram account @topeng\_ngalaman, created for this study, as one of the two dummy accounts used to publish and test the digitized Malangan mask content.

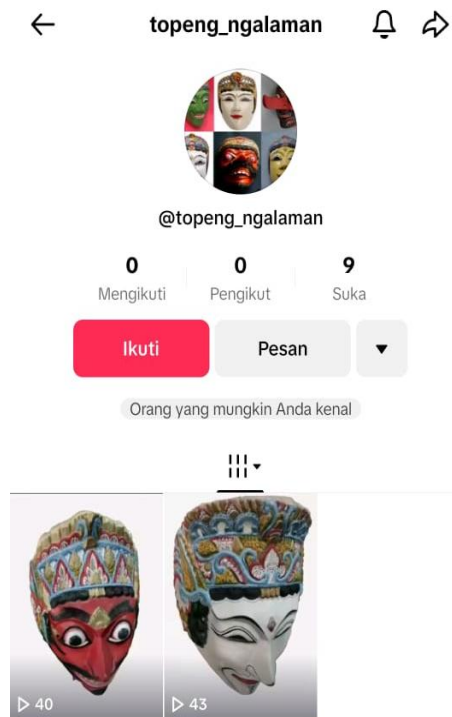


Figure 3. TikTok account @topeng\_ngalaman

Figure 3 shows the corresponding TikTok account, @topeng\_ngalaman, the second dummy account used to reach Generation Z on short-form video platforms.

These two social media platforms were chosen based on the high level of interest among Generation Z in using both Instagram and TikTok, each with its own unique characteristics. The survey results revealed data related to the social media platforms respondents use.

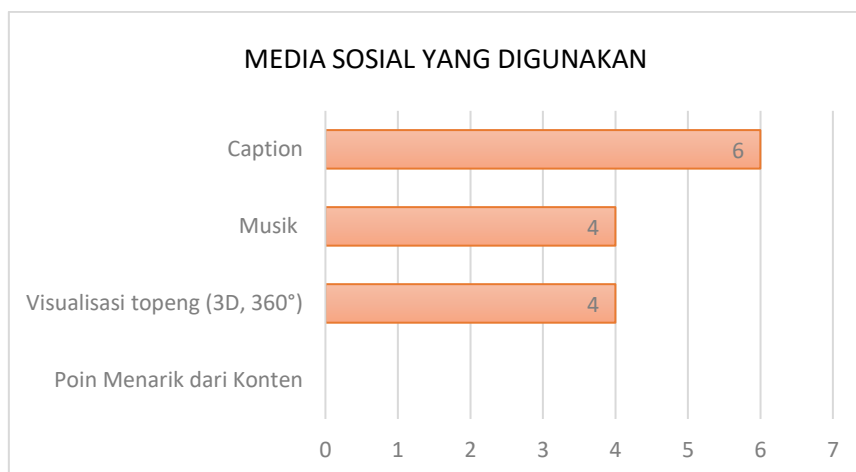
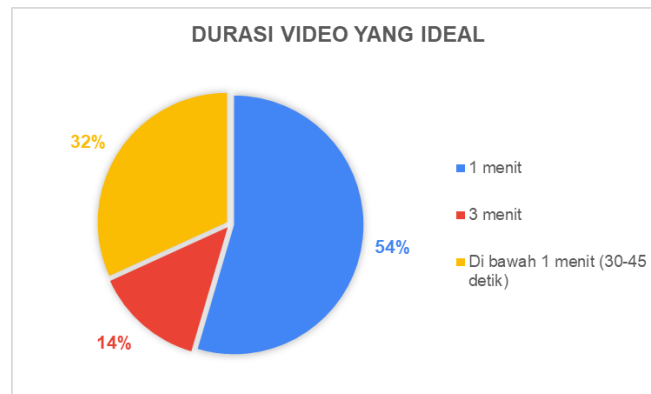


Diagram 2: Types of Social Media Used by Respondents

According to Diagram 2 above, the questionnaire results indicate that three of the four social media platforms selected by respondents focus on video content. Regarding

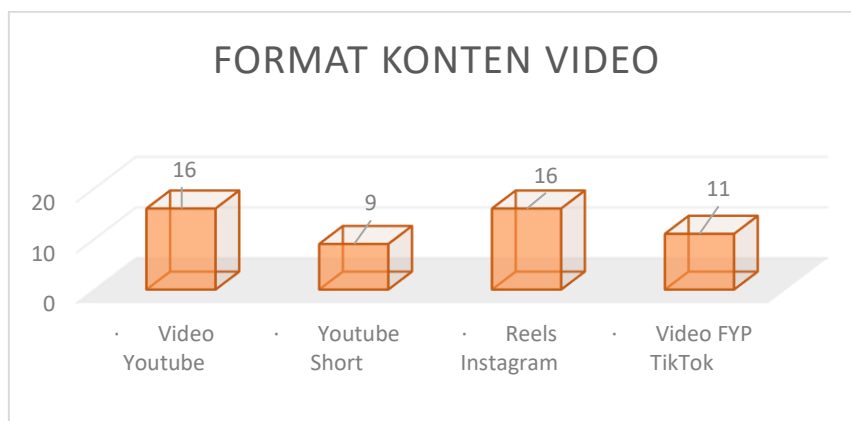
video content preferences, respondents tended to prefer short-form videos over longer ones. Specifically, 12 out of 22 respondents (54.5%) stated that they preferred video content with a duration of around one minute, while 7 out of 22 respondents (31.8%) preferred video content with a duration of less than one minute.



**Diagram 3:** Video Content Duration on Social Media

Diagram 3 shows respondents' preferred video duration, with the majority favoring videos of one minute or less (86%), confirming Generation Z's preference for short-form content.

Generation Z, exposed to digital media from an early age, has a very short attention span. As stated in the article "How to Grab Gen Z's Attention Span in 8 Seconds or Less," Generation Z only has an attention span of 8 seconds, yet they retain better memories of what they see on digital media than millennials (Marcus, 2022). This article also states that using video is the most effective way to capture and maintain Generation Z's attention. This article also recommends short videos (up to around two minutes) as the most engaging format for Generation Z. The present study's respondents, however, favored even shorter videos of one minute or less, suggesting that for cultural content aimed at this audience the most effective duration may be shorter still. Regarding video content formats, four video content formats are identified that Generation Z prefers on social media.



**Diagram 4:** Video Content Formats on Social Media Preferred by Generation Z

Diagram 4 shows the video content formats Generation Z prefers, with short-form videos such as Instagram Reels and TikTok FYP videos being the most popular.

According to the questionnaire results, the most popular short-form video uploads among Generation Z are currently Instagram Reels and TikTok FYP videos. Reels is a short video format offered by Instagram, with video durations ranging from 30 seconds to 10 minutes. As previously stated, Generation Z's short attention spans make them more likely to prefer short-form video content.

In addition to duration, another important consideration is the storytelling of the uploaded content. Paine mentioned that content creators on social media need to define the purpose of their content. Regarding the digitalization of Malangan masks, the four content uploads on Instagram and TikTok focused on introducing the characters of Malangan masks. The narrative is presented in two ways: through captions and in-video narration.

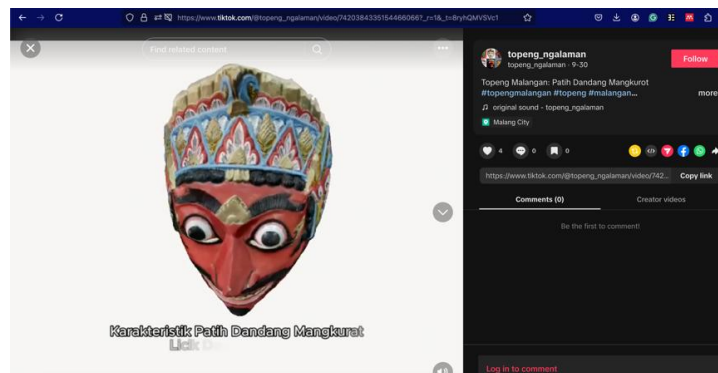


Figure 4. Display of video content on TikTok @topeng\_ngalaman, which uses text narration.

Figure 4 shows an example of TikTok content that conveys information through in-video text narration rather than captions.



Figure 5. Video content on Instagram by @topeng\_ngalaman that uses captions

Figure 5 uses captions in its video, explaining the Patih Dandang Mangkurat mask. While captions were previously generally used in films or long-form videos to convey the content, short-form videos have also begun using them recently. In Figure 4, the video was created without captions and instead emphasized the use of text narration explaining the characteristics of the depicted masks. Based on the questionnaire results, one element that needs to be considered to make information about the Malangan mask more accessible to Generation Z, the primary target audience, is the use of captions and text narration in the video. In addition to the questionnaire results demonstrating the importance of captions and text narration, the narrative written in the captions also needs to be considered.

Editing the caption narrative to use more communicative, interactive language for the audience. For example: "Hi, Topengers! This time we present a visualization of the mask..."

To improve video engagement and maintain strong audience flow, adding narration or voice-over with subtitles can enhance the appeal of the video.

This content on Malangan masks was created with the aim of providing information and knowledge to Instagram and TikTok users, particularly Generation Z, about traditional arts in the Malang region. The information is presented using narrative media written in captions and text within the video, as discussed previously. However, regarding the target audience for this content, the video's packaging is crucial.

Two elements stand out here: the video and the audio. The issue is that the video only shows a rotating image of the Malang mask, with nothing else. The audio element is that the video contains only a song or narration, whereas people today prefer to see and listen to something that directly provides information without having to look at captions/comments or wait a long time to read them. In addition, only narration with a fairly long duration is also boring.

According to the questionnaire results, the font effect in the first video was considered less engaging, while the lack of music in the second video was seen as less interesting.

The video animations used in content uploads on Instagram and TikTok are simple and visually appealing. Based on the questionnaire results, 12 respondents reported that the content was unengaging due to uninteresting videos. They emphasized the need to add still images or other video clips to create more variety and avoid monotony. The use of fonts and colors is an important consideration in creating engaging video content.

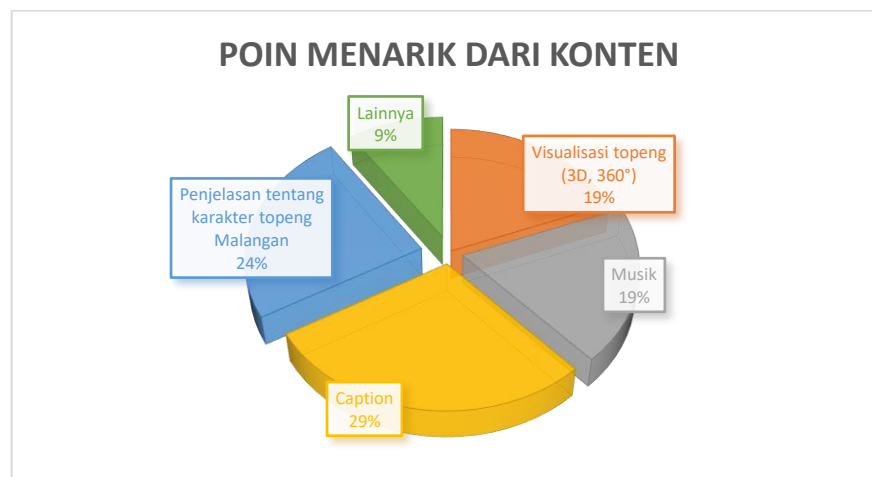
Another crucial element of video content is the use of audio. The choice of background music is a key factor in attracting viewers to the content, while adding voice-overs or dubbing to videos enhances the audience's enjoyment. The questionnaire results revealed that although captions play a crucial role in video content on Instagram and TikTok, social media users sometimes skip the captions and focus solely on the video's visuals. Therefore, adding voice-overs or dubbing can increase content engagement.

To create engaging videos and maintain high audience flow, adding narration or voice-overs with subtitles is recommended.

Provide information about Malang masks in uploaded videos, along with illustrations/photos of the masks discussed, rather than providing explanations in the captions.

Adding other clips, such as people wearing the masks, and providing some sort of explanation (subtitles) in the video to describe the mask's characteristics can help, since Instagram users sometimes don't have time to read captions and simply scroll past.

Due to the low attention span of Generation Z, when consuming content on social media, audiences often simply glance at the content and then watch it. Therefore, the use of audio, voice-over/dubbing, and the inclusion of content within the video narrative are crucial to conveying the message. The questionnaire results also revealed that, in addition to voice-over/dubbing in video content, selecting background music that matches the content is crucial.



**Diagram 5:** Interesting Points from @topeng\_ngalaman Video Content

Diagram 5 shows that music plays a significant role in attracting the attention of Instagram and TikTok users to the content presented. Choosing music that reflects the content encourages viewers to pay closer attention to it through the the end. The questionnaire collected respondents' opinions regarding the use of music in @topeng\_ngalaman video content.

The music in both videos is equally engaging, as it fits the characters they portray. The first video uses fast-paced, fiery music, befitting the evil Patih Dandang Mangkurat. The second video uses slower, more relaxed/cheerful music, befitting the good-natured Panji Asmoro Bangun.

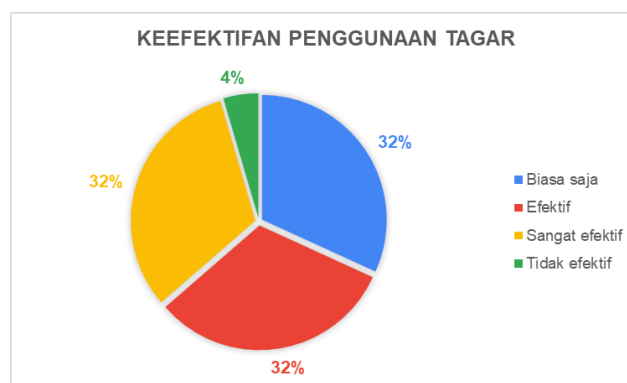
The use of Javanese gending music tailored to the character of each mask featured in the content is a selling point of @topeng\_ngalaman's content. Even though the audience doesn't know the content, the ear-catching music, which aligns with the visuals, keeps them engaged until the end. In practice, social media content creators often

incorporate trending audio/music to increase engagement and capture audience attention as people scroll through their feeds. Music is a crucial part of social media, where combining music with content has significant potential to increase appeal and engagement, and music also plays a role in the storytelling of social media content (Tabak, 2023).

A key component of video content is its visual appearance. This relates to the quality of the images or videos used in the content, as well as the flow of the video. The use of illustrations or animations in video content enhances its appeal. Furthermore, videos consisting of various video clips with similar themes prevent audiences from getting bored and provide a better understanding of the content. This can be seen in the comments from the questionnaire regarding what interests respondents about video content on social media, as follows.

Furthermore, for the visuals in the video, it would be better if the animations were expanded, not just one like the reels above.

The previous section explained the importance of using captions and narration in social media video content. Another element that contributes to high engagement is the use of hashtags. Hashtags are words or sentences preceded by the "#" symbol, which are used on social media platforms to categorize content and make it easier to search (Hutchinson et al., 2024; Ji, 2023; Skoric & Pang, 2024). Along with the use of hashtags, the questionnaire results indicate that using many hashtags in content will increase content engagement and increase the likelihood of content being included in the FYP (For Your Page) page, a section of the TikTok and Instagram platforms that provides video suggestions based on the algorithm of content frequently viewed on both platforms.



**Diagram 6:** Effectiveness of Hashtag Use in Social Media Content

Diagram 6 shows that 64% of respondents stated that hashtag use is effective in terms of content engagement with their audience. Engagement on social media refers to audience interactions and reactions, including likes, comments, sharing content links, and other forms that demonstrate audience activity and interest in the content (Hutchinson et al., 2024; Skoric & Pang, 2024). The appropriate use and selection of hashtags will make content more easily accessible to social media users, even if those audiences don't follow

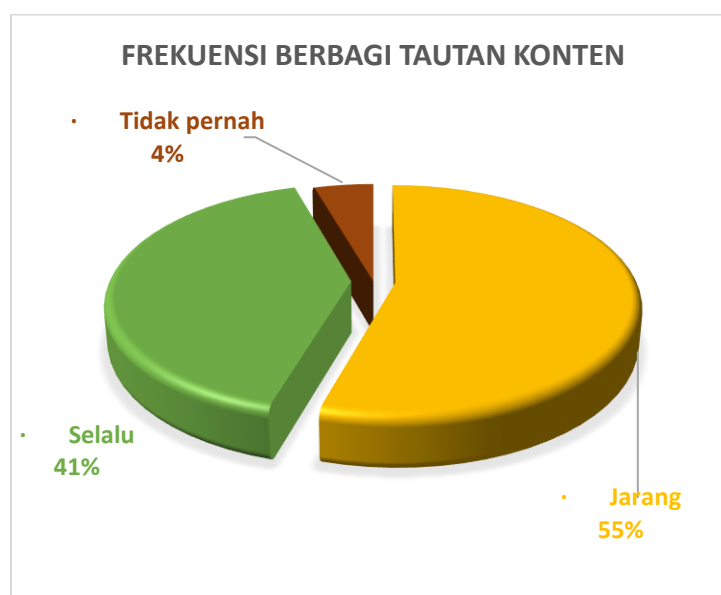
the account where the content appears. Consistent with this, questionnaire responses suggest maximizing hashtag use within the @topeng\_ngalaman account on both Instagram and TikTok.

Broadly speaking, there are four elements of video content that content creators need to pay attention to: 1) captions and narration, 2) use of music and audio, 3) visual appearance (video background selection, animation used), and 4) use of hashtags. If these four elements are used optimally, accompanied by a clear and structured concept in accordance with Paine's five components of questions regarding content creation on social media, then the achievement of the purpose of creating content and high engagement with the audience will be achieved. In relation to the communication process, content creators on social media must have the acumen to read the market in which the content will be created. Moreover, they must be able to read and understand the needs of the Generation Z audience for the content they consume on social media. Thus, content related to traditional culture, which is often assumed to be old-fashioned and boring, will be acceptable and enjoyed by Generation Z, and, in the long term, Generation Z will have knowledge of traditional arts and an awareness of the need to participate in preserving these arts.

### **Elaborating Social Media Content with Audiences**

Social media functions as a platform that mediates communication and interaction between individuals and groups. Social media platforms have evolved to enable online connections and public participation from diverse communities, networks, and society at large (Hutchinson et al., 2024). The previous section explained the components of social media content in relation to creating engaging content for its audience, which is necessary for the content's message to be conveyed. Content about traditional culture aims to introduce the culture in question, while social media serves as a repository for documentation of traditional cultural products. This section will discuss how the messages within social media content are perceived by audiences.

Video content on Instagram and TikTok is relatively short, with the average video on both platforms lasting around 1-2 minutes. Within this short timeframe, content creators strive to incorporate as much information or narrative as possible to convey to their audience. Regarding audience understanding of content, Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, using the Elaboration Likelihood Model, mention two routes for information acquisition: the central route and the peripheral route. In the context of social media content, the use of persuasive narratives is seen as influencing the attitudes and behaviors of the content audience. One way social media audiences engage with this content is by sharing links to it. The questionnaire results revealed that 55% of respondents rarely share links to the videos they watch on social media, as shown in the following diagram.



**Diagram 7:** Frequency of Respondents Sharing Video Content Links from Social Media

Diagram 7 shows how often respondents share video-content links; most (55%) rarely do so, indicating largely passive rather than participatory engagement.

Sharing links to interesting social media content with friends or family is a form of communication that develops through cognitive understanding of the content. Content with engaging content and visuals attracts audiences to share links.

I share videos with friends/family because I find the content interesting, whether it's entertaining or relevant to my interests. Sometimes I also share a video because I think the person might enjoy it.

Based on several questionnaire responses regarding reasons for sharing content links, respondents cited entertainment, information, and interest as the primary reasons for sharing content links. As previously explained, packaging video content with attention to visual appeal, the use of audio and music, and appropriate narration will make the content highly appealing, ultimately increasing engagement. Social media content audiences will share content links through a process of understanding the content, but this understanding involves shallow processing where individuals are influenced by cues not directly related to the message (Petty & Briñol, 2012). Elaboration is still low, where audiences do not process the information in depth. One such cue is how the engaging appearance of the video content will encourage viewers to share the link.

This low level of elaboration on social media content is most clearly reflected in the questionnaire findings regarding respondents' understanding of two video pieces from the Instagram and TikTok accounts @topeng\_ngalaman. The results indicate that only 1 of 22 respondents demonstrated a high level of message elaboration by accurately and comprehensively explaining the meanings embedded in both content pieces. This respondent not only recalled the information presented but also articulated the characteristics and relationships between the two mask characters in the videos.

This finding is particularly significant, as it highlights a strong dominance of peripheral route processing among Generation Z audiences, with most respondents engaging with the content at a surface level rather than developing a deeper interpretative understanding. In contrast, central route elaboration, characterized by analytical interpretation of cultural meanings, appears to be extremely limited within the observed sample.

Patih Dandang Mangkurat and Panji Asmoro Bangun are important characters in the play *Malangan*, which is based on the classic Javanese story of Panji. They are polar opposites.

The responses above show that respondents drew conclusions from the two pieces of content they viewed, concluding that the two characters depicted in the content are polar opposites in the Panji story. These respondents had a deeper understanding of the content and elaborated on it more than other respondents. On the other hand, the other 21 respondents only briefly mentioned what they saw in the content. This is evident in the following responses regarding the information they gained from viewing the @topeng\_ngalaman content:

Some of the responses above demonstrate low elaboration of the content. Some respondents did not even mention the word "Malangan," and some even wrote "explanation of the statue" in their answers. The deliberately simple presentation of the video content did not attract respondents' attention and did not prompt them to pay close attention to the content. Considering the target respondents of this study, Generation Z, as previously stated, their attention span is only around 8 seconds. Their information absorption will also be low if the media in which the information is presented is not engaging. The preceding analysis explains the social media components that must be considered to achieve high audience engagement, with visual appearance being the most important. From the respondents' answers above, it appears they are unable to elaborate on the content they view.

This low level of elaboration in social media content was also generally reported by respondents, who stated that many social media users do not read captions or have little interest in them. Therefore, video content with voice-overs or dubbing is more likely to generate high engagement. However, this does not necessarily indicate that social media users will use the central route to understand the information in a content. The cursory understanding that social media users tend to engage in is more on the peripheral route.

In analyzing audience responses, the classification of central and peripheral route processing was based on qualitative coding of respondents' open-ended answers. Responses were categorized as indicating central route processing when respondents could explain the symbolic meaning of the mask characters, relate the content to cultural or ethical values, and provide interpretive reasoning beyond the visual or musical appeal. In contrast, responses were categorized as indicating peripheral route processing when

respondents focused mainly on surface-level cues such as music, hashtags, visual attractiveness, animation, or general liking without elaborating on the cultural meaning of the content. Based on this coding procedure, only a very limited number of respondents demonstrated central route elaboration, while most responses reflected peripheral processing. Therefore, the claim of dominant peripheral route processing should be interpreted as an exploratory qualitative inference rather than a statistically tested measurement, particularly because the coding was conducted within a small pilot sample and inter-coder reliability was not formally calculated.

The audience responses also indicate that portrayals of mask characters and their moral values, such as respect, loyalty, and wisdom, were more closely associated with respondents' understanding of social and ethical messages than technical content features such as music, hashtags, and animation. While these peripheral cues helped attract attention and increase engagement, they did not necessarily lead to deeper elaboration of cultural or ethical meanings. These findings suggest that Generation Z audiences may be visually and affectively engaged with Malangan Mask content, but their deeper processing of cultural values remains limited. Accordingly, content creativity and cultural narrative should be strengthened not only to attract attention but also to guide audiences toward more explicit interpretation of symbolic, cultural, and ethical meanings embedded in Malangan Mask art.

These moral associations point to a deeper cultural–religious layer that distinguishes Malangan mask content from ordinary entertainment. In the Panji tradition, the two characters function as an ethical dyad: Panji Asmoro Bangun embodies the refined (*halus*) virtues of self-control, courtesy, and inner nobility prized in Javanese ethical thought, whereas Patih Dandang Mangkurat represents the coarse (*kasar*) drives of ambition and unrestrained emotion. The masks thus encode a moral cosmology in which character, comportment, and spiritual refinement (*budi pekerti*) are inseparable—values that resonate with the syncretic, locally grounded religiosity of Nusantara Islam, where ethical formation is transmitted through cultural forms rather than doctrine alone. Read in this light, the study's central finding gains added significance: because peripheral-route processing engages audiences through surface cues—music, visuals, and pacing—rather than reflective interpretation, it can signal that a character is “good” or “evil” without transmitting the ethical reasoning and spiritual meaning behind that judgment. For a tradition whose preservation depends on passing on these moral–religious values, activating the central route is therefore not merely a matter of engagement quality but of safeguarding the very substance of the heritage.

To present the main empirical findings of this study, the results are organized into quantitative summaries of audience preferences and engagement, followed by an analysis of content elements influencing engagement and a thematic interpretation of qualitative responses. This structure allows a clear distinction between observable engagement

patterns and deeper message elaboration processes, in line with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

**Table 2.** Key Quantitative Findings on Content Preferences and Engagement (n = 22)

Aspect Measured	Key Result	Interpretation
Preferred video duration	≤ 1 minute (86%)	Generation Z strongly prefers short-form video content
Preferred platform format	Instagram Reels & TikTok FYP	Short video algorithms shape content visibility
Effectiveness of hashtags	64% agree hashtags increase engagement	Hashtags function as peripheral cues enhancing reach
Sharing behavior	55% rarely share video links	Engagement is mostly passive rather than participatory
Engagement with cultural narrative	Narrative-based content most associated with cultural understanding	Cultural storytelling increases perceived relevance
Route of message processing	Peripheral route dominant (only 1 of 22 central)	Message elaboration remains shallow

The results in Table 2 indicate a strong preference for short-form video content among Generation Z respondents, particularly videos under of minute. This finding is consistent with the short attention span associated with digital-native audiences and the design of Instagram Reels and TikTok FYP algorithms. While hashtags were perceived as effective in increasing content visibility, sharing behavior was relatively low, suggesting that audience engagement was largely passive. Importantly, although cultural narratives increased audience interest, the dominance of peripheral route processing (with only 1 of 22 respondents showing central-route elaboration) demonstrates that high engagement does not necessarily translate into deep cognitive elaboration of cultural messages.

**Table 3.** Most Agreed Content Elements Influencing Engagement

Content Element	Evidence from Survey	Analytical Meaning (ELM)
Music & audio	Majority stated music attracts attention and fits character traits	Strong peripheral cue
Visual variety	12 respondents said visuals were monotonous	Visual appeal is critical for attention
Captions & subtitles	Identified as key for accessibility	Supports comprehension but not deep elaboration
Voice-over / narration	Suggested to increase engagement	Enhances information salience
Hashtags	Considered effective for FYP visibility	Algorithmic amplification cue

Table 3 shows that audiovisual components such as music, visual variation, and animation play a dominant role in attracting attention and sustaining engagement. These elements function primarily as peripheral cues within the ELM framework, influencing audience attitudes without requiring deep cognitive processing. While captions, subtitles, and narration were recognized as helpful for accessibility, they were insufficient to stimulate central-route processing. This suggests that although such elements support basic understanding, they do not automatically encourage reflective engagement with cultural meanings.

**Table 4.** Qualitative Themes on Audience Message Elaboration

Theme	Description	Example Respondent Quote
Shallow cultural recognition	Respondents identify object but not meaning	“Malangan masks”
Descriptive understanding	Focus on physical traits only	“Description and characteristics of masks”
Misidentification	Cultural context not fully grasped	“Explanation of the statue”
Deep elaboration (rare)	Understanding narrative & symbolism	“Patih Dandang Mangkurat and Panji Asmoro Bangun are polar opposites in the Panji story”
Moral value resonance	Ethical traits noticed but not elaborated	“The characters show good and bad traits”

Table 4 presents the qualitative themes on audience message elaboration. The qualitative analysis reveals that most respondents demonstrated shallow levels of message elaboration, limited to object recognition or basic descriptive understanding. Only one respondent articulated a deeper interpretation that connected character symbolism and narrative context, indicating central-route processing. The predominance of brief and surface-level responses confirms that, despite visual engagement, the transmission of cultural and religious meanings remains limited. These findings reinforce the quantitative evidence of peripheral route dominance.

**Table 5.** Summary of Core Empirical Findings

Dimension	Main Finding
Engagement pattern	High visual/audio engagement, low cognitive depth
Cultural message processing	Predominantly superficial
Religious–ethical value transmission	Recognized but weakly elaborated
Role of content creativity and cultural narrative	Most influential engagement drivers
Overall implication	Engagement ≠ understanding

Table 5 synthesizes the core findings of this study, highlighting a clear distinction between engagement and understanding. While content creativity and cultural narratives successfully attract Generation Z audiences, they do not consistently foster deep cognitive elaboration of cultural–religious values. Engagement is primarily driven by peripheral cues rather than reflective or argumentative processing.

### Situating the Findings in International Literature

These findings can be situated within a growing body of international research applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model to short-form video and social media persuasion. Consistent with the present study, recent work shows that engagement on short-video platforms is driven largely by peripheral cues, such as visual appeal, music, and surface-level content features, rather than by effortful central-route processing. Fang et al. (2025) find that peripheral routes have a positive impact on the efficiency of short-video marketing campaigns, while Rui (2025) demonstrates that surface features and network cues such as user engagement function as peripheral signals shaping audience attitudes toward short-form video content, consistent with evidence that herd-related cues heighten persuasion mainly through the peripheral route (Xu & Warkentin, 2020). The

dominance of peripheral processing among this study's Generation Z respondents, who were attracted by audiovisual elements yet showed limited elaboration of cultural-religious meaning, mirrors these patterns and reinforces the interpretation that high engagement does not equate to deep cognitive elaboration.

This distinction carries practical implications for digital cultural preservation. Because central-route attitudes are more durable and resistant to change than peripheral-route ones, content that merely captures attention is unlikely to sustain the intergenerational transmission of cultural values that heritage preservation requires. Li (2025) shows that features enhancing users' motivation and ability to process information, such as social presence and interactive cues, can raise cognitive engagement with short-video content, suggesting that Malangan mask content could be redesigned to invite deeper processing through stronger narrative framing, culturally contextualized captions, and prompts for reflection or participation. Read together with Cao et al. (2024), who link Generation Z's participation intention to immersive, flow-inducing experiences, these studies indicate that activating the central route, not merely maximizing reach, should be the primary design goal for social media-based preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

The study's finding that narrative-based content is most closely associated with cultural understanding resonates with a broader international literature on digital storytelling for heritage. Kasemsarn and Nickpour (2025) show that youth engagement with cultural heritage on social media depends on integrating storytelling with platform-specific features such as multimedia and community participation, rather than on visual appeal alone. Adewojo (2025) similarly argues that immersive, narrative-driven heritage media reposition audiences from passive observers to co-creators of cultural meaning, while Song (2025) demonstrates that the dissemination of intangible heritage is strengthened when digital content evokes emotional resonance through the stories behind cultural artifacts. Together, these studies support the present recommendation that Malangan mask content should foreground narrative framing and character symbolism to move audiences from peripheral attention toward central-route elaboration.

At the same time, the passive engagement observed among respondents' short-video preference and low sharing reflects well-documented Generation Z media habits. Podara et al. (2021) characterize Generation Z's screen culture as fragmented and attention-scarce, favoring brief, on-demand content, which helps explain why surface-level cues dominated message processing in this study. Situating these dynamics within the wider field, Lam (2025) observes that digital preservation of intangible heritage increasingly treats community participation and accessibility as core design paradigms rather than mere technical archiving (see also Khan et al., 2015). For community-based institutions such as the Asmorobangun padepokan, this reinforces the idea that effective digital preservation depends not only on reaching Generation Z but also on designing content that invites participation and deeper cultural processing.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how Generation Z engages with and processes Malangan mask cultural content on Instagram and TikTok through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The findings show that audiences predominantly process such content via the peripheral route: engagement is driven mainly by audiovisual cues music, visual variation, short-form formats, captions, and hashtags rather than by deep evaluation of cultural meaning, with only a few respondents demonstrating central-route elaboration of the masks' narrative, symbolic, and philosophical significance. Content creativity and cultural narrative emerged as the most influential indicators of engagement, yet they mainly raised surface-level attention; while moral and cultural–religious values such as respect, loyalty, and wisdom—values central to Javanese ethical and spiritual formation—were recognized, their deeper internalization remained limited, confirming a persistent gap between engagement and meaningful cultural transmission. Theoretically, the study extends the ELM by operationalizing content design into five integrated indicators: content creativity, cultural narrative, audience engagement, information accessibility, and media optimization, and its peripheral-dominant pattern converges with recent international research on short-form video and digital heritage communication. In practice, it suggests that institutions such as the Asmorobangun padepokan should pair short, narrative-driven videos with clear captions or voice-over, character-aligned Javanese gending music, and varied visuals to move audiences from attention to understanding.

These conclusions should be read in light of the study's exploratory, pilot character. The small convenience sample ( $n = 22$ ), the use of dummy accounts rather than organic environments, reliance on self-reported perceptions, and several single-item constructs (for which Cronbach's alpha is not meaningful) limit generalizability, so the results are best interpreted as indicative patterns rather than definitive claims about Generation Z. In particular, information accessibility and media optimization were captured using single descriptive items and exploratory content variation rather than fully validated multi-item scales, so the five-indicator model is best regarded as an integrated analytical framework, with full psychometric validation remaining for future research. References to broader agendas such as SDG 8 and SDG 17 were included as contextual motivation and were not empirically tested and should therefore be treated as conceptual relevance rather than findings. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, experimental designs such as A/B testing of content elements to establish causal links, real-time platform analytics, and longitudinal measures of how cultural and religious values are internalized over time—combining experimental, behavioral, and interpretive approaches to develop more effective strategies for transmitting intangible cultural heritage in digital spaces.

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