

# Traditional and Digital Media; Cultural Communication Mix in *Sekaten* Tradition

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**Abstract.** This study aims to describe the mix of cultural communication or inheritance of cultural values through *sekaten* traditional media and digital media. Participants consisted of the Surakarta palace informants and a number of online news portal writers. Data were collected using interview guides and coding sheets. Data validity is achieved through source triangulation techniques, and analysis is carried out with circular interactive techniques. The results obtained indicate that the *sekaten* tradition in the Surakarta palace since it was created in the XV century was intended as a medium of communication between the king and the people in spreading Islamic ideology. *Sekaten* tradition still exists because it contains philosophical, ideological, historical, political and economic values that can always be adapted to social dynamics and the development of the era. But its function as a medium to inherit values is less than the maximum if digital media do not support it. Therefore, the communication mix is needed by utilizing digital media and involving community members in the form of citizen journalism.

**Keywords:** *Cultural inheritance, Traditional media and digital, communication mix, citizen journalism*

## INTRODUCTION

*Sekaten* is one of the traditional ceremonies organized by the Palace to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. The *sekaten* tradition contains a number of teachings, religious and cultural values that are manifested in the form of various symbols that contain meaning [1], [2]. *Sekaten* tradition began in the XV century and was intended as a process of acculturation between religion and culture, namely the spread of Islamic teachings through a cultural approach. Symbols of the Islamic religion at that time, intended to improve religious understanding, especially for members of the community who are still atheists.

The *sekaten* Ceremony is a process of inheriting the noble values of Javanese ancestors [3], [4]. The Surakarta Palace and the community supporting Javanese culture want these noble values to continue to be passed on from one generation to the next because they have proven to be relevant to social dynamics and the progress of the times.

*Sekaten* tradition as a form of culture and local wisdom as other similar traditions in Indonesia currently faces a cultural dilemma, between maintaining local culture and adapting to the penetration of global culture through fun, fashion, food, facilities, and fantasy. Therefore, effective cultural communication is urgently needed to maintain a balance in the social lives of the younger generation and the next generation. On the other hand, the ability of people to collectively overcome global challenges requires an effort to integrate diverse ideas, perspectives, and epistemologies towards changing relevant values and beliefs [5]. Departing from this phenomenon, this research is directed to answer the question: why does the *sekaten* tradition still exist today and how is the mix of cultural communication carried out through the *sekaten* traditional media and the digital media.

Cultural theorists recognize that there is a very close relationship between communication and culture, reciprocal and interactive in which on one side of communication creates and sustains culture, while on the other the communication reflects and expresses culture [6]. Through communication, culture is passed on and modified from one generation to the next. Communication plays an important role in defining cultural experiences [7]. The relationship between communication and culture can also be explained through the concept that: people learn culture through the process of communication, and communication is the main indicator of culture, communication expresses and maintains the survival of a culture, and communication is a source and means of cultural change [6], [7].

In social life, there is always a process of cultural inheritance which can be interpreted as a process of transmitting the inheritance of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or community inherited from past generations, preserved at the present time and transferred to the interests of future generations [8], [9] Cultural

heritage includes tangible culture (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, books, works of art and artefacts), and intangible cultures (such as folklore, traditions, languages, and knowledge), and natural heritage, including landscapes that are culturally significant.

*Sekaten* tradition which is held every year for 7 days in the month of *Rabiulawal* (the third month of the Islamic year) is culturally a form of cultural heritage, and its implementation is a cultural inheritance activity. The existence of tradition is currently marginalized because it is deemed not to meet the demands of the tourism industry standards [10], [11]. Advances in communication and transportation technologies that make mobility and social interaction unlimited by time and distance are also challenges for traditional media. The emergence of various forms of new media [12]-[14] and social media produce interconnectivity between various elements of society at a global level. The new media is largely digital-based, capable of massaging the spread of knowledge massively because it allows users to expose content publicly and can make ties with other users.

## METHOD

This research was conducted in Surakarta Palace, Indonesia, using a qualitative descriptive strategy to produce descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior. Primary data sources are informants from the Surakarta palace and Municipal Culture Office and writers of the online news portal. To collect the data, it applied in-depth interview techniques, participatory observation, and content analysis. In addition, the instruments used were interview guides, observation structures, and coding sheets. The sampling technique is purposive or criterion-based selection, and the source triangulation technique determines the validity of the information. Data analysis is carried out inductively using interactive analysis methods consisting of three main components, namely data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions and verification. The three activities are cycle processes and are interactive in which each activity is not a separate stage but can run together and complement each other.

## RESULT & DISCUSSION

Based on the results of participatory observation, content analysis, and interviews, it was found that the *sekaten* tradition was carried out and demanded by the supporting community, especially the Javanese people because the tradition is seen as a symbol of the identity of the Surakarta Palace as the centre of the Islamic kingdom. In the *sekaten* tradition, there are verbal symbols in the

form of Javanese words and language used to convey messages about the teachings of Islam. In addition, there are also nonverbal symbols that contain cultural meaning. For example, *gunungan* (fruits, vegetables, and cakes arranged in the form of a pyramid) contain philosophical meaning that humans were created by God and will return to God. The procession was held on the 12<sup>th</sup> *Rabiulawal* in the mosque contained ideological meanings to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. *Gamelan* (percussion instruments made of brass) contains historical value as a relic of Sunan Giri in the era of Demak Kingdom. When the Surakarta Palace was still in power, politically the presence of regents in the *sekaten* tradition was used as an indicator of their obedience to the king. *Sekaten* tradition also has an economic meaning because it can generate the economy of the community through the night market, which is opened since a month before the peak of the tradition procession. These values up to now and continue to be accepted by the community supporters.

The practice of cultural communication or the transmission of cultural values contained in the *sekaten* tradition is carried out by holding a procession in the mosque and the Surakarta palace square so that it can be witnessed and followed by the general public. The message content, message formulation, media, and message delivery techniques in the procession are from year to year fixed because the structure and pattern of the procession are also fixed. Many online news portal writers cover and publish the procession but have not been controlled by the Palace or the Surakarta City Culture Office, so that information that is spread in the community is highly dependent on the subjective perspective of the author concerned. Elements in the *sekaten* tradition that are widely preached by digital media include the procession, some of the nonverbal symbols and their meanings, the history or background of the holding of these traditions. Digital media reports on secular traditions incidentally when implementing these traditions in the form of short and incomplete information.

Indonesian society is rich in tradition as an expression and cultural identity, representation of local wisdom and uniqueness of certain community or ethnic groups [10]. Tradition is a hereditary custom of ancestors that is still carried out in society or the assumption that the methods that already exist are the best and the right [15]. *Sekaten* tradition in the Surakarta Palace is carried out in public places and is a means of entertainment for the community but also has a communicative nature, so it is often referred to as traditional media. Traditional media are verbal, visual, or movement forms that are familiar with the community, originated, provided, and accepted by them so that

they function to entertain, proclaim, explain, educate, or socialize [16], [15]. In the process of socialization, culture in the form of beliefs, traditions, lifestyles, languages, rules, values, norms, and habits is shared or exchanged between members of the social system [16], [17]. Traditional media has advantages over modern media because it is familiar with the audience, rich in variety, immediate feedback available, and inexpensive. This media is well-liked by people of various age and is known as a theme carrier. Traditional media has great potential for persuasive and face-to-face communication [16], [18]. It can also be a tool of coercion and social control so that the norms of society are obeyed by their collective members [17].

Culture always colours human life [18], so that cultural inheritance always occurs between generations. Inheritance of cultural values will be more effective if done by utilizing digital media and involving various communities in the form of citizen journalism. Traditional and digital media must coexist and must work together by utilizing the comparative advantages of one another to face various events that are taking place in the global environment [19] including the penetration of foreign cultures into local cultures. Cultural inheritance requires creative and innovative strategies to preserve the values and local wisdom contained in them as a way to strengthen the cultural identity of a community [10]. Traditional media must be able to adapt to technological advances in order to continue to exist and have the potential as a means for public information dissemination [15]. Synergism between traditional and digital media is also needed as an effort to counteract the shift of *sekaten* tradition as a high culture into a profane or popular culture produced by the mass media, presenting hegemony, and removing boundaries so that differences are no longer meaningful [18]-[20].

The communication mix through synergism between traditional and digital media today is inevitable given the development of the internet in the world and in Indonesia which has an impact on the process of disseminating information that is no longer controlled by mainstream media. Non-verbal symbols in the *sekaten* tradition are often not accompanied by an explanation of the meaning and meaning verbally so that it is difficult to understand by audiences with different cultural backgrounds [15]. Digital media or online news portals are needed here. At present, online news portals are very popular sources of information providers [21] and are able to influence public understanding [20] by processing words and images into narratives or information. Digital media offers consumers more control, more choices, and more opportunities for social interaction through control over what they access, how to access, and with whom they share

experiences [22] so that they influence cognitively, affective, and behavioural.

*Sekaten* tradition in the Surakarta Palace still exists today because of the support of the local community, the tradition grows and is rooted in religious ritual practices that are still ongoing so that the tradition becomes an inseparable part of people's daily lives. Although some *sekaten* traditions such as other traditional media have experienced commodification [15] but until now there has been no rejection from the supporting community. The commodification of *sekaten* tradition can be accepted as part of conservation efforts. Therefore, the cultural inheritance will be more effective if done by involving supporting communities or communities familiar with digital media in the form of citizen journalism.

Citizen journalism is a form of dissemination of information or journalistic work in the form of digital files conducted by members of the public or community through online media portals or computer-wide networks, which with permits, can connect with each other and shorten the distance between countries [21]. This journalism has power because it is real-time, interactive, providing target opportunities to provide feedback, including multimedia elements, and providing convenience for makers, publishers, and newsreaders [23].

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the *sekaten* tradition still exists and is in demand by its supporting communities especially the Javanese community because the tradition is a symbol of the identity of the Islamic kingdom that distinguishes it from the previous Hindu kingdom. In addition, in the *sekaten* tradition, there are also various verbal and nonverbal symbols that contain philosophical, ideological, historical, political and economic values that can always be adapted to social dynamics and the development of the era.

The practice of cultural communication or the transmission of cultural values contained in the *sekaten* tradition is still conventional. Message content, message formulation, media and message delivery techniques from year to year are permanent because the structure and pattern of the procession are also fixed. The Palace and the Office of Culture in Surakarta City have not carried out structured, systematic and sustainable media management to support cultural communication. The cultural communication mix has not been maximally managed by the Palace or the Surakarta City Government.

The role of digital media, especially online news portals and social media in reporting about the *sekaten* tradition procession, the symbols contained therein and the meaning as a message to

be conveyed to the wider community has not been maximized. Digital media tells about *sekaten* tradition in a partial incidental and superficial way. Therefore, digital media support is needed to echo the message further so that it is able to reach a wider audience by involving community members.

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