

From Oral Traditional to Digital: The Role of Technology in Preserving Javanese Cultural Heritage

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Abstract - The transition to the digital age presents challenges and opportunities for cultural heritage preservation. This research analyzes the role of technology in preserving Javanese cultural heritage through an in-depth study of the video of the song “Saleho” popularized by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala on the YouTube platform. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected from visual observation, lyric analysis, and field notes, focusing on the coding and interpretation of visual and textual meanings, through videos uploaded on the two singers’ official YouTube channels. The analysis used semiotic theory, to identify the denotative and connotative meanings of Javanese cultural values contained in the songs and visualizations presented. The results show that Denny Caknan and Abah Lala have successfully utilized digital platforms to introduce the song “Saleho” to a wider audience, including the younger generation. The use of traditional Javanese costumes and lyrics that are rich in meaning are effective strategies in popularizing the song. However, this study also found modern adaptations in the song’s presentation aimed at attracting listeners, indicating the potential influence of cultural representations on young audience perceptions and cross-cultural adaptation. Implications include the development of a digital cultural heritage preservation methodology and policy recommendations for the creative industries. Digital technology, especially the YouTube platform, has an important role in the preservation of Javanese songs. Through the case analysis of the song “Saleho”, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how traditional music can be adapted into a digital format without losing its cultural essence.

Keywords: Oral Tradition, Digital platform, Cultural preservation

I INTRODUCTION

Digital platforms have revolutionized cultural preservation, transforming oral traditions into globally accessible digital heritage (Ratmono, 2023). The preservation of Javanese cultural heritage, which is rich in oral traditions, faces challenges in the era of globalization (Oktaviasary, 2024). However, digital technology offers innovative solutions to preserve and disseminate this heritage (Pang et al., 2025). The preservation of local cultural heritage, including traditional languages and arts

(Ratih et al., 2024) (Ariska, 2023), is increasingly important amid the dominance of globalization (Adam Hafidz Al Fajar, 2023) (Turmuzi et al., 2022). The song “Saleho” by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala is an example of how digital platforms, such as YouTube, Spotify and TikTok (Refky Dermawan et al., 2024), can sustain the Javanese language and reach a global audience (Adela & Al- Akmam, 2024) (Rubino et al., 2024). This study is important to understand the adaptation of local cultures in the era of globalization, especially given the risk of

extinction of languages such as Javanese.

Previous research has highlighted digitization as a cultural preservation tool (Vivin & Wijayanti, 2023), focusing on formal documentation such as digital archives and museum recordings (Harisanty et al., 2024). However, the role of tradition-based popular songs such as “*Saleho*” as a medium for Javanese language preservation has not been explored. The work of Denny Caknan and Abah Lala, by combining modern and traditional elements, offers a unique opportunity to enrich cultural preservation approaches in the digital era (Khoiroh, 2023).

This research aims to answer: What is the role of digital platforms, through the song “*Saleho*”, in the preservation of Javanese cultural heritage, particularly the Javanese language? This research also explores how the adaptation of local culture to digital platforms can strengthen cultural identity in the face of globalization. The issue raised is the effectiveness of traditional art-based digital content as an instrument of Javanese language preservation. This research will analyze the public acceptance of traditional elements in the song “*Saleho*”, how the meaning and cultural values contained in the Javanese oral tradition are transformed when mediated by digital platforms. And what social and cultural impacts the vitality of the song “*Saleho*” has on society, especially the Javanese language community.

This study argues that digital platforms, through works such as the song “*Saleho*”, have great potential to preserve traditional cultures

and languages. This is supported by research that shows the increased visibility of minority cultures through creative and adaptive approaches, as well as the integration of traditional elements with modern technology. This research is expected to prove that collaboration between tradition and technology can maintain cultural relevance and expand its reach in a global context.

II. METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. It is the most appropriate method to study digital cultural preservation through the song “*Saleho*” because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the complex symbols and meanings of Javanese culture, which cannot be achieved by quantitative methods. Through in-depth observation, lyric text analysis and virtual field notes, the researcher was able to capture the nuances and relevant cultural context and explore subjective interpretations of cultural representations in the digital age. Semiotic theory enables the interpretation of connotative and denotative meanings, while rich social, cultural and historical contexts can be considered to provide a comprehensive understanding. As such, the descriptive qualitative approach provides a strong framework for understanding the complexities of digital cultural preservation through the song “*Saleho*” and provides valuable insights for the reader.

Table 1. Research Method of Oral Tradition to Digital Platform

Aspect Analysis	Key Findings	Relevance to Javanese Culture
Song Lyrics	Contains moral values and socializing teachings	Reflection of Javanese values
Attributes/ Costumes	Traditional clothing, anoman, tiger, traditional makeup and drums	A symbol of identity and cultural heritage.
Digital Platform	YouTube as a dissemination tool	Modernization of cultural preservation

The videos to be analyzed will be studied in depth with a focus on costume details, such as materials, colors, and motifs that indicate elements of Javanese culture. This analysis aims to reveal the cultural symbols implied in the visual display. By applying semiotic theory, each costume element will be considered a sign that carries connotative and denotative meanings (Saleh et al., 2023). Connotative meaning refers

to a broader and symbolic meaning (Hismanto & Sunarya, 2022), while denotative meaning refers to the literal meaning of the sign (Rahmawati et al., 2024). This analysis will also reveal the messages conveyed, both explicitly and implicitly.

The content analysis technique, where the researcher is the key instrument after reading carefully, purposefully, and thoroughly in

collecting data (Ngangga Saputra et al., 2023), is used to organize data, reduce irrelevant information (Sentana et al., 2024), and interpret findings within the framework of the theory of cultural preservation and technology (Ma'rufi & Ardi, 2021). Thus, content analysis will allow us to uncover the latent meanings contained in the data, as well as the contribution of artworks to the dynamics of cultural preservation in the digital era.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research discusses the oral tradition to digital platforms in preserving Javanese language culture through a song "Saleho" performed by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala. The research discussion is based on three sub-chapters, namely oral tradition to digital platforms, cultural preservation and the role of technology in oral tradition and cultural preservation.

a. Oral Tradition to Digital Platform

Oral tradition refers to traditions that are passed down from one generation to another by oral media through "mouth to ear" (Sibarani, 2015) (Abidah et al., 2022). Endangered Javanese oral traditions have been protected through digital platforms, which not only store content but also allow for the updating of narratives according to the context of the times without losing their essence. Many studies have found this role, for example in a study by Hudhriah et al. (2024) applications such as Duolingo are now adding Javanese as one of the

learning materials. There are also other platforms, such as YouTube and Google Arts & Culture, which store a collection of Javanese videos and folktales in various languages (Laksmita et al., 2023).

Javanese folk songs and stories, such as Ande-Ande Lumut or Timun Mas, are adapted into modern formats such as animations, short films, or podcasts in Indonesian and English (Annisa et al., 2022). This accessibility protects traditions from extinction, while allowing oral tradition narratives to be adapted to global needs without losing the essence of local culture (Rai et al., 2024). This repackaging allows oral traditions to reach modern audiences without losing the core of the story or its values, such as honesty, virtue and harmony (Del Soldato & Massari, 2024).

By understanding oral tradition as a global phenomenon (Rai et al., 2024), we can better appreciate its role in specific cultural contexts, such as the Javanese tradition, where music, lyrics and symbolic expressions are integral in preserving and spreading cultural values (Sari & Haryanti, 2024). A current example is the song Saleho performed by Denny Caknan and Abah lala, a Javanese music that is very popular among everyone. Which is interpreted through semiotic theory. This theory helps analyze how symbols in the Javanese oral tradition (for example, in song lyrics or rituals) are translated or re-represented in digital media without losing their cultural meaning.

Table 2. Analysis Result of Saleho Denny Caknan and Abah Lala's Song

Signifiant	Denotative Meanings	Connotative Meanings	Semiotic Function	Links to Javanese Culture
<i>Saleho</i>	Words to say to someone	The object of affection, then becomes a symbol of betraya	Main marke, object of conversation	An expression of annoyance in Javanese, for people who are unclear
<i>Pamit</i>	Say goodbye	Farewell	Harmful actions, broken promises	Javanese culture upholds good manners, saying goodbye is considered important
<i>Dolan karo konco</i>	Play with friends	Cheating, acts of faithfulness	Promise keeping, irresponsible actions	The concept of "dolan" is associated with activities that are less productive or not in accordance with norms

Table 3. Analysis Result of Saleho Denny Caknan and Abah Lala's Song

Signifiant	Denotative Meanings	Connotative Meanings	Semiotic Function	Links to Javanese Culture
<i>ra nyongko ra ngiro</i>	Action thought you had the heart	Deep disappointment, betrayal	Emotional expression of disappointment	The value of honesty and loyalty is highly valued in Javanese culture.
<i>Jebul kowe tego</i>				
<i>Tinggal ake tresno milih</i>	Leaving love, choosing someone else	Betrayal, indifference	Actions that hurt the day, selfishness	The concept of love and loyalty is very central in Javanese culture
<i>Milih karo wong liyo</i>				
<i>Tu tu ra mutu sri</i>	You're talking out of your ass sri	Insulting, degrading	Expressions of anger, attempts to harm	An expression that is harsh, showing emotion.
<i>Awakmu kuwi</i>				

Table 4. Analysis Result of Saleho Denny Caknan and Abah Lala's Song

Signifiant	Denotative Meanings	Connotative Meanings	Semiotic Function	Links to Javanese Culture
<i>Tego-tego menyakiti kau</i>	How could you hurt and betray me?	Vices, indifference	Assessment of one's behavior	The concept of "tego" is very negative in Javanese culture, describing someone who is cruel and heartless.
<i>Kau menghianati</i>				
<i>Opo aku kurang sekti, Po khodamku kurang Ngeri</i>	Am I lacking time, is the khodamk not terrible?	Self-doubt, making excuses	Expressions of self-confidence, attempts at justification	Belief in the power of the supernatural is quite strong in Javanese culture.

Table 5. Analysis Result of Saleho Denny Caknan and Abah Lala's Song

Signifiant	Denotative Meanings	Connotative Meanings	Semiotic Function	Links to Javanese Culture
<i>Bakal tak goleki seng</i>	I'll look for what makes my heart hurt	Revenge, to avenge	Negative emotions, urge for revenge	The concept of revenge is not recommended in Javanese culture
<i>Gawe loro ng ati</i>				
<i>Kowe minggat ra Pamitan</i>	You left without saying goodbye	Irresponsible, Irresponsible, disrespectful	Promises, indifference	Highly respectful of manners and respectful of farewells
<i>Tego tenan we balek</i>	How could you go back to your ex	Indecisiveness, inability to forget the past	Weak nature cannot make decisions	In Javanese culture, loyalty to one's spouse is very important
<i>Neng mantanmu</i>				

Table 6. Analysis Result of Saleho Denny Caknan and Abah Lala's Song

Signifiant	Denotative Meanings	Connotative Meanings	Semiotic Function	Links to Javanese Culture
<i>Iso-isone kowe lungo</i>	How could you leave?	Indifference, not valuing the relationship	Selfish hurtful actions	The concept of harmonious relationships is highly valued in Javanese culture.
<i>Ninggalke loro sang ora</i>	Leaving a wound that you can't quite put your finger on	Pain, deep disappointment	Expression of emotion, expression of suffering	The concept of "loro" (sickness) is deeply personalized in Javanese culture.
<i>Kiro-kiro</i>				

Overall, the lyrics of "Saleho" can be interpreted as a narrative about personal experiences wrapped in poetic and emotional language. As in the lyrics "Hoo hoo saleho" repeatedly shows that the poet emphasizes

disappointment and annoyance at the betrayed lover and gives a curse called "Saleho" or can be interpreted as an insolent person. Not only that, the lyrics "Tu tu ra mutu Sri awakmu" also clearly express the deep resentment of the lies of

a sri who does not fulfill her promise. There are many more expressions that show deep disappointment such as “*Ninggalke loro seng ora kiro-kiro*”, “*Ra nyongko ngiro jebul kowe tego*”.

The song “*saleho*” also reflects the social and cultural changes that occurred during its time, “*Dolan karo konco*” the lyrics are an example of social and cultural changes, in Javanese culture dolan is considered a negative thing and not in accordance with the norms. Inappropriate for someone who is already in a serious relationship and already has an attachment. In addition, the emphasis on the lyrics “*Tinggal ake tresno milih karo wong liyo*” is very contrary to Javanese culture, the concept of love and loyalty is very central in Javanese culture. It is not just a feeling, but a complex noble value that is reflected in various aspects of life, from literature, art, to traditional rituals.

The belief in the power of the sun is quite strong in Javanese culture, for this reason there are lyrics that point to this “*Opo aku kurang sekti, po khodamku kurang ngeri*” expressing the poet’s anxiety about the lack of spiritual strength both in himself and in the khodam who became his companion. Hence, the lover’s hesitation to become her life companion and choose someone else. However, there is also an action that is not recommended in Javanese culture regarding revenge expressed in the lyrics “*Bakal tak goleki seng gawe loro neng ati*”, because it is not in accordance with the Javanese concept of “*Hening Ngraketake Ati*”, which means that peace of mind is considered the key to achieving happiness. Revenge will actually make the heart unsettled and cause suffering.

The song “*Saleho*”, performed by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala, explicitly and implicitly reflects the social values embraced in Javanese society, such as loyalty, honesty, courtesy, and respect for relationships. Through its lyrics, the song underlines the importance of these values in social life (Ridwan & Lutpiyana, 2023). The song “*Saleho*” also reflects social and cultural changes over time. Although rooted in the Javanese cultural context, the emotions expressed in this song, such as disappointment, anger and sadness, are universal. This suggests that the emotional experiences associated with betrayal and lost love are common to humans across cultures.

b. Culture Preservation

The importance of the role of youth in preserving local culture (Adela & Al- Akmam, 2024). Information technology can be used to promote Indonesian culture to the international world (Ratmono, 2023), so preserving culture does not mean rejecting modernization. However, various platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and other social media have provided space for young creators to produce and spread content such as Javanese more widely (Subekti & Sjuchro, 2024). The younger generation seeks connection with their cultural roots (Uddin & Muhid, 2021). Javanese language has become a symbol of identity (Sarasati, 2021) and nostalgia, so Javanese creative content is a way to express themselves and feel a sense of attachment to ancestral heritage. With support from various parties, Javanese creative content can continue to grow and contribute to enriching Indonesia’s cultural treasures.



Figure 1. Costumes and accessories used by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala when performing the song “Saleho”

The use of social media to promote Javanese song performances in displaying the beauty of costumes and attributes can expand reach and attract audiences from various circles (Kanty et al., 2024). Costumes and attributes used in social media are very effective (Valenciana & Pudjibudojo, 2022) in displaying unique and colorful visual beauty (Valenciana & Pudjibudojo, 2022). High-quality photos and videos can attract attention and make people want to see the performance live (Rahardjo & Sarjono, 2022). Several videos of Javanese song performances have gone viral on social media, attracting millions of viewers from various countries.

The results of analyzing the details of costumes and attributes in the music video “*Saleho*” can provide a richer understanding of efforts to preserve Javanese culture. Costumes and attributes not only serve as attractive visual

elements (El Jurdì et al., 2022), but also as symbols that carry deep meanings related to cultural identity (Ana Amalia Muzni & Isna Rafianti, 2024) and the history of a society. It is evident that the costumes and attributes used by DC Produktion Denny Caknan and Abah Lala when performing the song “*Saleho*” attracted the attention of the public.



Figure 2. Costumes and Attributes in the form of “*Probo and Irah-irah*”

The use of Probo (crown) and irah-irah (headdress) is usually decorated with bird feathers or metal ornaments that symbolize spiritual power and high social standing. Probo and irah-irah also serve to distinguish one character from another in Wayang Wong performances. Denny Caknan and Abah Lala in their performance of the song “*Saleho*” can be interpreted as an attempt to promote Javanese culture. They want to show that Javanese culture is rich, beautiful and relevant to modern times. The use of “*Probo and Irah-irah*” can also be part of their branding as artists who uphold traditional values.

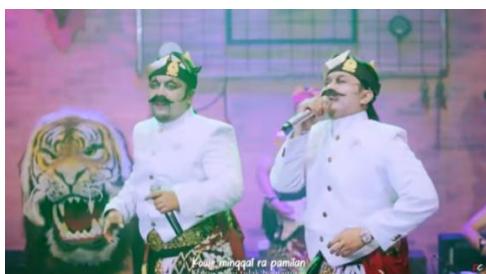


Figure 3. *Pegon* theme's Kostrum and Atirbut

The use of *pegon* costumes with a predominance of white color and striking facial makeup on Denny Caknan and Abah Lala in the song “*Saleho*” carries a number of symbolic and aesthetic meanings that are interesting to discuss. In the context of the song “*Saleho*”, the white color of the *pegon* costume may reflect the feelings of heartache and loss experienced by the singer. However, on the other hand, the white color can also be interpreted as hope to

start a new chapter after going through difficult times. Through their costumes, Denny Caknan and Abah Lala succeeded in creating visuals that made an impression on the audience’s minds and strengthened the message conveyed in the song.



Figure 4. Costumes and Attributes used by the Dancers

In the song “*Saleho*”, the use of traditional drummers’ costumes and attributes strengthens the Javanese feel of the song. This is also a form of respect for traditional Javanese music and an effort to preserve it. The costumes and attributes of the drummers in Denny Caknan and Abah Lala’s video song are not just clothes, but also symbols of cultural identity, noble values and the long history of Javanese music. By using traditional costumes and attributes, they managed to create an authentic and captivating atmosphere for the listeners.

Kendang, a traditional Javanese musical instrument, has a very central role in the song “*Saleho*”. In addition to serving as a rhythmic accompaniment, it also carries a number of deep symbolic meanings. The deep sound of the drums helps to reinforce the feelings of sadness and disappointment contained in the song’s lyrics. By using drums, the song “*Saleho*” successfully bridges the old and young generations, and introduces traditional music to a wider audience.



Figure 5. Costumes and Attributes of *Singa Barong/Tiger*

Singa Barong/Tiger is universally associated with strength, courage and bravery. In the context of the song “*Saleho*”, this symbol

can be interpreted as a representation of the emotional strength felt by the poet, especially when facing betrayal. In the context of this song, *Singo Barong*/Tiger is a protection. The symbolic meaning of protection is self-protection from inner wounds caused by betrayal. The use of the tiger symbol shows the strong roots of Javanese culture, considering that *Singo Barong* / Tiger has an important place in Javanese mythology and beliefs.

As evidenced in the video clip uploaded on DC Production's YouTube channel, observing the gestures and expressions of Denny Caknan and Abah Lala during the scene with *Singo Barong* / Tiger, there is harmony between the symbol (*Singo Barong* / Tiger) and the emotions displayed. The use of the *Singo Barong*/Tiger symbol in the video clip of the song "Saleho" shows that visual symbols have a very important role in conveying messages and meanings in a work of art. The *Singo Barong*/Tiger symbol not only enriches the meaning of the lyrics, but also creates a deeper aesthetic experience for the audience.



Figure 6. Anoman Costume and Attributes

Anoman is known as a figure who is very loyal to his lord, Sri Rama in the Ramayana story. In the song "Saleho", the symbol of *Anoman* is interpreted as a representation of hope for lost loyalty. He is also known as a very strong and brave figure. In the context of the song "Saleho", which tells the story of betrayal, the *Anoman* symbol can be interpreted as the inner strength needed to deal with the hurt and sadness of t. Because, the *Anoman* symbol creates a dramatic and epic atmosphere, in accordance with the song's emotional theme.

Anoman's figure placed in the video clip, it can be observed that *Anoman* appears at certain moments related to strong emotions. The use of *Anoman* symbols in the video clip of the song "Saleho" shows that mythological symbols have a very important role in conveying messages and meanings in a work of art. The *Anoman* symbol not only enriches the meaning

of the lyrics, but also creates a deeper aesthetic experience for the audience.

c. The Role of Technology on Oral Tradition and Cultural Preservation

Oral tradition, as one of the oldest forms of cultural heritage, has undergone a significant transformation with technology (Anista, 2023). The development of information and communication technology has opened up new opportunities (Rianto et al., 2024) in the preservation and dissemination of oral traditions. One prominent example is the viral phenomenon of the song "Saleho" performed by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala. The video clip uploaded on DC Production's YouTube channel reached millions of viewers and sparked widespread conversations about Javanese culture. Through the YouTube platform, the song "Saleho" with Javanese lyrics has crossed geographical and generational boundaries. This song is not only enjoyed by Javanese people, but also by music lovers from various regions and even countries.

This oral tradition in the form of the song "Saleho" has succeeded in strengthening the sense of pride in Javanese culture and encouraging people to recognize and appreciate their cultural heritage. The song "Saleho" appears as creative content performed by Denny Caknan and Abah lala such as covers, dance challenges, and parodies. The music video for "Saleho" combines traditional Javanese elements such as clothing, makeup, and props with an interesting modern touch. This combination has succeeded in attracting the interest of the younger generation who may initially be less interested in traditional music.

Based on various studies and observations, it can be concluded that the adaptation of local culture to digital platforms has enormous potential in cultural preservation efforts. The following analysis results are relevant to the case of Javanese language preservation.



Figure. 7 Results of Analysis of the Role of Technology on Oral Tradition and Cultural Preservation

The digital platform in the form of YouTube in Denny Caknan's DC Production account allows two-way interaction between content creators and audiences. Comments, likes, and shares are a form of active community participation in preserving culture, as evidenced by the number of viewers up to 5,471,461 million, 14. 912 thousand comments, and 112 thousand likes from various groups. The emergence of creative content generated by users shows the enthusiasm of the community in participating in cultural preservation. By adapting traditional art forms into a more modern and attractive format, local cultural content becomes more relevant to the younger generation. And the adaptation of local culture to digital platforms has proven to be one of the effective ways to preserve the Javanese language and strengthen cultural identity.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research explores the transformation of Javanese oral tradition to digital platforms through a case study of the song "Saleho" performed by Denny Caknan and Abah Lala. The main findings show that digital platforms, particularly YouTube, have revolutionized Javanese cultural preservation by expanding reach, enhancing preservation, and stimulating creativity. The song "Saleho" has reached millions of viewers worldwide, provided a durable digital archive, and blended modern visual attributes with ancient Javanese lyrics and traditional gamelan melodies. However, the research also identified significant challenges such as commercialization, distortion of meaning, and reliance on technology. Digital audience engagement, such as interpretation of lyrics through commentary and parody, can lead to misinterpretation of traditional meanings. For example, symbolism in music videos can be interpreted differently by audiences from different cultural backgrounds, or lyrics that have deep meaning in the Javanese cultural context can be simplified or changed in meaning through parody. The implication of this research is the need for a balanced approach in utilizing technology for cultural preservation. Digital literacy, cross-sector collaboration, and the development of authentic creative content are essential. In addition, the development of policies that protect intellectual property rights and support the preservation of oral traditions in the digital era is necessary. As such, this research provides valuable insights into the role

of technology in Javanese cultural preservation, while also reminding us of the importance of maintaining a balance between innovation and tradition.

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