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Synergy of cultural and economic communication within the social context of society

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Abstract. This study examines the synergy between cultural communication and economic activities within the social context of society, focusing on two prominent cultural heritage sites in Indonesia the Vredeburg Fort Museum in Yogyakarta and Borobudur Temple in Magelang. Using a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review. The findings reveal that cultural communication in tourism operates not only through verbal interactions but also symbolically through artifacts, spatial settings, and traditional expressions. Economic activities such as trade, tourism services, and creative industries function as mediums for cultural value exchange while simultaneously generating economic benefits for local communities. Local actors serve as cultural brokers who preserve, interpret, and convey cultural meanings to visitors. The study concludes that economic activities, when grounded in local wisdom and managed sustainably, can reinforce cultural continuity instead of undermining authenticity. The synergy between culture and economy contributes to community welfare, cultural sustainability, and the strengthening of social identity.

Keywords. Education Cultural Communication, Cultural Tourism, Economy, Local Community, Heritage Sites, Sustainability

Introduction

In the current era of globalization, cultural communication and economic activities cannot be separated from the social dynamics of society. Culture shapes how people think, behave, and interact within economic activities, while the economy becomes a driving force for cultural transformation through practices of consumption, production, and value distribution. According to Hofstede (2017), culture influences economic preferences through values such as collectivism, power distance, and long-term orientation adopted by a society.

Furthermore, Chen and Li (2020) argue that intercultural economic interactions in international trade are not solely based on material profit calculations but also on the ability to understand norms, ethics, and cultural communication from cross-national business partners. Meanwhile, Kwok and Tadesse (2018) found that countries or communities with high cultural diversity tend to have more innovative economic dynamics due to the exchange of various social practices and ideas.

On the other hand, economic development also plays a role in shaping new cultural forms in society. Nugroho and Prasetyo (2022) highlight that increased access to digital technology and e-commerce has encouraged the emergence of a new consumption culture that is instant, practical, and aligned with global lifestyles. Thus, the interaction between culture and the economy creates synergy that not only enriches social life but also strengthens the collective identity of society in facing contemporary changes.

Museum Benteng Vredeborg and Borobudur Temple, as two locations of high historical and cultural value in Indonesia, serve as concrete representations of how cultural communication and the economy operate simultaneously. Economic activities around these sites not only serve as sources of livelihood for local communities but also function as media for cultural communication through tourism, creative products, and the exchange of social values.

According to Pitana and Diarta (2017), cultural tourism plays a strategic role in building reciprocal relations between economic actors and local communities through symbolic communication processes, such as interactions between tourists and souvenir sellers, tour guides, and local artists. In line with this, Suwena and Widyatmaja (2020) explain that tourism-based economic activities not only generate economic value but also serve as a means of cultural preservation, as communities are encouraged to maintain traditions for both commercial and social purposes.

Within the context of world cultural heritage such as Borobudur Temple, tourism has developed into an arena of global value exchange, where tourists bring new perspectives while simultaneously absorbing the richness of local culture (Putri & Nugroho, 2021). This shows that cultural communication does not only occur verbally but also through artifacts, rituals, and the commodification of cultural symbols. Therefore, the integration of cultural communication and economic activities in heritage areas such as Benteng Vredeborg and Borobudur Temple becomes an example of synergy that reinforces community welfare while ensuring cultural sustainability.

The synergy between cultural communication and the economy in the social context of society is essential to study in order to understand how communities sustain cultural values amid rapid economic development, as well as how the economy can act as a medium for cultural preservation. According to Hall (2019), cultural communication serves as a mechanism of reproducing collective values and identity in society, so when interacting with economic interests, a negotiation of meaning is required to ensure that culture does not become merely a commodity but retains its symbolic value. Similarly, Smith and Xiao (2021) indicate that the cultural economy sector can support the preservation of cultural heritage if managed under principles of sustainability and local community participation.

Research by Wulandari and Prabowo (2020) demonstrates that cultural tourism destinations managed through a participatory communication approach are able to create balance between economic interests and cultural preservation. Furthermore, Nugroho and Wibisono (2022) emphasize that the success of managing cultural sites such as Borobudur Temple is not only determined by economic infrastructure but also by the extent to which local communities are involved in the cultural narratives communicated to tourists.

This research is expected to reveal a harmonious form of synergy between cultural communication and the economy that can strengthen the social identity of communities without inhibiting economic growth. The research locations Museum Benteng Vredeborg and Borobudur Temple stand as strong representations of the relationship between cultural preservation and the economic activities of surrounding communities.

The objective of this study is to describe how cultural communication and economic activities can synergize in shaping social dynamics. The main focus is to examine how local cultural values and economic activities interact and contribute to the economic and social sustainability of the community. The theoretical benefit of this research is to contribute to the development of communication science and economic sociology, particularly in understanding the reciprocal relationship between culture and the economy. The practical benefit lies in providing guidance for local governments, tourism managers, and surrounding communities in designing communication and economic strategies based on local wisdom. Meanwhile, the social benefit of this research is to increase public awareness of the importance of cultural preservation through sustainable economic activities.

Research method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design with a case study approach. Descriptive qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena in depth through direct engagement with research subjects or locations (Sugiyono, 2018). A case study approach was selected because it enables the researcher to capture reality contextually and holistically within a specific setting (Yin, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), a case study is appropriate when the researcher intends to explore a bounded system defined by place, time, or situation through multiple sources of information.

The research locations were selected using purposive sampling, namely the *Vredeburg Fort Museum in Yogyakarta* and *Borobudur Temple in Magelang*. The purposive selection was made because both locations are considered to have direct relevance to the focus of the study, namely the relationship between culture and economy within the context of tourism and society. Etikan (2016) states that purposive sampling is applied when researchers intentionally select subjects or sites based on specific considerations that are expected to provide the most informative data for the study.

Previous research also supports the relevance of these locations. Handayani and Wibowo (2021) found that cultural sites such as museums and temples function not only as centers for historical preservation but also play a significant role in driving the local economy through tourism activities. Similarly, Rahmawati (2020) asserts that well-managed cultural destinations can create new economic value without diminishing the traditional values of local communities.

Direct observation was employed because it provides access to actual communication practices and economic activities, which are often contextual and non-verbal. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), observation allows researchers to capture interaction dynamics that may not be easily detected through other instruments. A literature review was conducted to map prior research findings and identify research gaps (Booth et al., 2016). Documentation, including photographs, brochures, and tourism statistical data, was used as supplementary data for triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasize that visual artifacts and documents play an important role in enriching the interpretation of qualitative data.

For data analysis, the study adopts the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), which consists of iterative processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Systematic coding techniques (Saldaña, 2021) and validation procedures such as triangulation and member checking (Patton, 2015) were applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Discussion

1. Synergy Between Cultural Communication and Economy in the Context of Tourism

Observations at the Vredeborg Fort Museum and Borobudur Temple indicate that cultural communication is manifested not only verbally through conversations between traders and tourists, but also symbolically through traditional clothing, artifacts, and spatial arrangements within tourist areas. These findings reinforce Hall's (2019) view that cultural representation in social spaces functions as a mechanism for reproducing collective identity. In the context of tourism, the economy acts as a medium of cultural value exchange, materialized in transactions between local economic actors and visitors.

This aligns with Cohen's (1988) concept of cultural commodification, which posits that culture is marketed as an economic product while retaining its symbolic significance, as long as interpretation is conducted contextually by cultural actors themselves. Therefore, the process of buying and selling souvenirs is not merely an economic transaction but also an exchange of cultural narratives and meanings.

Boorstin (1992) refers to this phenomenon as a *pseudo-event* a cultural experience constructed to provide tourists with a sense of cultural authenticity, although the experience has undergone commodification. However, as long as local communities maintain control over the cultural narratives they present, such commodification can serve as a strategy for cultural preservation (Richards, 2018). Furthermore, Greenwood (2004) emphasizes that tourism can function as a space for negotiating identity, in which local communities are not merely objects of exoticism but also active subjects who determine how their culture is represented.

In the context of the local economy, trade and tourism services foster a circular economy that benefits surrounding communities (Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). In addition to generating income, interactions between traders and tourists become a form of micro cultural diplomacy (*people-to-people diplomacy*), strengthening intercultural understanding. Thus, the synergy between cultural communication and the economy in tourism not only creates material value but also produces social and symbolic capital that reinforces community cohesion.

2. The Role of Local Communities as Agents of Cultural Communication

Field observations indicate that local communities are not only economic actors but also cultural communicators (cultural brokers) who actively interpret and convey traditional values to tourists through direct interaction, oral narratives, and symbolic expressions such as traditional clothing and rituals. This finding aligns with Moscardo's (2011) concept of interpretive communication, which emphasizes that the success of cultural tourism is highly influenced by the ability of local communities to explain cultural meanings in a participatory and contextual manner.

Furthermore, Cohen (1985) asserts that local communities play a crucial role in the process of cultural mediation, bridging perceptual differences between the host culture and visiting cultures. When community members actively serve as cultural narrators, they do not merely transmit information but also shape tourists' perceptions of a region's collective identity (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006). Thus, local communities essentially act as living archives that safeguard the continuity of cultural knowledge.

However, these dynamics are not without challenges. The risk of over-commercialization arises when culture is reduced to a mere entertainment commodity. Greenwood (1989) warns that excessive commodification may erode the sacred meaning of cultural practices and shift their function from the sacred to merely spectacle. Likewise,

MacCannell (1976) describes this phenomenon as staged authenticity, wherein cultural experiences are packaged solely to satisfy tourist expectations without regard to their original essence.

Therefore, strengthening ethical principles in cultural communication is essential so that local economic actors do not simply pursue financial gain but also uphold cultural dignity and values. The principles of community-based tourism (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009) can serve as a reference, in which tourism development must be rooted in local wisdom, implemented inclusively, and place the community as the controller of cultural narratives rather than merely service providers. In this way, cultural communication in tourism becomes not only a promotional tool but also a medium for education and cultural preservation.

3. Economy as an Instrument of Cultural Preservation

Interestingly, the economy in the context of tourism functions not only as a commercial force but also as an instrument for cultural preservation. Business actors around Borobudur Temple and Fort Vredeborg do not merely sell products; they simultaneously reproduce cultural identity through narratives, symbols, and everyday practices. They are aware that the sustainability of their economic activities strongly depends on the preservation of local culture, which serves as the main attraction for tourists. This aligns with the concept of the heritage economy proposed by Throsby (2010), which asserts that cultural assets possess long-term economic value when managed sustainably and not exploited excessively.

In this context, culture is not positioned merely as an ornamental complement to tourism, but rather as capital or social capital that carries exchange value (cultural capital) as conceptualized in Bourdieu's theory (1986). Cultural heritage such as traditional dances, clothing, cuisine, and architectural styles is strategically utilized to construct the image of an authentic destination. However, this authenticity is dynamic rather than static; it is continuously negotiated between market demands and the community's awareness of local identity (Cohen, 1988).

Furthermore, Smith's research (2009) demonstrates that the involvement of local communities in managing culture-based tourism can prevent commodification that undermines the meaning of culture. When local communities are engaged in the production of cultural symbols not merely as objects of spectacle tourism becomes a space for the recontextualization of identity and the intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

Thus, the synergy between cultural communication and the economy does not necessarily pose a threat to cultural authenticity. On the contrary, when managed through a participatory approach founded on local values (value-based approach) and guided by the principles of sustainability (sustainable tourism), the economy can serve as a guardian of cultural continuity as well as a bridge for intercultural interaction on a global scale.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that the synergy between cultural communication and economic activities at the Vredeborg Fort Museum and Borobudur Temple operates harmoniously and mutually reinforces one another. Cultural communication occurs not only through direct verbal interactions but also through cultural symbols, historical artifacts, spatial arrangements of tourism areas, and local cultural performances that form an integral part of the visitor experience. In this context, economic activities such as trading, tourism services, and creative industries do not merely generate material value but also serve as channels for the exchange of cultural values between local communities and tourists.

Local communities play a crucial role as cultural brokers who ensure the continuity of cultural knowledge through interpretation, narratives, and cultural practices consistently conveyed to visitors. Their active participation is essential in maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring that commodification processes remain within ethical boundaries.

The study further confirms that the economy can function as an instrument for cultural preservation when managed based on principles of sustainability, contextual cultural interpretation, and community participation. Thus, the synergy between cultural communication and economic activities not only enhances community welfare but also strengthens social identity and ensures the sustainability of cultural heritage amid the dynamics of globalization and the growing development of the tourism sector.

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