



Digital cultural transmission: TikTok as a medium for the preservation and learning of Riau Malay Dance in informal communities



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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has reshaped the ways in which culture is transmitted, including Riau Malay Dance, which is currently facing a decline in interest among younger generations and the dominance of popular culture. At the same time, social media platforms such as TikTok have developed into informal learning spaces that are closely integrated with the everyday lives of adolescents. This study emerges from the gap between, on the one hand, the threat of fading interest in Riau Malay Dance and, on the other hand, the limited number of studies that specifically examine TikTok as a medium for the preservation and learning of traditional dance in informal community settings. This research employs a qualitative method with a digital ethnography approach through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of TikTok content related to Riau Malay Dance. The findings indicate that TikTok functions as a participatory learning space that facilitates processes of observation, imitation, and movement modeling, fosters intergenerational learning communities, and archives dance in digital format through tutorial content, performances, and creative reinterpretations. However, several challenges arise, including the commodification of culture, superficial cultural understanding, gaps in digital literacy, and algorithmic bias toward popular content. Scientifically, this study offers a renewed understanding of digital cultural transmission and underscores the importance of digital cultural literacy strategies and content standards to balance media innovation with the authenticity of Riau Malay Dance in the global era.



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1. Introduction

Riau Province possesses a diverse range of culture, traditions, and arts [1]. The Malay community of Riau has a rich and varied cultural heritage, with artistic works that reflect values, beliefs, and local wisdom [2]. Sources of artistic inspiration for the Malay people derive from multiple elements, including Islam, nature, customs, and traditions [3]. The artistic expressions of the Riau Malay people are a reflection of the culture, identity, and values embraced by the local community. Historically, Riau Malay culture has been strongly influenced by Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago, such as the Riau-Lingga Malay Kingdom, as well as Indian, Arab, and European cultures introduced through maritime trade. Ideas and information within Riau Malay art often depict religious life, customary practices, and the human relationship with nature [4]. One of the most prominent forms of Riau Malay artistic expression is dance. Dance can convey the dancer's emotions, thoughts, and creativity through various methods such as bodily movements, facial expressions, and gestures. As a natural form of expressive art, dance is inherently linked to music, which enhances the overall effect of stage performance [5]. Riau

Malay dance has evolved for centuries and constitutes an integral part of the social and cultural life of the community. The influence of ancient Malay kingdoms has been instrumental in its development [6]. Malay dance is not merely a form of entertainment, but also a means of strengthening cultural and social identity within the Malay community [7]. In Riau, dances are highly diverse, encompassing traditional, creative, and contemporary forms [8]. Riau Malay dances are frequently performed at weddings, customary ceremonies, cultural festivals, and official governmental events [9]. Both the government and local communities collaborate to preserve Malay dances through formal and non-formal education. Dance studios and cultural centers play a vital role in educating the younger generation about Malay dance and the cultural values embedded within it. Nevertheless, globalization and modernization pose challenges to the sustainability of these traditions. The influence of foreign cultures and shifting lifestyles threatens the continuity of traditional performing arts [10]. Today, Riau Malay dance faces complex social dynamics driven by generational changes and the accelerating forces of digitalization.

Riau Malay dance reflects the identity, values, and philosophical worldviews of the Riau Malay community and constitutes an important component of the region's cultural heritage. Beyond its function as entertainment, Riau Malay dance serves as an educational medium, a means of conveying moral messages, and a key element in various traditional ceremonies, such as welcoming distinguished guests or celebrating communal rituals. The dance is characterized by graceful and fluid movements, supported by specific rhythmic patterns such as *lenggang*, *inang*, *joget*, and *zapin* [11]. Rich in cultural values and philosophical meanings, Riau Malay dance represents a broader form of cultural expression that continues to shape and affirm the cultural identity of the Riau Malay community. Cultural expression refers to a range of traditional creations, whether produced collectively or individually within a community, that reflect its social and cultural identity and adhere to standards and values passed down across generations. As society continues to modernize, traditional cultural expressions face the risk of gradually disappearing due to limited public awareness of their significance as intellectual assets and the lack of proper recording or documentation [12]. Riau Malay dance is a form of cultural expression that embodies moral, religious, and social values transmitted across generations. It functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium for character education and the articulation of Malay cultural identity. However, amid the forces of modernization and globalization, interest among younger generations in traditional arts has declined, influenced by shifting lifestyles and the dominance of digital popular culture. Cultural education media plays a crucial role in preserving and disseminating local cultural values, especially in today's digital era. Serving as a strategic vehicle, it introduces, educates, and mobilizes public participation particularly among younger generations, in protecting and sustaining cultural heritage. The use of digital technologies such as mobile applications, interactive videos, and educational games makes cultural learning more engaging, contextually relevant, and widely accessible [13]. Digital technology not only broadens access to cultural education but also introduces a new pedagogical paradigm, positioning social media as an effective informal learning space and platform for cultural socialization.

The digital era has introduced pedagogical paradigms that place greater emphasis on learners. With widespread internet access and the pervasive use of smartphones and other devices, social media platforms have become unique tools for learning, teaching, and socialization. Digitalization has enabled the dissemination of knowledge within informal 'beyond the classroom' spaces [14]. Previous studies have examined social media as a learning platform and found that it enhances metacognition, collaboration, and access to relevant skills [15], [16]. These findings indicate that social media functions not only as a communication tool but also holds significant potential as an effective informal learning environment. Informal education plays a key role in preserving culture and traditions [17]. The role of artists and cultural practitioners in informal education is highly significant. Through various cultural activities they lead, these individuals function as active educational agents who transmit fundamental cultural values to the community, particularly to younger generations. This educational process does not occur through formal methods such as those used in schools; rather, it takes place through direct, experiential practices within the community. In this

context, young people are encouraged to participate, learn, and experience firsthand the meanings embedded in each artistic tradition that is performed. At the same time, the development of digital technology has created new opportunities for the transmission and learning of culture within non-formal and informal settings. TikTok, with its engaging short-video format, has become a popular platform for sharing creative content, including traditional dance. TikTok holds strong potential as a participatory medium for cultural learning, enabling users to observe, imitate, and collaborate in the process of learning traditional dances. This opens new possibilities for digital-based cultural preservation that align with the learning characteristics of younger generations as digital natives.

TikTok provides opportunities for individuals to create, share, and circulate videos globally. Its widespread adoption indicates its growing acceptance in Indonesia, becoming a trend across diverse segments of society. The platform's rapid user growth and broad influence offer unique opportunities for creative expression in cultural forms [18]. TikTok presents new avenues for introducing, learning, and preserving traditional dances. Its short-video format allows fast, interactive, and accessible cultural dissemination. For youth TikTok's dominant user base, the platform fosters internalization of cultural values through interaction with traditional dance content, albeit within informal learning contexts. This phenomenon highlights the substantial potential of TikTok as a culturally adaptive learning platform. Although several studies have explored the role of social media in education and cultural preservation, research specifically investigating TikTok as a medium for learning and preserving Riau Malay Dance remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on entertainment or cultural promotion, without examining in depth how digital practices can function as informal learning spaces and mechanisms for digital cultural transmission. Based on this background, the present study analyzes TikTok as a medium for the preservation and learning of Riau Malay Dance within informal communities. The study aims to understand how digital content facilitates cultural learning processes, strengthens youth engagement, and sustains traditional values within the digital ecosystem. Accordingly, this research contributes to the advancement of digital cultural transmission studies and social media-based pedagogy, offering new perspectives for the preservation of traditional arts in an increasingly globalized era.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative method with a digital ethnography approach. Digital ethnography can also be conducted through the internet or virtual spaces, referring to the aim of understanding life in online environments and evaluating online activities over time. Identifying behavioral patterns, examining forms of digital life, and understanding social relations must be carried out continuously, while maintaining direct engagement with social groups over a relatively extended period, an essential feature of ethnographic research [19]. In conducting digital ethnography, one technique involves documenting personal stories or monologues shared by informants during open-ended interviews. When participants narrate their experiences in detail, researchers may incorporate them into the study in narrative form. These personal accounts become primary data that offer rich insights and allow researchers to experience aspects of the participants' perspectives [20]. In the data collection process, the researcher conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. During participant observation, the researcher examined interactions on TikTok, including comments, video formats, musical choices, and cultural expressions embedded in content related to Riau Malay dance. In-depth interviews were carried out via chat, video calls, or face-to-face meetings with cultural experts, dance practitioners, content creators, and young users to understand their motivations, strategies, and experiences in using TikTok as a medium for cultural learning. Finally, digital documentation was conducted by collecting TikTok videos, screenshots, and comment transcripts for further analysis. Through this digital ethnographic approach, the study aligns with its primary aim: to investigate how TikTok is utilized as a medium for learning Riau Malay dance in informal settings and how cultural practices are integrated within the digital environment.

As a digital ethnographer, the researcher assumed dual roles as a participant observer and reflective participant. The researcher not only observed interactions on TikTok but also

engaged minimally by following creator accounts, interacting through comments, and observing audience responses to Riau Malay dance content. Reflexivity was carried out by composing reflective notes containing experiences, interpretations, personal assumptions, and shifts in the researcher's positionality throughout the digital fieldwork. Participant and account selection were conducted using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) cultural relevance, accounts posting content related to Riau Malay dance (e.g., #TariMelayuRiau, #TariMelayu, #TariZapin, #TariPersembahan, #RentakBulian); (2) active engagement, creators or communities consistently producing educational content, tutorials, or traditional dance performances; (3) diversity of roles, involving dance instructors, artists, cultural experts, content creators, and young TikTok users; and (4) community interactivity, accounts with high levels of comments and participation, indicating active learning and cultural transmission. Through these stages, the study processed data systematically and reflectively to interpret how TikTok functions as a space of digital cultural transmission for the preservation and pedagogical engagement of Riau Malay dance. The analysis was conducted cyclically, participatorily, and with a focus on cultural meaning, ensuring that each finding emerged from a deep understanding of social, visual, and narrative interactions within the digital environment.

3. Results and Discussion

In today's global era, issues of culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, and lifestyle are becoming more significant than the economic conflicts that characterized the industrial age [21]. Riau Province possesses a wide range of cultural traditions that merit preservation [22]. Cultural heritage, as both tangible products of past traditions and intangible spiritual achievements, embodies values from the past that constitute a fundamental element of the identity of a community or nation [23]. Art forms represent the core of national culture and serve as important instruments for fostering artistic literacy and cultural identity [24]. The arts and traditions not only safeguard cultural wealth but also function as media for reinforcing social, historical, and communal recognition of local diversity. Cultural values originate from local traditions across the Indonesian archipelago, including folklore, legends, mother tongues, oral histories, creativity (dance, songs, theatrical performances), adaptability, and the uniqueness of local communities [25]. However, low levels of digital literacy among local communities, combined with the overshadowing of local cultural content by global media, increasingly diminish the visibility and relevance of Malay cultural expressions [26].

Riau Malay dance is not merely a form of performative art or entertainment but also a reflection of values, history, indigenous wisdom, and cultural identity that bind the Riau Malay community and are transmitted across generations [11]. The integration of cultural elements should especially be enhanced through the inclusion of symbolic and narrative depth, ensuring that dance is represented not merely as a series of movements but as a living tradition embedded with meaningful context. This process requires iterative feedback from cultural experts and community members to ensure accuracy and cultural respect [27]. Addressing these challenges requires cultural preservation strategies that go beyond maintaining the physical forms of artistic expression, focusing also on strengthening the symbolic and narrative meanings embedded within them. Such an approach reinforces cultural understanding while ensuring the continuity of traditional artistic practices through the active participation of both communities and cultural experts.

3.1 TikTok as a Medium for Learning Riau Malay Dance

The rapid advancement of modern technology and the deepening effects of globalization have created an urgent need for the preservation and promotion of arts education [28]. With a continuously growing number of users, TikTok provides a space for Indonesian culture to be recognized and appreciated by younger generations as well as by the global community [29]. The use of TikTok has now become a popular culture phenomenon, accessible to people from diverse backgrounds [30]. As a social media platform, TikTok plays an important role in fostering creativity and initiative in the learning process [31]. Alongside its increasing popularity as a creative medium among the public, TikTok has also opened up new opportunities for cultural education and the preservation of traditional dance. This is particularly relevant in the context of Riau Malay dance.

Broadly speaking, Riau Malay dance encompasses various forms, such as *Tari Persembahan*, *Zapin Meskom*, *Zapin Siak*, *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas*, *Zapin Api*, *Zapin Bagan*, *Joget Sonde*, *Tari Inai*, *Tari Olang-olang*, *Rentak Bulian*, *Tari Cegak*, and others. Considering the richness of this tradition, TikTok can serve as an effective bridge to introduce and educate younger generations about Riau Malay dance [11]. One prominent example is *the Persembahan* dance, which is performed at various events, including welcoming ceremonies for distinguished guests such as state officials, ministers, and other dignitaries. Today, it is also frequently presented at weddings as part of the reception of the bride and groom [32]. The dance is intended as a gesture of honor and sincere gratitude toward esteemed guests. In this performance, dancers carry a *tepak sirih* complete with its traditional accessories, symbolizing the openness and hospitality of the Riau Malay people toward their honored guests. In interviews, Nanda Kurniawan (32), a content creator and the owner of Sanggar Bertuah Pekanbaru, explained:

“My motivation for using TikTok is not merely for entertainment, but also as a means of cultural preservation by presenting the uniqueness of traditional dance in creative ways and introducing Tari Persembahan as one of the Riau Malay dances to a broader audience through more engaging content. TikTok has become an effective medium for informal learning, especially for young people who wish to study Riau Malay dance. The videos I upload, using hashtags such as #taripersembahan, #tarimelayu, #taripersembahanmelayu, and #melayutiktok, showcase a full performance of Tari Persembahan from beginning to end, combined with its traditional musical accompaniment, in order to make it easier for TikTok users to follow the dance.”

In the comments section, it was observed that the TikTok user “enay” (15-5-2025) requested permission to use a clip of the *Tari Persembahan* video for educational purposes. Another user, “neyney” (3-1-2024), asked whether Sanggar Bertuah offered dance classes to learn *Tari Persembahan*. These examples illustrate that TikTok facilitates a visually based learning process that is highly engaging for younger generations. TikTok not only serves as a medium for promoting Riau Malay culture but also helps to overcome spatial and temporal limitations in dance education, making the learning process more flexible, personalized, and interactive. Thus, TikTok can be understood as a significant medium of informal learning for the preservation of Riau Malay Dance, as it expands audience reach while also providing more adaptable and individualized opportunities for learning. The close relationship between digital content and local cultural realities becomes evident when *Tari Persembahan* is not only present virtually but also remains practiced within social life, Fig. 1.

The adoption of technological innovations such as TikTok in society can be explained through Everett Rogers’ *Diffusion of Innovations* theory. Rogers describes how innovations (ideas, practices, technologies) diffuse within a social system through various channels of communication over time. He identifies five stages of adoption: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation, and categorizes adopters into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards [33]. This framework helps explain how TikTok’s role in traditional dance education can spread and be accepted by society. The use of TikTok as a medium for dance learning reflects the process of innovation diffusion within the Riau Malay cultural arts community. In this context, content creators act as innovators, utilizing TikTok to produce videos of Riau Malay Dance. Early adopters are represented by content creators or dance instructors who begin integrating TikTok as a teaching aid for *Tari Persembahan*. The early majority includes young people and cultural communities who actively engage with TikTok videos for learning. The late majority and laggards consist of groups that continue to rely primarily on conventional forms of dance instruction. This process demonstrates that TikTok functions as an effective channel of cultural communication for introducing Riau Malay Dance to wider audiences. Consequently, TikTok facilitates the dissemination of cultural knowledge through mechanisms of content sharing and visual trends.

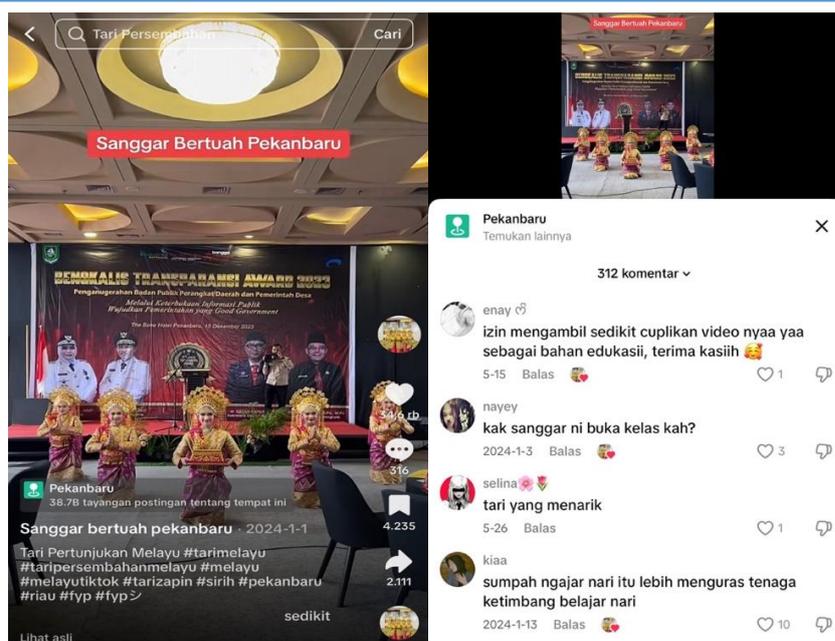


Fig. 1. Video of *Tari Persembahan* and comments on the TikTok account *Sanggar Bertuah Pekanbaru*.

3.2 The Role of Informal Environments in the Learning Process

Unlike formal education, which is structured within institutional curricula, informal education is flexible, participatory, and contextual, making it more adaptive to the dynamics of digital generations [34]. Informal environments play a central role in mediating the learning of Riau Malay Dance through the TikTok platform. The role of informal environments in the learning process demonstrates that digital spaces such as TikTok provide wide opportunities for communities to learn outside the formal education system. In contrast to the structured nature of formal education, learning through TikTok is flexible and non-hierarchical. The findings show that communities utilizing TikTok not only expand learning spaces but also reinforce models of learning based on observation and imitation, as emphasized in Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (1977), Bandura [35]. This theory highlights that learning occurs not only through direct reinforcement but also through watching and imitating others, particularly those who serve as social models within their environment [36]. Observation occurs when users watch and analyze Riau Malay dance videos on TikTok, learning movements through the visual display and practicing them independently. Imitation takes place when learners replicate the movements demonstrated by content creators or performers in the videos. Modeling is carried out by creators or dancers who serve as cultural and social models, providing examples of gestures, music, and costumes. This process demonstrates that TikTok is not merely an entertainment platform but also a visual-based learning medium aligned with the characteristics of digital natives. It further illustrates TikTok's role as an extension of the traditional classroom, enabling learners to engage in practice-based learning without the constraints of time and space.

Moreover, the social interactions enabled by comments, duet features, and live sessions foster collaborative learning communities. Content creators, learners, and audiences together form networks that enrich the learning process, shifting cultural transmission from a top-down (teacher-student) model to a more horizontal exchange among community members. Thus, informal environments function as alternative learning spaces that allow younger generations to interpret Riau Malay Dance in more personal and interactive ways. This role is particularly significant given the limitations of formal learning spaces, which often fail to accommodate the needs of digital generations. At the same time, digital literacy has become a crucial skill in today's era for ensuring social, economic, and educational inclusion. Digital literacy is closely related to the concept of *new media theory*. Lievrouw and Livingstone emphasize that *new media theory* is not only concerned with technology but also with the social interactions

mediated by it. In the context of digital literacy, new media theory helps explain how individuals adapt to changes in media and technology [37]. Digital literacy involves the ability to access, analyze, and produce media content within complex digital environments. New media literacy emphasizes critical skills in interpreting interactive content such as social media, videos, and other digital platforms. The findings of this study indicate that TikTok, consistent with Lievrouw and Livingstone's New Media Theory, functions as an interactive space that blurs the boundaries between formal and informal learning. Its integration of audiovisual content, personalized algorithms, and social interaction creates a dynamic and engaging learning environment for digital natives. However, its effectiveness depends greatly on users' levels of digital literacy; content creators must present dance movements in an educational manner, while users must critically interpret the content to avoid misinterpretation or the simplification of cultural meanings. The incorporation of learning within TikTok's informal environment also fosters a cross-generational cultural learning ecosystem, where senior instructors, content creators, and young learners interact within a shared digital space that strengthens cultural understanding and intergenerational collaboration.

3.3 Forms of Cultural Expression and Preservation Challenges

TikTok has become a cultural space that illustrates the dialectic between tradition and modernity through processes of negotiation, adaptation, and reinterpretation of local cultural values within digital formats. In the context of Riau Malay dance, this dialectic is evident in the way cultural practitioners and younger generations blend traditional elements such as movement, costume, music, and philosophical values with modern features like visual styles, video editing, popular music, and digital interactivity. This process is not a form of opposition but a creative dialogue that allows the tradition to remain alive, relevant, and continually evolving. Thus, the digital sphere serves as a 'new stage' where Malay cultural identity is negotiated, sustained, and reinterpreted by contemporary generations. Content related to Riau Malay Dance circulating on the platform can be categorized into three main forms: tutorial videos, digital performances, and new creations resulting from cultural remix. First, tutorial videos function as educational media that visually present dance movements, sometimes accompanied by narratives explaining the philosophical meaning of the gestures. Second, digital performances showcase dance in a virtual stage format, complete with traditional costumes, Malay music, and choreography in accordance with established conventions. Third, new creations represent a more fluid form of expression, in which younger generations combine traditional movements with global trends, visual filters, or popular music. Nevertheless, these forms of expression face several challenges in the context of cultural preservation. First, cultural commodification poses a threat when Riau Malay Dance is positioned more as viral entertainment content rather than as a medium for transmitting cultural values. Second, variation in content quality is evident: some creators demonstrate an understanding of choreographic conventions and symbolic meanings, while others present simplified versions that risk reducing cultural authenticity. Third, digital literacy gaps hinder the participation of teachers and traditional communities who are not yet fully familiar with social media [38]. Fourth, platform algorithms tend to prioritize sensational, short, and easily consumable content, thereby diminishing the visibility of educational videos rich in cultural meaning.

From the perspective of Cultural Preservation Theory, cultural preservation requires a balance between digital innovation and the authenticity of tradition [39]. TikTok creators present Riau Malay dance by preserving traditional elements, such as costumes, music, and movement patterns, while integrating modern digital features such as visual editing and popular hashtags. This practice demonstrates that cultural preservation does not entail freezing the past, but rather adapting cultural values to remain relevant in the present. The digital community also helps sustain the symbolic and moral values of Malay culture, even within an algorithmic environment that prioritizes quick entertainment. Although TikTok has the potential to expand the audience for Riau Malay dance globally, the sustainability of cultural preservation in digital spaces depends on collaboration among artists, educators, and communities to maintain a balance between digital creativity and cultural authenticity. Other Riau Malay Dances are *Rentak Bulian* and *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas*. *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* is a

distinctive Zapin dance from Pelalawan Regency, Riau Province, known since 1811–1945 in Pelalawan Village. Zapin itself places greater emphasis on coordinated movements of the feet and hands. The accompanying music is performed with a single *gambus* and four *marwas* drums, each played by one musician [40]. *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* holds deep cultural significance as it functions not only as a form of entertainment but also as a medium for value education, identity preservation, and the strengthening of social cohesion within the Riau Malay community, Fig. 2. The dance reflects the Malay philosophical worldview grounded in Islamic values, refinement, and communal harmony through the coordinated movements of the feet and hands with the rhythms of the *gambus* and *marwas*. Educationally, *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* serves as a vehicle for transmitting moral and cultural values through practice, observation, and imitation within informal community settings. Socially, it provides a collective space that reinforces solidarity and a shared sense of cultural belonging. When adapted to digital platforms such as TikTok, *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* continues to symbolize cultural continuity, enabling younger generations to learn and appreciate the tradition in more contextual ways without compromising its authenticity.

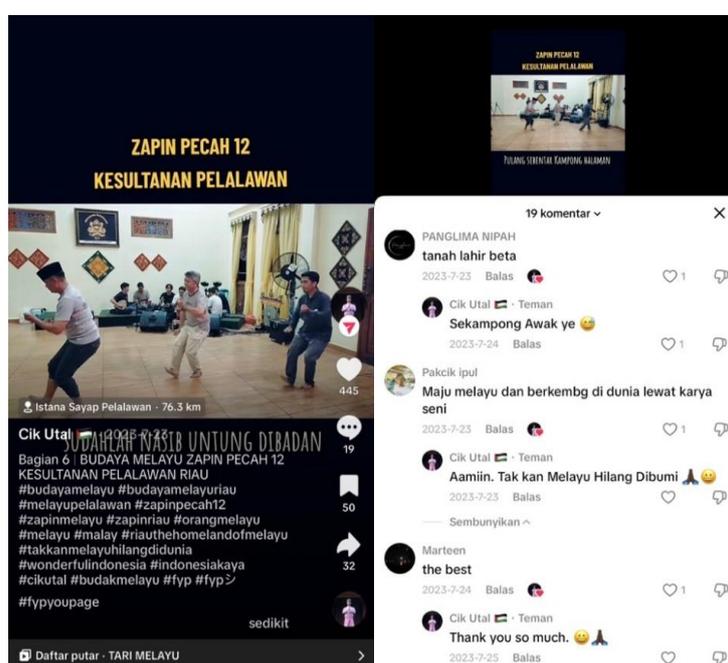


Fig. 2. Video of *Tari Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* and comments on the TikTok account *Cik Utal*.

The TikTok account *Cik Utal* is one of the channels that actively shares content related to Riau culture, Malay arts, and Riau Malay dance. The video and comments on the *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas* content represent cultural expressions conveyed by the creator through performances of this dance, accompanied by its traditional music. The hashtags used include #budayamelayu, #budayamelayuriau, #melayupelalawan, #zapinpecah12, #zapinmelayu, #zapinriau, #orangmelayu, #melayu, #malay, #riauthehomelandofmelayu, #takkanmelayuhilangdidunia, #wonderfullindonesia, #indonesiakaya, #cikutal, #budakmelayu, and #fyp, all of which emphasize culture, traditional dance, and the origins of *Zapin Pecah Dua Belas*. In the comments section, one user, “PAKCIK IPUL” (23-7-2023), stated, “Advance Malay culture and let it flourish worldwide through art.” This was replied to by the creator, *Cik Utal*, with “Aamiin. Malay will never disappear from the earth.” Such exchanges provide evidence that TikTok facilitates cultural expression and serves as an effective platform for the preservation of Riau Malay Dance. Another example of Riau Malay Dance is *Rentak Bulian*. The term derives from two words: *Rentak*, meaning step or stomp, and *Bulean*, which in the Indragiri Hulu dialect refers to a dwelling place of supernatural beings or spirits. In the context of the dance, *Bulian* is associated with ritual invocation, serving as a medium of communication between humans and spiritual entities. As one of Riau’s traditional dances, *Rentak Bulian* embodies profound philosophical and historical values. Since it is a traditional

dance, *Rentak Bulian* should be understood, preserved, and protected by the community [13]. The screenshot of the video and comments on the *Rentak Bulian* dance content below represent a form of cultural expression conveyed by the creator through their TikTok account, showcasing the *Rentak Bulian* dance complete with its accompanying music, costumes, and supporting properties, Fig. 3. The hashtags used, #traditional, #culture, #tarianrentakbulian, and #indragirihulu, indicate the cultural context, the traditional nature of the dance, and its geographic origin in Indragiri Hulu.



Fig. 3. Video of *Tari Rentak Bulian* and comments on the TikTok account *Bukan Pejabat @bangeriksyandra*.

Comments highlight its cultural relevance: for instance, TikTok user “ARI WELL” (15-6-2023) remarked, “Rentak Bulian performed by Talang Mamak Tribe in Indragiri Hulu, Riau Province those from Indragiri Hulu would surely know it.” Another user, “LIBRA” (19-6-2023), recalled, “Yuhuuuu, back in 1989 we were the dancers, and it was even made into a film with foreigners amazing in its time.” These responses demonstrate that TikTok facilitates cultural expression and the preservation of Riau Malay Dance, confirming its value as a medium of cultural continuity. The study identified several challenges articulated by participants, including the commodification of culture, in which creators produce dance content primarily for the sake of virality, thereby diminishing the philosophical values embedded in the dance. Limited cultural understanding among some creators who prioritize trends and popular culture reduces the visibility of traditional dance on TikTok. Cultural superficiality is evident when users merely imitate movements without comprehending their meanings or cultural contexts. Another challenge is the dominance of popular culture, as TikTok’s algorithm favors trending content, causing traditional dance videos to struggle to gain visibility. These issues create a dilemma between cultural exposure and the authenticity of traditional values, underscoring the need for strategic, culturally informed digital literacy initiatives.

On the other hand, digital technology also offers significant opportunities for documenting and disseminating cultural heritage more broadly. Cultural preservation theory emphasizes the importance of protecting both tangible (objects, structures) and intangible (traditions, arts, rituals) cultural heritage in the face of modernization and globalization. Digitalization and technological tools can be employed for documenting and disseminating cultural practices [41]. TikTok functions as a medium for digital documentation and a promotional tool for Riau Malay dance. Cultural communities utilize the platform to record, store, and circulate content related to Riau Malay dance, making cultural archives more accessible to future generations. The presence of TikTok also attracts younger audiences who may have previously lacked interest in traditional dance, as the short-video format aligns with their learning preferences. However,

without deeper cultural understanding, there is a risk of reducing cultural values in pursuit of viral popularity. Therefore, culturally informed digital literacy strategies are essential to ensure that TikTok functions not merely as a platform for entertainment but also as an authentic and sustainable medium for cultural preservation, as summarized in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Research Findings

Aspect	Research Findings	Challenges	Implications
Role of TikTok	TikTok functions as an effective, participatory, and collaborative informal learning medium based on observation, imitation, and modeling. It also serves as a platform for cultural promotion and digital documentation.	Meaning reduction and inconsistent content quality.	The need for content production strategies that are educational, authentic, and culturally accurate.
Informal Environment	The digital environment of TikTok creates a flexible, non-hierarchical, and contextual informal learning space that expands learning opportunities beyond formal schooling.	Differences in learning habits across generations within traditional cultural communities.	The development of community-based learning designs grounded in practice and peer feedback.
Cultural Expression	Forms of cultural expression on TikTok appear in three categories: tutorials (educational), digital performances (traditional/pakem), and new creative works (cultural remix).	TikTok's algorithm prioritizes short, sensational content over culturally educational material.	Strengthening hashtag curation, creator-teacher collaboration, and culturally sensitive algorithms.
Social Impact	TikTok increases the interest and cultural awareness of younger generations toward Riau Malay Dance, expands cultural promotion globally, and fosters collaborative cultural networks.	Variations in content quality and superficial cultural understanding among some creators and users.	The need for minimal standards for traditional dance content (music, movement, costume, narrative).
Cultural Preservation	TikTok serves a dual role as a digital archive of dance documentation and as a culturally accessible promotional medium across generations.	The dominance of popular culture and modern trends may marginalize traditional dance in digital public spaces.	Culturally grounded digital literacy strategies are needed to maintain authenticity and sustainability.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that TikTok functions as an informal, participatory, and collaborative space for cultural learning. The mechanisms of observation, imitation, and modeling, as described in Social Learning Theory, are evident through TikTok's interactive features such as duets, comments, and live sessions. The process of Diffusion of Innovation also appears through distinct adopter categories: creators and dance instructors as innovators, cultural communities as the early majority, and the wider public as the late majority. These patterns indicate how the adoption of digital innovation shapes the visibility and continuity of Riau Malay Dance in the public sphere. The application of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in this context shows that the dissemination of cultural innovation is not only technological but also social and cultural. The adoption of digital media depends on digital-cultural literacy, the authenticity of representation, and platform algorithm dynamics. In alignment with Cultural Preservation Theory (Otero-Pailos, 2024), the findings emphasize the importance of balancing digital innovation with traditional authenticity. TikTok functions not merely as an entertainment medium but also as a space of cultural negotiation where Malay identity and values are recontextualized through creative digital practices. This research contributes to the development of digital ethnography and social-media-based cultural pedagogy by proposing the conceptual model of Digital Cultural Transmission. This model synthesizes Social Learning Theory, Diffusion of Innovation, and Cultural Preservation Theory to explain how cultural practices transform within the digital ecosystem without losing their symbolic meaning. Practically, the study offers insights for educators, artists, and policymakers in designing culturally sustainable, digitally literate strategies for cultural learning. The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which is restricted to several TikTok accounts and specific regions in Riau, and therefore does not fully represent the broader digital cultural ecosystem of Malay

communities in Indonesia. Future research is recommended to incorporate digital network analysis and comparative studies across regions or platforms to gain a more comprehensive understanding of cultural interaction patterns, creator adaptation, and the dynamics of cultural preservation in digital spaces. Thus, this study provides an academic contribution to the development of social-media-based cultural learning frameworks and enriches scholarship on digital cultural transmission, where technological innovation is no longer viewed as a threat to tradition but as a new medium for sustaining local cultural heritage.

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