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# Resilience of Local Artists in the Kecak Ramayana Performance at Uluwatu, Bali as a Sacred Negotiation Amidst Tourism Commodification

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**Abstract**

This study examines the resilience of local artists involved in the Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu, Bali, particularly in negotiating sacred cultural values with the demands of tourism commodification. The study employs an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that integrates perspectives from performing arts, ethnomusicology, and visual communication design. Data were collected through direct observation of Kecak Ramayana performances, audiovisual documentation, and in-depth interviews with local artists and cultural practitioners. The analysis focused on three dimensions of performance: movement structure and dramaturgy, vocal rhythm as a spiritual element, and visual narratives and symbolism. The findings indicate that local artists are not passive recipients of tourism commodification but active cultural agents who selectively adapt performance elements while maintaining core ritual, spiritual, and philosophical values. Adjustments in performance duration, narrative presentation, staging, lighting, and visual communication are made to accommodate tourist audiences, whereas fundamental movement patterns, vocal practices, and spiritual values are retained. This process demonstrates that tourism commodification can become a space for cultural negotiation and adaptive resilience rather than necessarily resulting in cultural degradation. The study concludes that community-centered artistic production enables local artists to maintain cultural identity while simultaneously responding to economic and communicative demands within the tourism industry. Thus, the resilience of Kecak Ramayana artists is reflected in their ability to transform and contextualize traditional performance without abandoning its cultural and spiritual foundations.

**Keywords**: Cultural Resilience; Kecak Ramayana; Tourism Commodification; Sacred Negotiation; Balinese Performing Arts

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism in Bali has created a complex relationship between economic development, cultural identity, and the sustainability of traditional performing arts. Bali has demonstrated considerable resilience in responding to changes in the global tourism industry, including the severe disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Agrusa et al., 2021). The island has a long history of interaction between local communities and international tourism, which has contributed to the development of cultural performances as part of the tourism economy (Chin et al., 2015). Within this context, traditional performing arts have increasingly occupied a dual position: they function as expressions of cultural identity and spirituality while simultaneously becoming attractions within the tourism industry.

The incorporation of traditional arts into tourism has generated an extensive debate concerning cultural commodification. Commodification occurs when cultural expressions that originally possess social, ritual, and symbolic value are incorporated into market-oriented exchanges. In Bali, this process has raised concerns about the transformation of sacred values and the potential reduction of cultural performances into tourist spectacles (Ramdhani, 2020; Ulum, 2020). Nevertheless, commodification does not necessarily produce cultural degradation in every context. Tourism can also provide economic resources and institutional spaces that enable local communities to sustain cultural practices. Pujayanti et al. (2023), for example, indicate that tourism development can contribute to the economic survival of local communities, while Darmiati et al. (2022) demonstrate the vulnerability of cultural tourism during periods of economic disruption. These conditions suggest that the relationship between cultural commodification and cultural sustainability needs to be examined beyond the simple opposition between preservation and commercialization.

The Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu, Bali, provides an important context for examining this relationship. The performance is presented in a highly commercial tourism environment while retaining elements associated with Balinese cultural and spiritual values. Previous research by Hidajat (2025) examined the commodification of Kecak Ramayana as tourism art at Melasti Beach, Ungasan, and found that commodification did not necessarily destroy the cultural character of the performance. However, that study primarily examined the phenomenon of commodification as a tourism art practice. The present study extends this discussion by focusing specifically on how local artists negotiate the demands of tourism with the maintenance of sacred, spiritual, and cultural values through movement, vocal performance, and visual presentation. This focus is important because the resilience of traditional performing arts cannot be adequately understood solely from the perspective of the tourism market; it also requires attention to the agency of the artists who actively determine which cultural elements can be adapted and which should remain protected.

The concept of cultural resilience is therefore central to this study. Resilience is understood not simply as the ability to preserve traditional forms unchanged, but as the capacity of local artists to respond adaptively to social, economic, and cultural pressures while maintaining fundamental elements of their cultural identity. Picard (1990, 2020) demonstrates that tourism in Bali has become an important arena in which cultural identity is continuously negotiated and reconstructed. From this perspective, cultural change does not necessarily imply the disappearance of tradition. Instead, local communities may actively reconstruct cultural expressions in response to changing social conditions. Such a perspective provides an analytical basis for understanding Kecak artists not as passive objects of tourism commodification but as cultural agents who actively negotiate the relationship between tradition, spirituality, and the tourism market.

The issue becomes particularly important in the context of Kecak Ramayana because the performance contains interconnected movement, vocal, visual, and symbolic dimensions. The adaptation of these dimensions to tourism requires negotiation between aesthetic expectations and cultural values. From the perspective of performing arts, changes in movement structure and dramaturgy can demonstrate how traditional performance forms are adjusted to the requirements



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of tourism presentation while retaining essential movement patterns. From an ethnomusicological perspective, vocal rhythm represents an important dimension of the performance because the collective vocal practice of Kecak is closely connected to its spiritual and symbolic character. Meanwhile, visual communication design provides a perspective for examining costumes, stage arrangements, lighting, visual composition, and other forms of presentation through which cultural meanings are communicated to heterogeneous tourist audiences. An interdisciplinary perspective is therefore necessary to understand the performance as an integrated cultural system rather than merely an entertainment product.

Previous studies have also emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in understanding cultural and artistic sustainability. Sudikan (2015) argues that interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches enable complex cultural phenomena to be examined through the interaction of different forms of knowledge. In the context of performing arts, such an approach makes it possible to connect artistic structure with cultural meaning and modes of communication. The resilience of local artists can consequently be understood as the result of interaction between artistic creativity, cultural agency, and the ability to respond to changing social and economic environments. Rather than viewing commodification exclusively as cultural degradation, this perspective allows tourism to be examined as a contested space in which artists negotiate their position and reconstruct the presentation of traditional art.

The Balinese cultural concept of *desa, kala, patra*—understood in relation to place, time, and situation—also provides a relevant cultural context for understanding this adaptive process. Netra (2023) explains that the concept provides a basis for understanding contextual flexibility within Balinese cultural practices. In the context of tourism performance, this flexibility may enable artists to modify aspects of presentation according to the place, time, and audience while retaining essential cultural meanings. Such adaptation should not automatically be interpreted as a loss of authenticity. Instead, it may represent a cultural strategy through which traditional practices remain relevant within changing social environments. In this study, resilience is therefore conceptualized as the capacity of local artists to adapt selected aspects of a traditional performance to tourism demands without abandoning its fundamental cultural and spiritual foundations.

Despite the growing literature on tourism commodification, Balinese cultural identity, and the sustainability of traditional performing arts, there remains a need for more focused analysis of how local artists themselves negotiate the boundary between sacred values and commercial demands at the level of performance practice. Existing discussions tend to emphasize either the negative consequences of commodification or the economic benefits of tourism, while the agency of artists in determining the boundaries of adaptation receives comparatively less attention. In particular, the relationship between movement and dramaturgy, vocal spirituality, and visual communication has not been sufficiently integrated into an explanation of how resilience is constructed within a tourism performance context. This gap is especially relevant to the Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu, where traditional performance is presented directly to a heterogeneous international audience within a highly developed tourism environment.

This study addresses this gap by examining the resilience of local Kecak Ramayana artists at Uluwatu through an interdisciplinary perspective combining performing arts, ethnomusicology, and visual communication design. The study focuses on three dimensions of performance: (1) the negotiation of movement structure and dramaturgy, (2) the role of vocal rhythm as a spiritual and communicative element, and (3) visual narratives and symbolism in the presentation of the performance to tourism audiences. Through these dimensions, the study seeks to explain how artists negotiate sacred cultural values with the demands of tourism commodification and how such negotiation contributes to cultural and livelihood sustainability.

The study contributes to the discussion of cultural resilience by positioning local artists as active cultural agents rather than passive recipients of tourism commodification. It proposes that the sustainability of traditional performing arts may depend not on maintaining every element of performance in an unchanged form, but on the ability of artists and communities to distinguish between cultural elements that must be retained and presentation elements that can be adapted.



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In this sense, the Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu represents a significant case for understanding how traditional art can be transformed and communicated within contemporary tourism while continuing to function as an expression of Balinese cultural identity and spiritual values.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a performative ethnographic approach, which views performance as an important site for understanding cultural meanings, social practices, and embodied experience. Performative ethnography integrates ethnographic inquiry with performance-oriented approaches and emphasizes the importance of participation, observation, and engagement with cultural practitioners in understanding performance practices (Denzin, 2003; Haanstad, 2014). In this study, the Kecak Ramayana performance was examined as a cultural text through which artistic, spiritual, and social meanings are expressed and negotiated within the tourism environment of Uluwatu, Bali. Performance studies provides a relevant framework for examining performing arts, ritual, and cultural practices as interconnected forms of social and cultural expression (Schechner, 2013).

Data collection was carried out during routine Kecak Ramayana performances using participatory observation, audiovisual documentation, and in-depth interviews. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled the researchers to examine the performance from different empirical perspectives and to compare observations with the experiences and interpretations of local artists. In qualitative research, the combination of different methods and sources can strengthen the credibility of findings by allowing researchers to examine the consistency and convergence of information across forms of evidence (Carter et al., 2014). The credibility of the findings was therefore supported through source triangulation and investigator triangulation involving researchers with different disciplinary expertise.

The interdisciplinary research team consisted of Robby Hidajat, a performing arts scholar from Universitas Negeri Malang, who examined movement structure and dramaturgy; Surasak Jamnongsarn, an ethnomusicologist from Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand, who examined the rhythmic function of vocal performance as a spiritual element; and Pujiyanto, from the Visual Communication Design Study Program at Universitas Negeri Malang, who examined visual narratives and symbolism in the performance. The involvement of researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds allowed the phenomenon to be examined through complementary analytical perspectives. Investigator triangulation is particularly relevant in qualitative inquiry because the interpretation of data can be compared across researchers and perspectives, thereby reducing the possibility that findings are determined solely by one researcher's interpretation (Carter et al., 2014).

The observation process combined direct field observation and audiovisual document analysis. The performing arts and visual communication design researchers directly observed and documented the Kecak Ramayana performances in Uluwatu, while the ethnomusicology researcher conducted analysis remotely from Bangkok using high-quality audiovisual documentation. The audiovisual materials were used as supporting data for examining movement, vocal rhythm, performance structure, visual composition, costumes, stage arrangements, and other elements that could be repeatedly examined during the analytical process. Performance studies emphasizes the importance of examining performance not only as a staged artistic product but also as a process involving performers, audiences, space, ritual, and cultural context (Schechner, 2013).

The qualitative data analysis was conducted through an interactive and interpretive process. The data consisted of observation notes, interview information, and audiovisual documentation, which were organized according to the three principal analytical dimensions of the study: movement structure and dramaturgy, vocal rhythm as a spiritual element, and visual narrative and symbolism. Qualitative data analysis involves systematic processes of organizing, displaying, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from qualitative materials (Miles et al., 2014). Accordingly,



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each researcher first examined the data from the perspective of their respective disciplinary expertise before the findings were compared and synthesized through interdisciplinary discussion.

The performing arts analysis focused on the articulation of movement, dramaturgical structure, and the adaptation of performance elements within the tourism context. The ethnomusicological analysis examined vocal rhythm and its relationship to the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of the Kecak performance. Meanwhile, the visual communication analysis examined costumes, stage settings, lighting, spatial composition, and other visual elements as forms of cultural representation and communication. The use of complementary analytical perspectives was intended to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the performance and its relationship to cultural identity and tourism commodification.

The primary interview data were obtained from five local artists and cultural practitioners involved in the Kecak Ramayana performance. The informants were I Made Sudira (60 years old), chairman of Sekaa Karang Boma; I Made Astra (58 years old), vice chairman; I Wayan Chary Antara (50 years old), secretary; I Made Tarka (59 years old), a traditional stakeholder; and I Wayan Suganda (70 years old), a senior dancer who performs the character of Hanoman. The interviews focused on the artists' experiences and perspectives regarding the adaptation of Kecak Ramayana to the tourism environment, particularly their strategies for negotiating sacred values with the demands of professionalism, commercialization, and tourist audiences. The interview data were interpreted in relation to the observations and audiovisual documentation so that artists' accounts could be compared with observable performance practices.

The final analytical stage involved interpretation and synthesis. The findings obtained from observations, interviews, and audiovisual documentation were compared and triangulated across data sources and researchers. Miles et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of systematic data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing in qualitative analysis. In this study, the synthesis process involved comparing the technical observations of the three disciplinary researchers with the accounts provided by local artists. The process enabled the researchers to identify recurring patterns of adaptation and negotiation between sacred cultural values and tourism demands.

Through this analytical process, the Kecak Ramayana performance was interpreted as a dynamic cultural practice rather than merely a commercial tourism product. The final interpretation focuses on how local artists maintain culturally and spiritually significant elements while adapting selected aspects of the performance to the expectations of tourism audiences. This approach enables the study to explain the resilience of local artists as an active process of cultural negotiation in which tradition, performance space, audience expectations, and tourism interests continuously interact.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu, organized by Sekaa Karang Boma, Pecatu Village, South Kuta, Badung, Bali, illustrates a complex process of adaptation between traditional cultural values and the demands of tourism. Performances are attended by tourists from various countries and are presented within a tourism environment in which audiences purchase tickets to watch the performance. From an economic perspective, this condition may initially appear to represent the commodification of traditional culture. However, the interviews indicate that the income generated from the performances is distributed among the performers according to their professional categories after operational costs have been deducted. The income is distributed cumulatively every three months, while performers may access advances when they have urgent needs (I. W. C. Antara, personal communication, 2024).

The economic dimension, therefore, should not immediately be interpreted as evidence of cultural degradation. Previous research on Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu has similarly demonstrated that the performance has developed as a tourism attraction and that commercial elements have become part of its contemporary presentation (Hidajat et al., 2024). Rather than treating commodification as a one-directional process in which traditional culture is simply


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transformed into a market product, the findings of this study indicate that artists actively negotiate between economic demands, aesthetic expectations, and cultural values. This finding is consistent with the argument that tourism performances can simultaneously function as cultural expressions, entertainment, and economic activities (Hidajat et al., 2024).

The interdisciplinary analysis identifies three interconnected dimensions of this negotiation: (1) negotiation of movement structure and dramaturgy, (2) vocal performance as a spiritual and communicative element within tourism performance, and (3) visual narratives and symbolism in the presentation of tourism art.

**1. Negotiation of Movement Structure and Dramaturgy**

The organization of tourism performing arts at Uluwatu developed gradually from the local community rather than from a community of professional performing artists or academic institutions. According to the interviews, most of the dancers involved in the Kecak Ramayana performance are also traders or residents living and working in the Uluwatu Temple environment and members of Sekaa Karang Boma in Pecatu, South Kuta, Badung. The performance was initially developed as an additional attraction for visitors to Uluwatu Temple. According to I Wayan Suganda, the environment of the temple remains associated with daily religious activities, including the preparation of offerings and prayer, while information concerning the temple's history and cultural significance is also communicated to visitors through tour guides (I. W. Suganda, personal communication, 2025).

The development of the performance demonstrates that tourism presentation does not necessarily require the complete separation of artistic performance from its cultural context. Previous research has documented the development of Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu as a tourism performance and identified its commercial attractiveness as an important component of the contemporary presentation (Hidajat et al., 2024). In this context, the performance operates within a liminal or threshold space, where traditional cultural expressions are presented as spectacles to tourists while remaining connected to the cultural and spiritual environment of the temple. The artists therefore face the challenge of maintaining the cultural integrity of the performance while communicating it effectively to a heterogeneous tourism audience.

The interview with I Made Astra indicates that the performers recognize this tension. He explained that the presentation of tourism performances creates a space in which tradition is simultaneously positioned as a spectacle and as an experience associated with the sacred environment. Consequently, the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of the performance must be maintained even when the presentation is adapted to tourism requirements (I. M. Astra, personal communication, 2024).

One of the strategies used by the artists is the maintenance of the pakem gerak, or established movement patterns, of Kecak performance. New dancers undergo approximately three months of training before participating fully in the performance. After acquiring the necessary basic techniques and performance skills, dancers undergo a stage test before becoming regular performers. This process demonstrates that adaptation does not mean unrestricted alteration of traditional movement structures. Instead, adaptation takes place within a controlled framework of training, rehearsal, and performance.

This finding can be interpreted through Schechner's concept of restored behavior, which refers to behaviors that are rehearsed, reconstructed, arranged, and repeatedly performed within a performance context (Schechner, 1985, 2013). In this sense, the movement vocabulary of Kecak is not simply reproduced mechanically; it is repeatedly trained and reconstructed through the performers' bodies. The concept is particularly relevant because Schechner emphasizes that restored behavior can be revised and rearranged while remaining recognizable as performance material.

Thus, the training process at Uluwatu represents an important mechanism of cultural resilience. The younger dancers are introduced to established movement structures and performance discipline while simultaneously being prepared to perform in a tourism-oriented environment. The process demonstrates that the sustainability of traditional performance is not



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necessarily achieved by freezing the art form in its original condition. Rather, it can be maintained through continuous transmission, rehearsal, and controlled adaptation.

This finding also challenges the assumption that tourism automatically produces the erosion of traditional artistic values. In the case of Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu, the artists establish boundaries around what may be adapted and what should remain relatively stable. The duration, staging, and presentation may respond to tourism conditions, but the fundamental movement vocabulary and performance discipline remain important references for the artists. The resilience of the performers is therefore reflected in their ability to adapt the context of presentation without abandoning the basic structure of performance.

**2. Vocal Performance as "Spirit" in Tourism Performance**

From an ethnomusicological perspective, vocal performance is one of the most distinctive elements of Kecak. Unlike performances dominated by conventional instrumental accompaniment, Kecak relies heavily on collective vocalization, interlocking rhythmic patterns, repetition, and coordinated group performance. The vocal component therefore functions not merely as musical accompaniment but as an important element in constructing the atmosphere and identity of the performance.

The dancers interviewed in this study emphasized the importance of maintaining vocal quality even when the performance is presented for tourists. According to I Made Tarka, the vocal expression known as *cak* is associated by performers with the development of the Kecak vocal tradition and its relationship to the narrative structure of the performance (I. M. Tarka, personal communication, 2025). The transformation of vocal expressions into the characteristic repeated *cak* pattern demonstrates how vocal performance functions simultaneously as musical structure, dramatic expression, and cultural signification.

The vocal structure also contributes to the collective character of the performance. Rather than relying on a single vocalist, the sound is produced collectively through interlocking rhythmic patterns. The resulting sonic texture creates a strong sense of group cohesion and contributes to the dramatic atmosphere of the Ramayana narrative. From this perspective, the vocal dimension can be interpreted as an embodied form of collective cultural expression.

The spiritual dimension of the performance should nevertheless be distinguished from the commercial context in which the contemporary Kecak is presented. The presence of tourists and the commercialization of the performance do not necessarily eliminate the performers' understanding of the spiritual significance of the performance. I Made Tarka explained that the quality of the vocal performance is related to the emotional and spiritual engagement of the dancers (I. M. Tarka, personal communication, 2024). Similarly, I Wayan Chary Antara noted that audience noise can interfere with the performers' concentration and appreciation of the performance (I. W. C. Antara, personal communication, 2025).

The findings therefore suggest that the vocal component operates at two interconnected levels. First, it functions as a performative and communicative device for presenting the Ramayana story to tourists. Second, it remains associated with the performers' understanding of spiritual and collective experience. This dual function illustrates the process of negotiation at the center of this study: the same artistic element can serve tourism communication while retaining meanings that are significant to the performers.

The relationship between vocal performance and spirituality can also be understood in relation to the broader development of Kecak from ritual and trance-related performance traditions. Previous research on Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu has emphasized the relationship between artistic creativity, cultural values, and spiritual expression in the performance. Hidajat, Suprihatin, Hartono, Hasyimy, and colleagues describe Kecak Ramayana as a performance that connects creative artistic expression with Balinese cultural and spiritual identity.

The present findings consequently indicate that the shortening or adaptation of a tourism performance does not automatically eliminate its spiritual dimension. What becomes important is how performers maintain the quality of vocal coordination, concentration, emotional involvement, and ritual preparation. According to the performers, preparation before the performance includes


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prayer and the use of holy water. These practices indicate that the performance remains situated within a broader cultural and spiritual framework even though it is presented in a tourism setting.

Therefore, the resilience of Kecak performers is not only visible in their ability to reproduce vocal patterns but also in their capacity to maintain the cultural meanings attached to those patterns. Tourism may alter the duration, audience relationship, and presentation context, but the performers continue to negotiate the spiritual dimension through preparation, collective vocal practice, and embodied engagement.

**Visual Narrative and Symbolization**

From the perspective of Visual Communication Design (VCD), the visual dimension of the Kecak Ramayana performance functions as an important mechanism for communicating cultural narratives to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. The performance is presented to international audiences who may possess different cultural references and interpretive frameworks. Consequently, visual elements such as costumes, character differentiation, spatial formations, stage arrangements, and lighting contribute to making the narrative more accessible to audiences who may not have extensive knowledge of Balinese culture.

The audience is provided with a synopsis of the story through printed materials and/or explanations delivered by the master of ceremonies. The synopsis functions as an interpretive guide that assists audiences in identifying characters and following the development of the Ramayana narrative. Character differentiation is further reinforced through costumes, while changes in group formations communicate changes in dramatic situations. Circular, frontal, and other spatial configurations therefore function not merely as aesthetic arrangements but also as visual signs that contribute to the construction of narrative meaning.

This finding can be understood through Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly the concept of myth as a second-order system of signification. In the first level of signification, visual elements such as costumes, colors, bodily forms, and spatial arrangements function as signs with relatively direct meanings. At the second level, these signs become signifiers of broader cultural concepts and values, thereby producing meanings that appear natural and self-evident within a particular cultural context (Barthes, 1972).

Accordingly, costumes and visual properties in the Kecak Ramayana can be interpreted not merely as decorative elements but as cultural signs. For example, the use of red in the representation of Rahwana can contribute to the construction of an antagonistic character, whereas the white costume associated with Hanoman can communicate qualities of heroism, purity, loyalty, and moral strength. These meanings are not inherent in the colors themselves; rather, they are produced through cultural conventions and the narrative system of the Ramayana. The visual presentation therefore enables audiences to identify moral oppositions through relatively accessible visual codes.

The visual representation of characters can consequently be interpreted as a form of cultural myth in the Barthesian sense. The visual sign is transformed into a broader cultural meaning in which particular characters become associated with moral categories such as good and evil. The Ramayana narrative thus provides a cultural framework through which ethical values are communicated to audiences, including those who may not possess detailed knowledge of Balinese Hindu philosophy. The visual system of the performance consequently functions as a form of cultural translation between the traditional narrative and contemporary tourism audiences.

The spatial arrangement of the performance also contributes to this process of visual communication. The open-air stage overlooking the sea and located near the cliff of Uluwatu creates a distinctive visual relationship between the performance, the landscape, and the audience. The natural environment becomes part of the performance's visual composition rather than functioning merely as a background. The sunset, ocean, cliff, performers, and stage are integrated into a single visual field that shapes the audience's experience of the performance.

This spatial relationship is particularly important in the representation of Alengka, the kingdom associated with Rahwana in the Ramayana narrative. The ocean visible beyond the



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performance space can function symbolically as a spatial reference separating the world of the performers from the imagined location of Alengka. In this sense, the natural landscape becomes part of the dramaturgical and visual language through which the narrative is communicated.

From a performance studies perspective, performance is not limited to the actions of performers on stage but is produced through the interaction between performers, audience, space, objects, and cultural context (Schechner, 2013). The Uluwatu performance therefore demonstrates how the natural environment can become an active component of the performance experience. The cliff, ocean, sunset, stage, costumes, lighting, and collective movements form an integrated visual environment that supports the communication of cultural meaning.

The visual design consequently functions as an interface between traditional cultural narratives and global audiences. Rather than requiring audiences to possess extensive technical knowledge of Balinese performing arts, visual codes provide an immediate point of entry into the narrative. This does not necessarily mean simplifying the culture; rather, it demonstrates how traditional performance can employ visual communication strategies to make cultural meanings accessible within a multicultural tourism environment.

The findings indicate that visual adaptation does not necessarily eliminate cultural meaning. Instead, the strategic use of costumes, spatial formations, stage composition, lighting, and environmental framing can strengthen the readability of the traditional narrative. Visual communication therefore becomes part of the resilience strategy of the Kecak Ramayana: traditional meanings are recontextualized into a contemporary visual environment while retaining their relationship with the Ramayana narrative and Balinese cultural identity.

**Sacred Negotiation vs. Commodification**

The relationship between sacred tradition and tourism commodification is one of the central issues emerging from the Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu. Previous research has examined the relationship between sacred and profane dimensions in Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu and has demonstrated that the performance operates within a complex cultural environment in which ritual, artistic expression, and tourism intersect (Hidajat, 2019). The present findings extend this discussion by emphasizing the agency of local artists in negotiating these different dimensions.

Rather than understanding tourism commodification as a linear process that inevitably transforms sacred culture into a commercial product, the findings demonstrate a more complex process of selective adaptation. The artists from Sekaa Karang Boma, Pecatu, do not simply accept all demands of the tourism industry. Instead, they distinguish between aspects of the performance that can be adapted for tourism audiences and aspects that remain culturally and spiritually significant.

This interpretation is consistent with Schechner's performance perspective, which emphasizes that performance encompasses both artistic practices and broader cultural, ritual, and social processes (Schechner, 2013). The Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu can therefore be understood as a performance space in which cultural identity is continuously negotiated through the relationship between performers, audience, environment, and tourism institutions.

The three analytical perspectives used in this study—performing arts, ethnomusicology, and visual communication design—indicate that this negotiation occurs simultaneously through movement, vocal performance, and visual presentation. Movement patterns retain elements of established performance conventions; vocal performance maintains collective rhythmic structures and spiritual associations; while visual elements are adapted to make the narrative communicative to heterogeneous audiences. These dimensions demonstrate that transformation and preservation are not necessarily contradictory processes.

The resilience of Kecak artists is therefore rooted not simply in the economic structure of tourism but in their capacity to act as cultural agents. Mantra and Kutanegara (2016) demonstrate that the sustainability of cultural practices is closely related to the ability of communities and cultural actors to respond to changing social environments. In the Uluwatu case, the artists utilize


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local community institutions and cultural knowledge as resources for maintaining their collective identity while participating in the tourism economy.

This agency can also be interpreted through Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Habitus refers to embodied dispositions that are developed through social experience and shape how individuals perceive and act within particular social fields. In the context of the Kecak artists, repeated training, participation in community institutions, cultural experience, and spiritual practices contribute to dispositions that enable them to navigate the demands of both cultural tradition and the tourism market (Bourdieu, 1989). Rather than being passive subjects of commercialization, the artists operate strategically within the tourism field while drawing upon cultural dispositions developed through their community environment.

The findings further indicate that the artists establish implicit boundaries between the ritual/spiritual dimension and the tourism-performance dimension. Elements considered fundamental to the cultural identity of Kecak—such as collective vocal practice, basic movement structures, and particular dramaturgical conventions—are maintained. At the same time, other aspects, including performance duration, narrative pacing, stage presentation, lighting, and communication with tourists, can be adjusted to accommodate the expectations of contemporary audiences.

This process can be conceptualized as selective cultural adaptation. The artists do not reject commodification entirely, because the tourism economy provides important economic resources for the sustainability of the performers and their community. However, they also do not allow every element of the performance to be determined exclusively by market demands. The boundary between what can and cannot be commodified is therefore negotiated through artistic practice and community-based cultural knowledge.

The distinction between adaptable and relatively stable elements can be described analytically as a “hard core” and “adaptive layer” of performance. The hard core consists of cultural and spiritual elements that the performers regard as fundamental, while the adaptive layer consists of elements that can be modified according to the requirements of tourism presentation. This distinction should be understood as an analytical finding of this study rather than as a direct theoretical category established by Bourdieu or Hobsbawm and Ranger.

The findings also resonate with the argument of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) that traditions are not necessarily static entities transmitted unchanged from the past. Their concept of the invention of tradition demonstrates how traditions can be selected, reconstructed, institutionalized, and represented in response to particular social circumstances. In the case of Kecak Ramayana, adaptation to tourism should therefore not automatically be equated with the disappearance of tradition. Instead, adaptation can be understood as part of the ongoing process through which tradition remains socially meaningful.

However, this argument should not be interpreted as suggesting that every form of commodification is automatically beneficial. Tourism commodification can still create tensions concerning authenticity, cultural ownership, economic inequality, and the transformation of sacred practices. The findings of this study instead indicate that the consequences of commodification depend partly on the degree of agency exercised by cultural practitioners and communities in determining the boundaries of adaptation.

Within this context, the Kecak Ramayana performance at Uluwatu can be understood as a living cultural practice rather than simply a static cultural artifact. Its continued presentation provides opportunities for intergenerational transmission because younger performers learn movement patterns, vocal techniques, performance discipline, and cultural narratives through participation. The tourism stage consequently becomes one of the institutional spaces through which traditional knowledge can continue to be practiced and transmitted.

The performance also creates what Schechner describes through the broader concept of performance as a space in which ordinary social relations can be temporarily reorganized through ritual, play, and staged representation (Schechner, 2013). In the Uluwatu context, tourists enter a performance environment in which sound, movement, visual composition, landscape, and



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narrative are combined to produce an immersive cultural experience. The use of lighting and visual framing does not necessarily eliminate the cultural meaning of the performance; instead, it can increase the communicative accessibility of traditional symbols to audiences from different cultural backgrounds.

The integration of movement, sound, and visual communication therefore demonstrates that local artists function as active cultural agents who continuously manage the relationship between identity and tourism. Their resilience does not lie in rejecting change but in determining how change can occur without eliminating the cultural principles that they consider fundamental. The Uluwatu case thus illustrates a process of transformative adaptation, in which traditional performance is selectively recontextualized to remain communicative, economically viable, and culturally meaningful within a changing tourism environment.

Accordingly, the sustainability of Kecak Ramayana should not be measured solely by whether every element of the contemporary performance remains identical to an earlier form. More importantly, sustainability can be considered in terms of the capacity of artists and communities to transmit core cultural meanings while adapting selected forms of presentation to new social and economic circumstances. The resilience demonstrated by the Kecak artists at Uluwatu therefore emerges from the interaction between cultural continuity, artistic agency, selective adaptation, and economic participation in tourism.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Kecak Ramayana artists of Sekaa Karang Boma in Pecatu Village, South Kuta, Badung, Bali, actively negotiate between the sacred values of traditional performing arts and the pragmatic demands of the tourism industry. The interdisciplinary analysis of movement structure and dramaturgy, vocal rhythm, and visual communication reveals that cultural resilience is manifested through the artists' capacity to adapt the presentation of Kecak Ramayana while maintaining cultural and spiritual elements considered fundamental to the performance.

The findings indicate that local artists should not be positioned merely as passive objects of tourism commodification. Rather, they function as cultural agents who actively determine how traditional performance can be presented within a contemporary tourism environment. Their agency is reflected in the selective adaptation of movement, vocal performance, duration, visual presentation, and stage arrangements according to the expectations of a global audience. At the same time, elements regarded as fundamental to the cultural identity of the performance, including established movement patterns, collective vocal practices, and spiritual values, remain subject to preservation and negotiation within the community.

The distinction between the "hard core" and "adaptive layer" identified in this study provides an analytical explanation of this process. The hard core refers to cultural and spiritual elements that the artists consider fundamental, whereas the adaptive layer includes aspects of presentation that can be modified to accommodate tourism audiences. This selective adaptation demonstrates that commodification does not necessarily result in the disappearance of cultural meaning. Instead, when cultural practitioners retain agency over the boundaries of adaptation, tourism can provide an economic and social space for the continued practice and transmission of traditional performing arts.

The study further suggests that the sustainability of Kecak Ramayana requires a community-centered production model in which local artists and cultural institutions remain the primary authorities in determining which cultural elements can be publicly presented and which should remain within the sacred domain. Such an approach positions the community not only as performers but also as cultural custodians who participate in determining the rhythm, movement, narrative, visual presentation, and boundaries of cultural representation.

Therefore, the resilience of Kecak Ramayana at Uluwatu is not primarily reflected in the preservation of an unchanged traditional form, but in the community's capacity to maintain its cultural and spiritual foundations while responding selectively to social, economic, and tourism-



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related changes. The findings demonstrate that cultural continuity and adaptation can operate simultaneously. In this context, tourism can become one of the spaces through which traditional performing arts remain economically viable, socially relevant, and transferable to younger generations, provided that the community retains meaningful authority over the cultural values embedded in the performance.

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