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Visibility Paradox in Digital Representation of Traditional Foi Doa Music

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Abstract: Digital visibility in the Foi Doa instrument shows a shift in the way culture is understood in the digital space. Visual representation in digital media plays a strong role in directing the audience's perception of traditional practices. The *Qualitative Digital Discourse Analysis* (QDDA) method was used to analyze content and responses on two YouTube channels with different production styles. Observations are focused on comparisons between cinematic representations and everyday documentation. High audience engagement on cinematic videos does not develop into a deep musical understanding. The audience's response focuses more on the visual aspect than on the sound structure and spiritual function of the instrument. Simple documentation does not show a comparable level of interaction. These findings show the dominance of visual elements in shaping audience perception in the digital space. This condition is understood as the paradox of visibility, which is a situation when the expansion of reach through digitalization goes hand in hand with the simplification of meaning. In contrast to the concepts of mediatization and spectacularization that emphasize the changing form and dominance of media, the visibility paradox highlights specifically the tension between increased visibility and narrowing of the depth of meaning in digital consumption practices. Thus, digital representation not only expands access, but also limits the way culture is interpreted.

Keywords: Digital culture, Digital visibility, Qualitative Digital Discourse Analysis, Traditional music. Visual representation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional music no longer appears as a whole practice when it enters the space of digital representation. Presence in the media brings a selected form, not the entire practice. The visual parts are easier to appear and quickly recognizable, while the musical structure slowly slips out of the spotlight. These changes evolve as culture is produced and circulated in the digital space (Hou et al., 2022). The history and development of music anthropological theory shows that the shift in medium always affects the way humans interpret sound (Bagaskara et al., 2024). Music then tends to be understood as a spectacle, not as an experience.

Adjustments to the media do not happen without pressure. Cultural practices are directed to follow the mechanism of the platform that demands visibility and speed of circulation. The visual format was chosen because it is easier to grab attention in a short time. These choices are gradually changing the way culture is displayed. Social practices move according to the logic of the media that determines what is worthy of being present in the public space (Väliveronon, 2021).

This change in shape affects the way Audiences responded. Comment patterns show a tendency to repeat and not develop far. Landscape, color, and visual quality are more often talked about than musical elements. Attention moves in the direction that is easiest to



capture. Studi Häikiö (2022) shows that visual culture shapes the way Audiences understand the message. The meaning that is formed tends to stop at the surface effect.

The digital space ultimately forms a distinctive pattern of audience response. Interactions are generally short and tend to repeat in a uniform form. Under these conditions, variations in interpretation rarely develop, so the textual responses that emerge are often not reflections of deep cultural understanding. This kind of communication pattern can be examined as a form of digital discourse (KhosraviNik, 2017). Through this framework, it can be seen that the meaning of tradition is not completely lost, but rather narrows in the midst of the audience consumption process (Bouvier & Machin, 2018; Pizzolitto, 2023).

Before examining its shift in the digital space, it is important to situate *Foi Doa* in its original cultural context in the Ngada community. Organically, the *Foi Doa* is a double wind instrument made of bamboo that has a unique physical structure where two flutes are played simultaneously to produce a specific tonal harmony (Darania et al., 2023). In its historical landscape, this musical practice carries a spiritual and communal dimension that binds the social relations of the community, and often becomes a medium of expression in local agrarian activities (Agung Nono et al., 2026). The complexity of the souling technique on this instrument represents the closeness of the Ngada human being to the surrounding nature. It is this intrinsic characteristic that then clashes when transformed into a two-dimensional display format, where visual elements often take over the dominance of auditory and cultural experiences (Häikiö, 2022).

The narrative of previous research moves in a different direction. Digitalization is understood as a means of preservation without much question. Increased exposure is considered sufficient to maintain cultural sustainability. Studies on *Also Prayer*, a bamboo wind instrument from Flores, also shows this tendency (Agung Nono et al., 2026; Wea et al., 2024) (Agung Nono et al., 2026; Wea et al., 2024). The focus stops at existence, while the change in meaning in the digital space is rarely critically touched. Response Audiences Cultural representation has not been a major concern.

Problems arise from this imbalance. Exposure increases, but comprehension does not develop proportionally. Representations become more and more clear, while meaning moves towards simplification. This condition shows a mismatch between visibility and meaning in digital culture practices. The paradox of visibility is used to read the situation. The analysis is directed at the relationship between representation and response Audiences to see how visibility actually triggers the softening of meaning (Hou et al., 2022; Väiliverronen, 2021). Based on this, the direction of the research focuses on one main question: how exactly does representation in online spaces construct the audience's interpretation of traditional *Foi Doa* music?

2. METHOD

This study uses the *Qualitative Digital Discourse Analysis* (QDDA) method approach to dissect how the discourse and meaning of *Foi Doa* is constructed in the digital space. This approach is used to analyze the discourse formed from the interaction of text and visuals on video-sharing platforms.

The initial stage of data collection began with a search for data on YouTube using the keywords "Foi Doa Ngada" and "Traditional Music Foi Doa". The search results are then filtered by popularity level to map the hierarchy of visibility of the instrument. The initial mapping shows a number of major channels, namely AWVisual ($\pm 11,000$ views, 288 comments), Jeremy Dara Nu'a ($\pm 2,400$ views, 26 comments), Cristanu Bata ($\pm 2,300$ views, 6 comments), and Mauritz Andrew ($\pm 1,400$ views, 4 comments).

Departing from this landscape, sample extraction is carried out purposively through an *extreme case sampling* strategy. The AWVisual (cinematic approach) and Mauritz Andrew (everyday documentation) channels are drawn as two polar opposites to illustrate the contrasting style of visual presentation and its impact on audience engagement. From a total of 292 comments on the two videos, the selection was made to sort out texts that specifically responded to visual, musical, and expression of appreciation. After the reduction process, a total of 85 comments (consisting of 82 comments from AWVisual and 3 comments from Mauritz Andrew) were determined as the final data unit that was analyzed in depth.

The data reduction process is carried out through strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the validity of the findings. Inclusion criteria include comments expressing an assessment of video elements, responses to instruments, and textual interactions relevant to the substance of the impression. Through this filtering, the remaining data represents the quality of audience discourse in the digital participatory space. Furthermore, the commentary text was dissected using micro-discourse analysis to see the diction structure and the choice of prominent adjectives (KhosraviNik, 2017). This approach allows researchers to map how language in social media is deeply integrated with design and visual imagery in shaping meaning (Bouvier & Machin, 2018). The peer debriefing process was then carried out to ensure the consistency of categorization between visual and musical appreciation to suppress the subjectivity bias of the researcher.

Text analysis goes through the stages of categorization and interpretation. Comments are grouped based on diction patterns and discourse themes (such as emphasis on landscape aesthetics or sound structure). To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher applied a data triangulation procedure by crossing the text of the comment against the context of the visual impression, as well as conducting peer debriefing among the research team members to suppress subjective bias. Furthermore, this analysis is also based on *the reflexivity of the researcher by realizing the inherent limitation that the interpretation of digital texts is not fully able to capture the complexity of cultural experiences in the real world.*

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Data on the channel YouTube shows the difference in range between the two representations *Also Prayer*. The video on the AWVisual channel has garnered more than 11,000 views with 288 comments. The video on Mauritz Andrew's channel only reached about 1,400 views with four comments. Researchers realized that differences in visibility numbers (Views) it is influenced by various

external technical variables, such as recommendation algorithms *platform*, number of followers (*subscribers*), the duration of the content, to different upload times. Therefore, this analysis does not position the number of views as a measure of the quality of meaning, but rather as an early indicator of the level of visibility that a particular style of content packaging is capable of achieving in the digital space (Hou et al., 2022; Kumar, 2024).

The audience's attention does not move neutrally. Content with a cinematic approach looks more responsive than simple documentation. Cultural practices in this context are not only displayed, but processed to fit the logic of the media that prioritizes visual appearance. Väliverronen (2021) shows that mediatization encourages social practices to adapt to media formats. This pattern is seen in the way *Also Prayer* presented to the digital public.

The visual elements of the AWVisual canal are built through savannah landscapes and drone cinematography techniques. This exotic impression obscures the physical details of the instrument which actually has a complex organological structure. Players *Also Prayer* Perform in full traditional attire in an aesthetically pleasing open space. This composition does not simply display the practice, but forms a certain impression on the audience. An exotic impression emerges from the combination of nature, costumes, and visual framing. In these conditions, the sound of the instrument does not stand alone, but rather is present as part of the overall visual display. São Paulo (2022) shows that visual culture shapes the way *Audiences* read the message through what is seen first.



Figure 1. Cinematic representation of the performance of *Foi Doa* (AWVisual channel)

The comparison can be seen in a video from Mauritz Andrew's channel. The practice of *Prayer Foi* is displayed without any special visual processing. Players wear casual clothes in an ordinary environment without aesthetic styling. There is no attempt to build a certain impression on the audience. Documentation like this is closer to everyday practice. A contrast arises between the constructed representation and the practice displayed directly.



Figure 2. Documentation of the daily performance of the Foi Doa (Mauritz Andrew channel)

The visual difference is followed by a difference in response patterns *Audiences*. The comments on AWVisual videos show the tendency to use diction that refers to aesthetic beauty. Through textual data encoding, audience responses are dominated by visual appreciation categories. Words such as "beautiful", "heaven", and "wonderful" appear repeatedly in various forms, as seen in the representative verbatim quotes: "Flores nature is beautiful, like in heaven" or "The combination of scenery and music is amazing". In contrast, the response to musical structure is relatively limited. More attention stops on the display. This condition suggests that meaning does not develop in depth, but tends to follow the visual direction it is displayed. In the digital context, this tendency is related to the simplification of cultural meaning due to the dominance of visual representations (Pizzolitto, 2023; Tunnikmah et al., 2024).

Further digging into the comment data unit shows a classification of responses dominated by external elements of music. Of the total comments analyzed on the cinematic channel, about 70% of them refer exclusively to the beauty of Ngada's natural landscape and the technical quality of the filming. In contrast, only about 12% of the comments alluded to the auditory aspect, which was limited to general expressions such as "the voice is soothing" without identifying the character of the Foi Doa instrument itself. This phenomenon indicates the existence of a hierarchy of meaning in which visual stimuli occupy the top position, while musical substance serves as a complement to the atmosphere of the show.

This inequality confirms that in the *digital platform* ecosystem, language integrated with design and visual imagery is more effective at triggering interaction compared to stand-alone text or voice. This condition creates a consumption pattern in which *the audience* feels that they have "understood" the *tradition of Foi Doa* only by absorbing its aesthetic representation, even though the understanding of the functional and technical context of the instrument remains at the surface level. This emphasizes that the increase in the number of *engagement* on social media cannot be directly used as an indicator of the success of cultural literacy in the public space.

Different situations do not develop on simple documentation videos. The number of comments is very limited and does not form a strong response pattern. The interactions that emerge tend to be short and do not develop further. Cultural practices that are displayed as they are do not receive comparable attention in the digital space.

The relationship between visibility and *audience* response can be seen from these findings. Strong visuals encourage increased engagement, but are not followed by a deepening of understanding of musical practice. Access to content does not automatically result in deeper meaning. This condition suggests that exposure to cultural representation is not always accompanied by an adequate process of reflection. Visibility in the digital space tends to drive engagement at the surface level without reinforcing deeper understanding.

3.2 Discussion

Digital visibility in practice *Also Prayer* shows a tendency not to work completely neutrally. Engagement *Audiences* The high level of cinematic content is not always followed by a deepening of musical understanding. The distance between exposure and meaning is beginning to be seen in digital culture consumption patterns. Hou et al. (2022) shows that the digitization of cultural heritage can encourage decontextualization. The cultural practices of Ngada have not disappeared, but have undergone a shift in meaning when they are present as objects of spectacle, while their spiritual function remains in local practices (Agung Nono et al., 2026).

The shift does not stand alone. Cultural representations are moving with the demands of visibility to stay present in digital flows. Cinematic forms were chosen because they are easier to attract attention *Audiences*. Välvirronen (2021) explains that mediatization directs social practices to conform to the logic of promotion. Everyday context *Also Prayer* the simple ones become less visible, replaced by constructed visual representations. This change marks a shift in the relationship between cultural practices and their contexts (Hein & Foster, 2022; Santoso et al., 2026). Apart from being preservation, the digitization of traditional music is often directed as a form of cultural diplomacy to reach out *Audiences* Global (Sinulingga et al., 2024).

The change in shape is followed by a change in the way *Audiences* responded. Attention no longer moves towards the musical structure, but stops at the visual appearance. The landscape, color, and composition of the image take center stage. São Paulo (2022) shows that visual culture shapes the way messages are understood through what is seen. The musical dimension is still present, but it does not become the main point in the process of meaning. Diction such as "beautiful" and "heaven" in the comments show this tendency.

This tendency reflects a broader shift from experience to representation. Mediated art tends to be presented in a more consumable form (Tunnikmah et al., 2024). Music in the digital space is often understood as part of a broader experience, rather than as a structure that is analyzed in depth (Pizzolitto, 2023). Response *Audiences* rarely moves towards musical exploration (Larasati et al., 2024; Samarasinghe, 2024). This condition challenges the philosophy of music education that should place music as an integral part of life and reflection. This tension between auditory experience and visual representation has implications for the way cultural values are commodified in the digital ecosystem. Music that initially served as a deeply communal practice, now tends to be presented as a supporting element of visual aesthetics to make it easier for global audiences to consume (Tunnikmah et al., 2024). In this context, the 'logic of the media' (Hjarvard, 2013) not only changes the form of the presentation, but also dictates the priority of the audience in

interpreting a work. Complex auditory experiences are often reduced to mere soundscapes to reinforce a grand visual narrative. >

This condition is in line with Debord's (1967) thesis regarding the dominance of spectacle that has the potential to alienate humans from the essence of authentic experience. For the discourse of music education, this shift is a serious challenge to the audience's ability to critically appreciate the structure of sound. When the audience's attention has been conditioned by algorithms to stop at artificial initial impressions, the depth of the musical and spiritual meaning of instruments like *the Foi Doa* becomes increasingly difficult to reach (Pizzolitto, 2023). Therefore, high digital visibility is not a guarantee for the sustainability of traditional values, but rather a new negotiation space that demands reflective awareness from its users.

This series of conditions leads to what in this study is formulated as the paradox of visibility. This concept intersects with previous critical traditions. Walter Benjamin's (1936) view of the loss of "aura" through mechanical reproduction, combined with the concept of *Society of the Spectacle* from Guy Debord (1967), provides the basis for unraveling the shift. These two thoughts show how cultural experience is changing from contextually intact practices to fragmented, visual-first forms of representation. In the development of the media, Hjarvard's theory of mediatization (2008) reinforcing this assumption by demonstrating the necessity of social practices to adapt to the *platform*.

Based on this foundation, the paradox of visibility in this study specifically reads the incompatibility between the widespread cultural exposure in the digital space and the shrinking meaning of the audience. The musical dimension and spiritual value that are difficult to translate into images tend to be eliminated, both in terms of viewing and audience response. This pattern cannot be read simply as a technical impact of the digitization process. This is more the result of the representation selection mechanism in digital consumption practices that rely heavily on visual elements.

This space of meaning then narrows due to the lack of the audience's reflection process when consuming the spectacle. Broad exposure does not automatically lead to a deeper understanding. Recent studies have shown that access without reflection limits the depth of meaning. A similar pattern is seen in the audience's response to *Foi Doa*, where high engagement does not develop into an exploration of further meaning.

The paradox of visibility in this context does not only show the tension between popularity and meaning. Visibility also serves as a selection mechanism for what can be displayed and understood. The dominant visual representation expands the reach, but at the same time filters out the meaning left in digital consumption. The digitization of *Foi Doa* opens up wide access, but in the same process limits the way in which these cultural practices are interpreted by the audience.

4. CONCLUSION

The high audience engagement on the cinematic show *Foi Doa* proves not always to develop into a deep musical understanding. The real gap between the breadth of exposure and the shallowness of meaning is a central finding in this digital culture consumption pattern. Visual representation has great control over how traditions are

received, which ultimately makes the spiritual dimension and sound structure of the instrument tend to be marginalized from the audience's discourse space.

The logic of the media completely does not work in a neutral manner against traditional practices. Based on the formulation of the visibility paradox, this study proposes a theoretical proposition regarding the occurrence of "digital colonialism of meaning". In such an ecosystem, global *platform* algorithms driven by engagement metrics structurally discriminate against non-photogenic expressions of local culture. Cultural practices are indirectly forced to conform to the standards of visual aesthetics in order to survive and gain public attention. Therefore, digitalization is not sufficiently understood as a preservation instrument, but functions as a selection mechanism that also filters and limits the way culture is interpreted.

Based on these findings, this formulation offers a practical foothold for the cultural preservation agenda. Content creators and local artists seem to need to rethink the balance between cinematic allure and the integrity of traditional information. The risk of shrinking meaning can actually be suppressed through contextual measures, for example through the addition of educational narratives or camera highlights in the details of the instrument's playing technique. At the policy level, governments and educational institutions must begin to realize that the work of digitalization should not be completed just by producing shows that spoil the eyes. Building the foundation of musical literacy for the audience is actually a more urgent task, so that the cultural spectacle that passes on the screen can be digested more critically.

This study certainly cannot be separated from the limitations. The observation landscape used specifically only targets the YouTube ecosystem through two contrasting representations of presentation. Responding to this gap, future research has a wide opportunity to dissect similar phenomena on micro-platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. In these spaces, visual dominance and the demands of rapid circulation are believed to work much more aggressively. Another direction of exploration that is no less important is to turn the point of view towards the main actor. Examining how Foi Doa musicians on the field negotiate, or even are forced to compromise with the platform's aesthetic standards when performing in front of the lens, will certainly complete the discussion building related to the mediatization of this tradition.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

This research was conceived and designed by Author 1 who is also responsible for data analysis and manuscript writing. Author 2 plays a role in data collection and field documentation as well as the organization of initial data. Author 3 contributes to strengthening methodologies, theoretical analysis, and data validation. Author 4 was involved in data interpretation and cultural contextualization as well as conducting a review of the manuscript. Author 5 provides technical support, assists in data processing, and does editing and formatting of manuscripts.

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