

The Digital Sustainability Paradox in Heritage Communication: A Multimodal Analysis of Seren Taun Kasepuhan Cisungsang 2025

Dewi Sad Tanti¹; Ahmad Mulyana²; Dudi Hartono³

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Communications Science
Mercu Buana University
Jakarta Indonesia

Publication Date: 2026/08/04

Abstract: Digital platforms have transformed heritage documentation into public communication shaped by algorithmic visibility, expanding accessibility while risking the decontextualization of sacred traditions. This study examines this structural tension through a qualitative case study of YouTube documentation of the 2025 Seren Taun Kasepuhan Cisungsang ritual. Using Halliday's social semiotics and Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal visual grammar, the analysis identifies three interconnected documentary mechanisms, i.e., selection, intensification, and aestheticization, that enhance audience engagement while reducing contextual depth. Rather than treating preservation and spectacularization as separate, this study introduces the Digital Sustainability Paradox as a conceptual framework to explain how platform-mediated documentation simultaneously promotes cultural visibility and generates decontextualization risks. The findings integrate multimodal discourse analysis with sustainability perspectives, offering practical guidance for heritage managers, documentarians, and indigenous communities seeking to balance digital reach with cultural integrity.

Keywords: Digital Sustainability Paradox, Heritage Documentation, Multimodal Analysis, Tourism Communication, Indigenous Representation, Spectacularization.

How to Cite: Dewi Sad Tanti; Ahmad Mulyana; Dudi Hartono (2026) The Digital Sustainability Paradox in Heritage Communication. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(7), 2824-2833. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jul1530>

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital platforms has fundamentally transformed the ontology of cultural documentation. Traditional rituals, once documented primarily for archival or community purposes, are now recorded, archived, and disseminated through platforms whose algorithmic logic rewards engagement, spectacle, and aesthetic appeal (van Dijk, 2013; Cameron & Kenderdine, 2007). This shift raises a critical theoretical question: does digital documentation strengthen the resilience of local wisdom by making it visible and accessible, or does it systematically transform sacred practices into consumable spectacles?

The annual Seren Taun ritual of Kasepuhan Cisungsang, an indigenous agrarian ceremony in Banten emphasizing gratitude, harmony, and ecological balance, exemplifies this tension. In 2025, the ritual gained national recognition as a Karisma Event Nusantara (KEN) event, amplifying its visibility. Simultaneously, the community's location within the Bayah Dome Geopark, currently pursuing UNESCO Global Geopark status, positions Seren Taun as both a living

tradition and a strategic asset for sustainable tourism development. These converging factors make the ritual a critical site for examining how digital documentation operates at the intersection of preservation, promotion, and platform-mediated visibility.

This study analyzes digital documentation, defined as the recording, archiving, and dissemination of cultural practices through digital media platforms, rather than merely "content" produced for entertainment or marketing. The term "documentation" foregrounds the preservationist intent inherent in such recordings: these videos are produced, at least ostensibly, to record and transmit cultural knowledge. However, this documentary intent operates within the structural constraints of digital platforms, whose algorithmic mechanics reward engagement metrics, watch time, likes, shares, comments, over substantive cultural explanation (van Dijk, 2013). This tension between documentary intent and platform mechanics constitutes the empirical site for investigating what this study terms the Digital Sustainability Paradox: the structural condition wherein documentation, when mediated by engagement-driven platforms, risks

becoming its opposite, a mechanism of decontextualization rather than preservation.

Existing studies have examined cultural representation in tourism media (Rachmawati et al., 2018; Isti'annah & Puri, 2022; Sukma, 2021; De Bernardi, 2022) and the risks of commodification (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Smith, 2006). Studies have also explored digital storytelling in community-based tourism (Putra & Wibowo, 2024) and communication patterns of content creators (Purnomo et al., 2024). While existing studies have advanced heritage communication scholarship, they generally analyze preservation, representation, and commodification as discrete phenomena. This compartmentalization overlooks the structural contradiction wherein visibility-enhancing documentary practices simultaneously foster decontextualization as a gap that this study addresses through the Digital Sustainability Paradox.

To investigate this paradox, the study addresses the following research question: How are local wisdom symbols constructed and transformed through multimodal digital documentation, and how does this transformation manifest the digital sustainability paradox in heritage communication?

Theorizing the interplay between documentary intention and platform logic, this study argues that preservation and spectacularization arise simultaneously rather than sequentially. Introducing the Digital Sustainability Paradox, it explains how visibility-enhancing documentation inherently risks decontextualization. In doing so, the study contributes theoretically to heritage and multimodal studies while offering practical guidance for sustainable documentation

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Semiotics and Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Halliday (1994) posits that all communication performs three simultaneous functions: ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (enacting social relations), and textual (organizing coherent messages). In digital documentation, these functions operate across multiple semiotic modes. As Halliday (1994, p. xiii) states, language is "a social semiotic system", a resource for making meaning that cannot be separated from its context of use.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) extend this framework to visual communication, proposing that images employ their own "grammar of visual design" through three meaning-making functions: representational (how images depict the world), interactive (how images establish relationships with viewers), and compositional (how elements are arranged to create coherent messages). As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 17) argue, visual language is not transparent and universally understood but is culturally situated. Recent applications have examined how tourism videos construct persuasive cultural narratives through these multimodal resources (Zhang & Xu, 2022; Chen, 2024).

B. Heritage as Performance and the Spectacularization Critique

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) fundamentally challenged heritage discourse by arguing that heritage is not the preservation of something from the past but a new mode of cultural production, heritage as performance, produced for contemporary consumption, particularly tourism. Smith (2006) extended this critique through the concept of Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), arguing that heritage practices privilege expert, institutional, and visually spectacular representations over community knowledge and lived experience.

In the digital era, this performance is intensified. Platform algorithms prioritize content that maximizes watch time, likes, and shares, creating structural pressure toward spectacularization (van Dijck, 2013). Recent research on neo-exoticism in Indonesian online media (Lestari & Firmansyah, 2023) shows how cultural tourism regimes normalize the transformation of ethnic cultures into visually striking but epistemologically shallow spectacles.

Complementing these critiques, Urry and Larsen (2011) developed the concept of the 'tourist gaze' to explain how tourism practices shape the way cultural sites and practices are perceived and consumed. The tourist gaze, they argue, is not a neutral act of seeing but a socially constructed way of looking that transforms cultural practices into spectacles to be experienced rather than lived. In the digital era, this gaze is increasingly mediated by platforms whose visual logics amplify the spectacular dimensions of culture while obscuring its functional and contextual meanings (Urry & Larsen, 2011, pp. 3-5). This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how digital documentation of rituals like Seren Taun positions viewers as observers rather than participants.

C. Digital Sustainability in Heritage Documentation

Drawing on Bramwell and Lane (2011) and Gretzel et al. (2020), digital sustainability in heritage documentation encompasses three interdependent dimensions, i.e., cultural sustainability (the capacity to transmit accurate, contextualized cultural knowledge), social sustainability (the fostering of community participation and equitable representation), and economic sustainability (the generation of equitable economic benefits without instrumentalizing cultural meaning).

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized participatory approaches to heritage documentation as a means of addressing power imbalances in cultural representation. Rahayu and Putri (2024) propose participatory co-creation models wherein community members actively contribute to the production of heritage content, thereby challenging the dominance of external expert narratives. Their framework demonstrates that when communities are positioned as co-authors rather than subjects of documentation, the resulting content more accurately reflects internal cultural meanings and strengthens social sustainability (Rahayu & Putri, 2024, pp. 238-242). This participatory turn responds directly to Smith's (2006) critique

of Authorized Heritage Discourse by redistributing interpretive authority.

Building on these frameworks, this study proposes the concept of Digital Sustainability Paradox to describe the structural tension in platform-mediated heritage documentation: the structural condition wherein documentary practices, when mediated by engagement-driven platforms, systematically generate a tension between documentary intent (preservation, contextual transmission) and platform mechanics (engagement optimization, spectacularization). This paradox extends earlier work on heritage as performance (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) and staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) by incorporating the specific dynamics of digital platforms into the analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Approach and Case Selection

This study employs a qualitative case study approach following Yin (2018). According to Yin (2018, p. 15), a case study is defined as an in-depth investigation of a "contemporary phenomenon" within its "real-world context." Yin (2018, p. 13) further explains that case studies are optimal for researching "how" or "why" questions within a contemporary context over which "the researcher has little or no control." The case study approach is appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena within their real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018, pp. 15-17).

The case is the digital documentation of Seren Taun Kasepuhan Cisungsang 2025 on YouTube. The case was selected because it exemplifies the intersection of indigenous cultural practice, national tourism promotion (KEN event status), and geopark development (UNESCO Global Geopark pursuit), making it strategically relevant for examining the digital sustainability paradox in heritage documentation. As Yin (2018, p. 27) emphasizes, a quality case study design requires clearly defining the case as a "bounded system," which in this study is bounded by: (1) time, the 2025 Seren Taun ritual; (2) place, Kasepuhan Cisungsang, Lebak Regency, Banten; and (3) medium, YouTube documentation.

B. Data Source and Selection Rationale

Four digital documentation units, video recordings of the Seren Taun ritual disseminated via YouTube, were purposively selected. These units are treated as documentary texts that simultaneously serve archival, educational, and promotional functions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 15; Jewitt, 2014, p. 3). The selection followed purposive sampling criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158): (1) variation in producer type enables comparative analysis of how institutional position and documentary intent shape representation (Yin, 2018, p. 93); (2) combined, the videos achieve theoretical saturation, the point at which additional videos would not yield new analytical categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 167); and (3) the videos cover the ritual's temporal arc from pre-ritual to peak ceremony, enabling analysis of documentary selection and omission patterns.

Table 1 Digital Documentation Units and Selection Rationale

Video	Channel/Producer	Primary Focus	Producer Type	Selection Rationale
Video 1	Unknown/Journalistic	Ritual process and food resilience	Independent journalistic	Represents independent documentation with emphasis on material practices
Video 2	Tiara Mandalawangi	Sacred pre-ritual spirituality	Independent documentary	Represents spiritual/documentary framing with preservationist intent
Video 3	Unknown	Comprehensive event documentation	Community-oriented	Represents comprehensive documentation of multiple ritual dimensions
Video 4	Tribun Banten (501k subs)	Educational cultural explanation	Mainstream media	Represents professional journalism documentation with educational framing

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

The four selected videos represent different producer types: Video 1 (independent journalistic documentation emphasizing ritual process and food resilience), Video 2 (independent documentary by Tiara Mandalawangi emphasizing sacred pre-ritual spirituality), Video 3 (community-oriented comprehensive event documentation), and Video 4 (mainstream media coverage by Tribun Banten with educational cultural explanation).

C. Units of Analysis

The analysis focuses on three interconnected units, following the multimodal framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Jewitt (2014): (1) cultural practices documented, ritual activities, ceremonies, and social interactions depicted (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 56-78); (2) gestures documented, nonverbal communication, body movements, and symbolic actions carrying cultural significance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 46-78); and (3) visual narratives constructed, camera techniques, editing choices, composition, color use, and audiovisual elements forming the documentary representation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 175-214).

Table 2 Sustainability Indicators in Documentary Analysis

Sustainability Dimension	Indicators in Documentary Text	Analytical Focus	Reference
Cultural Sustainability	Presence/absence of cultural explanation, contextualization of ritual elements, generational involvement depicted	Does the documentation transmit meaning or merely show spectacle?	Smith, 2006, pp. 3-5
Social Sustainability	Visibility of community participation, collaborative activities, intergenerational interaction	Does the documentation represent community as participants or subjects?	Bramwell & Lane, 2011, p. 414
Economic Sustainability	Tourism promotion cues, commodification indicators, resource distribution cues	Does the documentation position the ritual primarily as tourist attraction?	Gretzel et al., 2020, p. 447

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

These are analyzed through two complementary lenses: a multimodal analytical lens (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) examining representational, interactive, and compositional meanings, and a sustainability analytical lens assessing cultural explanation, community voice visibility, and spectacularization cues. Crucially, the study analyzes representation, what the documentation shows and how, not the sociological impact on the community. Claims about sustainability are confined to representational implications and structural risks for public perception and knowledge transmission, not empirical claims about community practice (Yin, 2018, p. 41).

D. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded through five systematic stages, following established procedures in qualitative and multimodal research (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Jewitt, 2014). Stage 1: Data Reduction, videos were viewed multiple times; scenes relevant to cultural representation were segmented (30-second units), producing approximately 45 minutes of analyzable documentary content (Yin, 2018, p. 169). Stage 2: Open Coding, initial coding identified patterns in cultural practices depicted, gestural elements, visual techniques, and sustainability indicators (87 initial codes) following Creswell and Poth's (2018, pp. 193-195) approach. Stage 3: Axial Coding, codes were organized into analytical categories based on Halliday's (1994) metafunctions and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, with sustainability indicators integrated into each category (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 196-197). Stage 4: Identification of Documentary Mechanisms, across videos, three recurrent mechanisms were identified: selection, intensification, and aestheticization, following Yin's (2018, pp. 195-197) pattern-matching logic. Stage 5: Multimodal Interpretation, the final stage integrated findings to construct an analytical account of

how digital documentation constructs meaning and structurally predisposes spectacularization (Jewitt, 2014, pp. 15-18).

E. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through multiple strategies following Yin (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018): (1) triangulation, data were triangulated through comparison across four documentation units and three theoretical frameworks (Yin, 2018, p. 127); (2) peer debriefing, initial findings were discussed with two colleagues familiar with cultural communication to challenge interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263); (3) thick description, detailed descriptions of videos, coding processes, and interpretations are provided to enable readers to assess the plausibility of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 266); (4) negative case analysis, the research actively sought documentary segments that contradicted emerging patterns to refine interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 264); and (5) theory triangulation, multiple theoretical frameworks were applied, allowing cross-validation of interpretations from different perspectives (Yin, 2018, p. 127).

IV. RESULTS

A. Mechanism 1: Selection, The Construction of Documentary Priorities

Across all documentation units, selection operates as the primary mechanism through which particular dimensions of Seren Taun are foregrounded while others are backgrounded or omitted. This selection is not neutral documentation but constitutive documentary practice that produces distinct, partial versions of the ritual (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 56-78).

Table 3 Patterns of Selection in Digital Documentation

Selected Elements	Foregrounded in	Backgrounded/Omitted	Documentary Implication
Communal feasting	Video 1, 3	Individual spiritual experience	Constructs ritual primarily as social/economic practice
Ritual offerings	Video 2, 4	Economic dimensions of agriculture	Constructs ritual primarily as spiritual practice
Traditional authority	Video 2, 4	Internal community negotiations	Constructs community as hierarchical, not contested

Visual spectacle	All videos	Mundane preparatory labor	Emphasizes visual appeal over comprehensive coverage
Harmony/cohesion	All videos	Conflict or contestation	Constructs community as unified, not dynamic

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

The systematic foregrounding of visually striking, cohesive, and harmonious elements aligns with what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 56) identify as representational meaning, the selective depiction of reality that constructs a particular version of events. In Video 1, the exclusive focus on food distribution constructs Seren Taun as primarily a system of economic resilience, obscuring its spiritual dimensions. In Video 2, the focus on offerings and prayer constructs it as sacred devotion, obscuring its pragmatic agricultural functions. Selection, while necessary for documentary coherence, carries a representational risk, it may form the basis

for shallow audience understanding. This risk is structural, not intentional.

B. Mechanism 2: Intensification,

The Amplification of Spectacle in Documentation
Intensification refers to the amplification of selected elements through cinematic techniques that enhance emotional engagement and visual impact (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 124-146). The analysis identified three intensification strategies operating across documentation units.

Table 4 Intensification Strategies in Digital Documentation

Strategy	Description	Example	Documentary Implication
Visual intensification	Close-ups, slow motion, dramatic angles	Video 2: extreme close-ups of offerings and prayer gestures	Transforms ritual objects into visual focal points, inviting contemplation but also visual consumption
Audio intensification	Music, ambient sound enhancement, voice-over emotion	Video 4: dramatic background music accompanying educational narration	Creates emotional engagement that may overshadow informational content
Narrative intensification	Problem-solution structures, temporal compression	Video 1: scarcity→abundance narrative arc	Constructs emotional journey that prioritizes narrative satisfaction over comprehensive explanation

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

From Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006, pp. 124-125) interactive meaning perspective, intensification establishes a specific relationship between viewer and documented content. The close-ups in Video 2 position the viewer as an intimate observer of sacred practices, a relationship that, while potentially educative, simultaneously transforms sacred objects into visual focal points that invite gaze and appreciation. This is not commodification itself but a structural predisposition toward spectacularization: the documentary techniques that make the ritual "accessible" are the same techniques that detach it from its functional context. Intensification serves both sustainability and spectacularization simultaneously; in Video 2, it effectively transmits cultural knowledge (cultural sustainability), yet it also aligns the documentation with platform logics that reward spectacle, creating a structural tension between documentary intent and platform mechanics (van Dijck, 2013, p. 29).

C. Mechanism 3: Aestheticization , *The Framing of Culture as Spectacle*

Aestheticization refers to the systemic framing of cultural elements as visually striking objects of appreciation rather than meaningful practices with functional significance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 175-214). This operates through compositional aesthetics, balanced framing, color grading, and symmetrical arrangements that treat ritual spaces as visual compositions; temporal aesthetics, edited rhythms and pacing that create viewing pleasure rather than documentary comprehensiveness; and performative aesthetics, emphasis on traditional clothing, decorations, and ceremonial movements as visually striking performances.

A critical analytical distinction emerged from the analysis: aestheticization is not inherently problematic for sustainability. The analysis distinguishes between contextual aestheticization, framing that enhances appreciation while maintaining cultural explanation (partial presence in Video 2, Video 4), and decontextualized aestheticization, framing that treats cultural elements as visual spectacles without substantive explanation (more pronounced in Video 1, Video 3).

Table 5 Aestheticization Patterns and Sustainability Risks

Documentation Unit	Aestheticization Type	Risk Level	Analytical Rationale
Video 2	Contextual	Moderate	Extensive spiritual explanation accompanies visual spectacle, but visual emphasis may still overshadow substantive content
Video 4	Contextual	Low-Moderate	Educational framing provides context, but expert voice may override community interpretive authority (Smith, 2006)
Video 1	Decontextualized	Higher	Visual focus on food with minimal cultural explanation; documentary prioritizes emotional narrative over cultural transmission
Video 3	Decontextualized	Moderate	Comprehensive but observational; lacks interpretive framing that would transmit cultural meaning beyond visual depiction

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

Decontextualized aestheticization aligns with what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, p. 149) describes as heritage as performance, culture produced for appreciation rather than participation. The emphasis on visual coherence and beauty constructs what Smith (2006, p. 11) calls authorized heritage discourse, a version of culture that appeals to external audiences but backgrounds complexity, contestation, and functional meaning.

D. The Absence of Community Interpretive Voice

A significant finding across all documentation units is the absence of community-generated interpretive narration. None of the videos explicitly present Kasepuhan Cisungsang community members as interpreters of their own rituals in the documentary narrative. Video 4 uses professional journalists and voice-over narrators; Video 2 uses an external documentary voice; and Videos 1 and 3 use implicit observational narration without explicit interpretation.

This does not imply that communities lack agency in documentation production (a claim the data cannot support). Rather, it indicates that the documentary text does not foreground community interpretive authority. This structurally aligns with what Smith (2006, p. 11) identifies as authorized heritage discourse, which privileges external expertise. The absence of community voice in the documentary text is a representational phenomenon, not an empirical claim about community engagement in production processes. When cultural explanation in documentation comes from external narrators, the risk of decontextualization increases, not because external narrators are inherently less accurate, but because they may not possess the contextual knowledge required for comprehensive cultural transmission (Smith, 2006, p. 29).

Table 6: Summary of Documentary Mechanisms and Sustainability Implications

Mechanism	Definition	Structural Tendency	Sustainability Implication
Selection	Foregrounding certain elements, backgrounding others	Produces partial, fragmented representations	May limit comprehensive cultural understanding if selection systematically favors spectacle
Intensification	Amplification through cinematic techniques	Creates emotional engagement and visual appeal	Serves visibility but may overshadow substantive explanation
Aestheticization	Framing cultural elements as visual objects	Transforms practices into spectacles	Contextual aestheticization can educate; decontextualized aestheticization risks commodification (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998)

Source: Authors' compilation based on documentary analysis (2025)

V. DISCUSSION

A. Theorizing the Digital Sustainability Paradox in Heritage Documentation

The findings demonstrate that Seren Taun's digital documentation is not a neutral transmission of cultural meaning but a constitutive documentary practice shaped by selection, intensification, and aestheticization. The simultaneity of visibility and spectacularization is not

accidental but structural, rooted in the logic of platform-mediated documentation (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 26-29).

The Digital Sustainability Paradox can now be formally defined: the structural condition wherein documentary practices (recording, archiving, disseminating cultural heritage), when mediated by engagement-driven platforms, systematically generate a tension between documentary intent (preservation, contextual transmission) and platform mechanics (engagement optimization, spectacularization).

This is not a deterministic causal relationship but a structural predisposition, the techniques required for documentation to be viewable and distributable are the same techniques that dispose documentation toward decontextualization.

The paradox lies in the tension between intent and mechanism. The idealist intent of digital documentation, cultural preservation, knowledge transmission, community empowerment, enters into structural contradiction with the practical mechanics of platform-mediated communication (van Dijck, 2013, p. 32). Documentarians do not necessarily intend to spectacularize; they intend to share and educate. However, the techniques required for sharing (selection, intensification, aestheticization) are the same techniques that generate spectacularization risk. This is a paradox of unintended structural consequence.

B. Explaining the Paradox Through Halliday's Metafunctions

Halliday's (1994) metafunctions illuminate how the paradox operates in documentary practice. At the ideational level (Halliday, 1994, p. 106), the selective representation of particular ritual dimensions while backgrounding others constructs partial, fragmented meanings. This fragmentation is a necessary condition for documentary coherence but generates the risk of representational impoverishment, audiences receiving a reduced version of cultural complexity. In documentation terms, the ideational metafunction operates through selection: what is documented becomes what is known.

At the interpersonal level (Halliday, 1994, p. 68), the relationship established between documentation and viewer positions the audience as observer or consumer rather than participant. Even Video 2's reverential framing positions viewers as respectful observers, not participants in meaning-making. This observer position is foundational to the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 3), which treats culture as a spectacle to be experienced rather than a practice to be lived. In documentation terms, the interpersonal metafunction operates through aestheticization: how viewers are positioned shapes what they experience.

At the textual level (Halliday, 1994, p. 33), the organization of documented elements into coherent, visually pleasing, emotionally engaging narratives aligns with platform algorithms that reward engagement. This creates a feedback loop: engagement-driven documentary narratives become templates for future documentation, normalizing decontextualized aestheticization as the standard mode of cultural documentation. In documentation terms, the textual metafunction operates through intensification: how documentation is organized shapes its documentary impact.

C. Visual Grammar and the Construction of Documentary Spectacle

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar explains how aestheticization operates as a constitutive mechanism in documentation. In terms of representational meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 45-78), the depiction of Seren Taun through visual vectors (gazes, gestures, movement) constructs particular documentary

narratives. In Video 2, the vector of traditional leaders' gaze toward offerings establishes a relational process that positions viewers as witnessing sacred action. This witnessing, while valid documentary practice, structurally transforms participants into visual subjects available for appreciation.

In terms of interactive meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 114-124), the use of close-ups, direct gaze, and intimate framing establishes an imagined relationship between viewer and documented ritual. This intimacy can educate but also creates an "on-display" quality that aligns with spectacularization. The interactive meaning of documentation positions viewers in specific relationships with cultural content.

In terms of compositional meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, pp. 175-214), the arrangement of documented elements into aesthetically balanced compositions treats ritual spaces as visual canvases. Color grading, symmetry, and rhythmic editing produce viewing pleasure that, while enhancing engagement, can overshadow substantive understanding. Compositional meaning in documentation prioritizes visual coherence over documentary comprehensiveness.

The analytical distinction between contextual and decontextualized aestheticization, identified in the findings, warrants deeper theoretical elaboration. While previous critiques of heritage commodification (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) often treat aestheticization monolithically as a degrading force, this study reveals that aestheticization operates on a spectrum. Contextual aestheticization, as observed in Video 2, pairs visual spectacle with substantial spiritual exegesis, thereby mitigating the risk of epistemological reduction. Conversely, decontextualized aestheticization, predominant in Videos 1 and 3, severs the visual signifier from its functional ritual meaning, leaving audiences with appreciation without comprehension. This spectrum suggests that the paradox's severity is not uniform; it is mediated by the documentarian's intentionality to embed explanation within visual framing. Thus, visual appeal does not inevitably lead to spectacularization if documentary producers consciously construct multimodal texts where compositional aesthetics are accompanied by explanatory metafunctions (Halliday, 1994).

D. Implications for Geopark Development and Sustainable Tourism

The findings have direct implications for the Bayah Dome Geopark's UNESCO Global Geopark pursuit. UNESCO criteria emphasize authentic cultural representation and community participation. The digital sustainability paradox suggests several strategic considerations. First, the aestheticized documentation that attracts tourists may not align with UNESCO's authenticity criteria if it decontextualizes cultural meaning (Smith, 2006, pp. 29-31). Geopark managers should distinguish between promotional documentation (which may be more aestheticized) and educational documentation (which should emphasize contextual explanation).

Second, increased visibility is generally positive, but the mechanisms that generate visibility (intensification, aestheticization) must be balanced with mechanisms that ensure cultural explanation (Bramwell & Lane, 2011, p. 414). Without such balance, increased visibility may produce shallow rather than substantive cultural engagement. Third, the absence of explicit community interpretative voice in the documentation suggests that participatory documentation models, where communities actively narrate their own cultural practices, are not yet structurally embedded in digital documentation for this context. Fourth, documentation that emphasizes aesthetic appeal may generate greater economic benefits (tourism promotion) but risks undermining cultural sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2020, p. 447).

E. Toward Mitigating the Paradox: A Prescriptive Framework.

Building upon the preceding implications, the findings suggest a prescriptive framework for navigating the digital sustainability paradox rather than resolving it entirely. First, documentary practices should adopt a 'context-first' editing protocol, wherein every visually intensified segment (e.g., close-ups, slow motion) is paired with explicit verbal or textual contextualization of its functional and symbolic role, thereby fulfilling Halliday's ideational function beyond mere representation (Halliday, 1994, p. 106). Second, participatory co-creation models (Rahayu & Putri, 2024) should be structurally embedded, ensuring that community representatives actively co-author the documentary narrative, directly countering the AHD tendency identified in this case. Third, documentarians and heritage managers must consciously resist the algorithmic imperative for pure engagement metrics by evaluating success not solely on views or watch time, but on indicators of cultural comprehension, such as audience knowledge retention or community satisfaction with the representation. These strategies do not eliminate the paradox (as it is structurally inherent), but they provide concrete procedural mechanisms to navigate its inherent tension, particularly for communities like Kasepuhan Cisungang navigating the dual pressures of global recognition and cultural integrity.

F. Distinguishing Representational Risk from Sociological Impact

A critical epistemological clarification is warranted: this study analyzes documentary representations, not sociological impacts. The claim is not that these documentary units have eroded community practice, diminished cultural knowledge among younger generations, or caused cultural loss. Such claims would require ethnographic and longitudinal data this study does not possess (Yin, 2018, p. 41).

The claims are confined to: (1) representational pattern analysis, how cultural meaning is constructed in digital documentation; (2) structural risk identification, how the mechanisms of digital documentation dispose toward certain documentary outcomes; and (3) platform logic analysis, how platform mechanics generate structural predispositions in documentary practice (van Dijck, 2013, pp. 26-29). This distinction is crucial for academic rigor. The "risk" or "potential" of spectacularization is established through textual

analysis; the actualization of that risk requires further research. This positions the study as generating testable hypotheses about digital sustainability rather than asserting empirical conclusions about cultural decline.

However, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that the paradox carries a dialectical, rather than purely negative, character. For marginalized indigenous communities such as Kasepuhan Cisungang, heightened digital visibility itself constitutes a form of political recognition and cultural revitalization, particularly when vying for UNESCO Geopark status. The aesthetic appeal that attracts tourists and global attention can paradoxically strengthen community pride and provide economic resources for intergenerational transmission (Gretzel et al., 2020). Thus, the Digital Sustainability Paradox is not inherently destructive; it is a productive tension where risk and opportunity are co-present. This study does not advocate for ascetic, unappealing documentation, nor does it romanticize a pre-digital authenticity. Rather, it calls for critically reflexive practices that consciously manage this tension, leveraging visibility for community benefit while actively mitigating the epistemic erosion that unreflective aestheticization can produce.

G. The Structural Silence of Community Interpretive Voice

Beyond the three documentary mechanisms, the systematic absence of community-generated interpretive narration constitutes a distinct structural feature of the paradox. While Section E addresses representational risk broadly, the absence of community voice specifically reinforces Smith's (2006) Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD), where external experts and journalists occupy the position of cultural translators. This structural arrangement is not merely a matter of representational incompleteness; it actively predisposes documentation toward decontextualization. When community members do not narrate their own practices, the documentation structurally privileges external framings, such as tourism potential or aesthetic appreciation, over internal meanings, including cosmological significance or intergenerational knowledge (Smith, 2006, p. 29). Consequently, the platform logic that favors professional, polished narration (van Dijck, 2013) compounds this epistemic inequality. Addressing the paradox, therefore, requires not only balancing spectacle with explanation but fundamentally redistributing documentary authorship to include community voices as primary interpretive agents.

H. Comparison with Previous Research

The findings both reinforce and extend previous research. The identification of selection, intensification, and aestheticization as documentary mechanisms aligns with findings in studies of tourism promotion videos (Rachmawati et al., 2018; Isti'anah & Puri, 2022; Sukma, 2021). The aestheticization pattern, treating cultural elements as visual objects, echoes De Bernardi's (2022) finding that digital media tends to represent indigenous communities stereotypically as exotic and ancient.

This study extends previous research by integrating sustainability analysis into multimodal interpretation,

showing not just how representation works but what it means for sustainability; by distinguishing contextual from decontextualized aestheticization, a distinction absent in previous studies that tend to treat aestheticization monolithically; and by theorizing the paradox of documentation, showing that the same techniques that serve visibility simultaneously generate spectacularization risk.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Seren Taun's digital documentation is not a neutral recording but a communicative practice shaped by selection, intensification, and aestheticization. While these mechanisms amplify heritage visibility, they concurrently reduce contextual richness, structurally encouraging the transformation of rituals into spectacles under platform logics. Building on this, the study introduces the Digital Sustainability Paradox, explaining how visibility-enhancing practices simultaneously generate decontextualization risks. Preservation and spectacularization, therefore, emerge as interconnected dynamics rather than separate outcomes.

The study contributes by bridging multimodal representation with digital sustainability, integrating Halliday and Kress's frameworks with sustainability perspectives, and distinguishing representational risk from sociological impact to ensure rigorous textual interpretation. Practically, it advocates for documentation that balances visual appeal with contextual explanation and strengthens community interpretive agency, as a critical consideration for UNESCO Geopark initiatives.

The analysis is limited to four videos of a single event, focusing on representational patterns rather than audience reception or long-term impacts. The paradox, thus, represents a conceptual model of structural tendencies, not empirical evidence of cultural change. Future research should examine audience interpretations, participatory models, and cross-platform visibility.

Ultimately, digital documentation is a communicative practice shaping how heritage is interpreted and valued. The central challenge is not whether to digitally document, but how to expand visibility without diluting the contextual meanings that sustain heritage's enduring significance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors express sincere gratitude to the Research Center of Universitas Mercu Buana Jakarta for institutional support. The insights and feedback from colleagues and reviewers have significantly strengthened the quality of this article. The authors also acknowledge the Kasepuhan Cisungsang community for their ongoing preservation of cultural heritage. Any remaining limitations are the sole responsibility of the authors.

REFERENCES

- [1]. B. Bramwell and B. Lane, "Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 4-5, pp. 411-421, 2011.
- [2]. F. Cameron and S. Kenderdine, Eds., *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage: A Critical Discourse*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.
- [3]. Y. Chen, "Multimodal strategies in digital tourism videos: Enhancing audience engagement and cultural authenticity," *Tourism Management*, vol. 95, pp. 104-118, 2024.
- [4]. J. W. Creswell and C. N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- [5]. C. De Bernardi, "Sámi tourism in marketing material: A multimodal discourse analysis," *Acta Borelia*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 1-25, 2022.
- [6]. E. Giaccardi, Ed., *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- [7]. U. Gretzel, M. Sigala, Z. Xiang, and C. Koo, "Smart tourism: Foundations and developments," *Electronic Markets*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 443-457, 2020.
- [8]. M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2nd ed. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.
- [9]. A. Isti'annah and A. D. Puri, "Nature in Indonesian tourism: A multimodal discourse analysis," *Widyaparwa*, vol. 50, no. 1, pp. 45-60, 2022.
- [10]. C. Jewitt, Ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2014.
- [11]. B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- [12]. G. Kress and T. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2006.
- [13]. D. Lestari and A. Firmansyah, "Neo-exoticism discourses in Indonesian online media: Normalization of cultural tourism regimes," *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 89-104, 2023.
- [14]. D. MacCannell, "Staged authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 3, pp. 589-603, 1973.
- [15]. A. Purnomo, T. Suryani, and S. Rahayu, "Communication patterns of content creators in local wisdom-based tourism development: Supporting tourism sustainability," *Jurnal Komunikasi*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 145-162, 2024.
- [16]. D. Putra and A. Wibowo, "Digital storytelling for sustainable cultural heritage: Technology-driven museum innovation," *Heritage Science*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 1-15, 2024.
- [17]. J. I. Rachmawati, Warto, and T. S. Pitana, "Presenting local wisdom: A multimodal analysis of the Sedekah Gunung Merapi video as a tourism promotion in Boyolali Regency," *Jurnal Komunikasi Indonesia*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 33-48, 2018.

- [18]. S. Rahayu and D. Putri, "Balancing cultural authenticity and digital reach in heritage communication: Participatory content governance," *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 234-251, 2024.
- [19]. R. Saputra and T. Handayani, "Digital competence and sustainability practices in post-smart tourism villages: A mediating effect analysis," *Tourism Management*, vol. 97, pp. 104-119, 2025.
- [20]. B. Setyawan and A. Nugroho, "Communication ecology of Pampang Cultural Village: Digital media as tools for heritage outreach and preservation," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 78-95, 2025.
- [21]. L. Smith, *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- [22]. B. P. Sukma, "Constructing and promoting national identity through tourism: A multimodal discourse analysis of Indonesian official tourism websites," *Linguistik Indonesia*, vol. 39, no. 2, pp. 145-162, 2021.
- [23]. UNESCO, *Culture in the Post-COVID-19 World: Digital Transformation and Cultural Sustainability*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2020.
- [24]. J. Urry and J. Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: SAGE Publications, 2011.
- [25]. J. van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- [26]. R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.
- [27]. Y. Zhang and H. Xu, "YouTube and cultural representation: Multimodal analysis of tourism promotion videos," *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 789-804, 2022.