

## COMMUNICATION PATTERNS OF WAYANG GOLEK PUPPETEERS IN PROVIDING SOCIAL CRITICISM MESSAGES TO THEIR AUDIENCES IN BANDUNG REGENCY

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the communication patterns of wayang golek puppeteers in Bandung Regency as they deliver social criticism messages to their audiences. The primary objective is to understand how traditional wayang golek performances can address contemporary social issues while engaging audiences in meaningful dialogue. Employing a qualitative research methodology, this study utilized direct observations and in-depth interviews with key participants, including wayang golek puppeteers and audience members. The data collection involved attending live performances, analyzing the content and delivery of social critiques, and conducting interviews to gain insights into the effectiveness and reception of these performances. The findings reveal that Wayang Golek puppeteers employ interactive techniques to engage their audiences, incorporating contemporary issues into traditional narratives to provoke thought and reflection. The performances demonstrate a successful adaptation of cultural practices to address modern societal challenges, fostering a participatory dialogue between the puppeteers and their audiences. The study highlights the role of cultural symbols and allegories in bridging traditional values with contemporary social critiques and underscores the importance of maintaining cultural heritage while addressing current issues. The results contribute to the broader discourse on participatory communication and the role of traditional art forms in societal change.

**Keywords:** Wayang golek, social criticism, participatory communication

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pola komunikasi para dalang wayang golek di Kabupaten Bandung dalam menyampaikan pesan kritik sosial kepada audiens mereka. Tujuan utamanya adalah untuk memahami bagaimana pertunjukan wayang golek tradisional dapat menangani isu sosial kontemporer sambil melibatkan audiens dalam dialog yang bermakna. Menggunakan metodologi penelitian kualitatif, studi ini memanfaatkan observasi langsung dan wawancara mendalam dengan peserta kunci, termasuk para dalang wayang golek dan anggota audiens. Pengumpulan data melibatkan kehadiran pada pertunjukan langsung, menganalisis konten dan penyampaian kritik*

*sosial, serta melakukan wawancara untuk mendapatkan wawasan tentang efektivitas dan penerimaan pertunjukan tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa para dalang wayang golek menggunakan teknik interaktif untuk melibatkan audiens mereka, menggabungkan isu kontemporer ke dalam narasi tradisional untuk memprovokasi pemikiran dan refleksi. Pertunjukan tersebut menunjukkan adaptasi budaya yang berhasil dalam menangani tantangan sosial modern, serta memfasilitasi dialog partisipatif antara para dalang dan audiens mereka. Studi ini menyoroti peran simbol budaya dan alegori dalam menjembatani nilai-nilai tradisional dengan kritik sosial kontemporer, serta menekankan pentingnya menjaga warisan budaya sambil menangani isu-isu terkini. Hasil penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskursus yang lebih luas mengenai komunikasi partisipatif dan peran bentuk seni tradisional dalam perubahan sosial.*

**Kata kunci:** Wayang golek, kritik sosial, komunikasi partisipatif

## INTRODUCTION

Wayang golek, as one of Indonesia's traditional art forms, has played a significant role as a medium of communication and entertainment, delivering messages on morals, social issues, politics, and culture (Riana & Putra, 2024). This art, passed down through generations, is not just entertainment but also serves as a means to convey social criticism to the public. Amidst the rapid advancement of technology and digital media, Wayang Golek remains relevant in delivering social criticism through the performances of the puppeteers (dalang). As the central figure in a wayang golek performance, the dalang plays a critical role in conveying social messages to the audience through a unique communication pattern (Nalan dkk., 2023).

The communication patterns used by these dalang result from a combination of oral tradition, symbolism, and improvisation, which are adjusted to the current social and political context. In the context of Bandung Regency, Wayang Golek remains an effective medium for conveying social criticism, particularly on issues related to governance, corruption, injustice, and other social problems. However, in delivering these messages, the dalang faces challenges in making the social criticism relevant, accessible, and understandable to a diverse audience, varying in age, educational background, and social-cultural contexts (Widiastuti & Aziz, 2024).

This research adopts the symbolic communication theory and rhetorical theory within the context of traditional culture. Symbolic communication theory, introduced by Utomo, (2020), emphasizes that human interaction is based on meaningful symbols, and their social actions are rooted in the interpretations they give to those symbols. In the context of wayang golek, the stories enacted by the dalang are filled with symbols that carry deep meanings and serve as a medium of communication with the audience. The dalang employs characters, plotlines, and humor to convey social criticism messages relevant to contemporary social conditions.

Additionally, Aristotle's rhetorical theory is also pertinent in this research, particularly in understanding how dalang employs ethos, pathos, and logos in delivering social criticism to their audience. Ethos refers to the dalang's credibility as a respected communicator in

their community, pathos relates to the effort of stirring emotions in the audience, and logos pertains to the logical arguments used to strengthen the social criticism being delivered (Sulton dkk., 2021).

There have been numerous studies on communication within traditional performing arts. For example, Farida & Zakiyah, (2022) highlighted that wayang golek plays an important role in delivering social criticism, especially concerning political and economic issues in West Java. Susilo argued that the communication patterns of the dalang in delivering social criticism often use symbolic language and humor to avoid conflict with those being criticized. Another study by Masunah dkk., (2022) examined how the dalang, as the primary communicator in wayang golek performances, employs specific strategies to convey social messages. Wicaksono emphasized that one of the strategies used by dalang is the use of metaphors and allegories that are tailored to the social context of the local community. Meanwhile, Widagdo, (2020) noted that while Wayang Golek remains a medium for social criticism, globalization and technological advances have diminished its popularity, especially among the younger generation. Rohman suggested that there should be adaptations in how messages are delivered to keep Wayang Golek relevant in the digital era.

This research has several significant differences from previous studies. First, it focuses specifically on the communication patterns of dalang in conveying social criticism in Bandung Regency, which has not been widely explored in detail. Second, this study delves deeper into symbolic communication and rhetorical theory, examining how dalang use symbols, humor, and emotions to influence their audience. Third, it considers how the communication patterns of dalang have changed in the digital era, where they must compete with other media such as television, the internet, and social media in delivering social criticism. The novelty of this research lies in the in-depth exploration of how Wayang Golek dalang in Bandung Regency adapts to social and technological changes in delivering social criticism to their audiences. This research not only focuses on the traditional use of symbols but also explores how dalang leverage modern and digital media to convey their messages. Moreover, the study will examine the audience's response to the communication patterns of dalang and whether social criticism delivered through wayang golek remains effective in the context of modern society.

This research is highly urgent because wayang golek, as an intangible cultural heritage, risks losing its relevance in modern society if not properly adapted. This research aims to identify strategies that dalang can use to maintain Wayang Golek's existence as an effective medium of social criticism. Furthermore, this study is essential for preserving Indonesia's traditional performing arts, which are increasingly being overshadowed by digital media and globalization. On the other hand, social criticism plays a crucial role in maintaining societal balance, particularly in checking power and voicing public concerns. Wayang golek, as a traditional medium rich in local values, can serve as an independent social control tool. Therefore, this research will make a significant contribution to social communication studies through traditional performing arts.

This study aims to describe and analyze the communication patterns of Wayang Golek Dalang in delivering social criticism messages to audiences in Bandung Regency. The specific objectives of this research are as follows: 1) To identify the symbols and communication methods used by dalang in conveying social criticism messages, 2) To analyze the communication strategies used by dalang to influence their audience through the use of humor, metaphors, and rhetoric, 3) To examine the audience's response to the social criticism delivered through wayang golek performances, 4) To explore how wayang golek dalang adapt to using technology and digital media to convey social criticism, 5) To identify the challenges and opportunities faced by wayang golek dalang in maintaining the relevance of wayang golek as a medium of social criticism in the modern era.

## **METHOD**

This study on the communication patterns of wayang golek puppeteers in delivering social criticism messages to their audiences in Bandung Regency will utilize a qualitative research approach. The research will employ multiple methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of how wayang golek performances communicate social critiques. The primary method will be in-depth interviews with a selection of experienced dalang (puppeteers). These interviews will explore their techniques, strategies, and intentions behind incorporating social criticism into their performances. Interview questions will focus on how they choose and deliver their messages, the symbols and themes they use, and how they perceive their audience's reception and understanding (Jaya, 2020).

In addition to interviews, participant observation will be conducted during live wayang golek performances. This observational approach will allow the researcher to directly witness the interaction between the dalang and their audience, noting the nuances of how social criticism is conveyed through dialogue, puppetry, and performance style. Observations will be systematically recorded and analyzed to identify specific communication patterns and techniques used to address social issues. To complement these methods, a content analysis of performance scripts and recorded shows will be performed. This analysis will identify recurring themes, symbols, and rhetorical strategies employed by the dalang in presenting social critiques. By examining the narrative and symbolic content of performances, the research will reveal how these traditional art forms are utilized to engage with contemporary social issues. Together, these methods will provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of how wayang golek puppeteers communicate social criticism. The combination of interviews, observations, and content analysis will offer valuable insights into the effectiveness and adaptation of these communication practices in the context of modern societal challenges.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The exploration of communication patterns of wayang golek puppeteers in delivering social criticism messages to their audiences in Bandung Regency has yielded insightful findings. This section discusses the results in detail and relates them to relevant theoretical

frameworks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how traditional performances adapt to contemporary social issues.

### **1. Findings from In-Depth Interviews**

The interviews with dalang (puppeteers) revealed that wayang golek performances are a sophisticated medium for social commentary. Dalang emphasized that their performances are designed to address current social issues while maintaining the traditional essence of wayang golek. They use a combination of humor, satire, and symbolic representations to engage their audiences and provoke critical thinking. Dalang highlighted that the integration of social criticism into their performances is not merely an artistic choice but a response to the evolving societal landscape. For instance, puppeteers often incorporate contemporary issues such as corruption, inequality, and environmental concerns into their narratives. This practice aligns with the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, which posits that individuals and groups create and interpret symbols within social interactions to convey meanings and construct reality (Prasetya dkk., 2024). The use of symbolic representations in Wayang Golek allows dalang to communicate complex social critiques in a culturally resonant manner.

### **2. Observations of Live Performances**

Participant observation during live performances corroborated the findings from the interviews. The observations revealed that dalang employs a variety of techniques to convey social criticism. These include the use of allegorical characters, exaggerated gestures, and ironic dialogues. For example, a character representing a corrupt official might be depicted with exaggerated flaws and comedic mishaps, which serves to highlight the absurdity of corruption in a way that is both engaging and thought-provoking. The observations also noted the interactive nature of wayang golek performances. Dalang often involves the audience in the performance through direct engagement and responsive dialogue. This interactive approach aligns with the concept of participatory communication, which emphasizes the role of audience engagement in shaping the message and its impact (Akhbar dkk., 2024). By actively involving the audience, dalang ensures that the social criticism is not only delivered but also received and contemplated.

### **3. Content Analysis of Performance Scripts**

The content analysis of performance scripts and recorded shows provided further insights into the thematic and symbolic content of Wayang Golek's performances. The analysis revealed recurring themes of justice, moral integrity, and social responsibility. Symbols such as the figure of the wise king or the foolish advisor were commonly used to critique social issues. These symbols are deeply rooted in Javanese culture and serve as powerful tools for conveying social messages. The theoretical framework of cultural symbolism supports these findings, suggesting that symbols are integral to how cultural meanings are constructed and communicated (Halimah dkk., 2020). In Wayang Golek, cultural symbols are utilized to reflect societal values and critiques, thereby reinforcing the connection between traditional performance and contemporary social commentary.

#### **4. Discussion of Findings**

The integration of social criticism into wayang golek performances reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. Dalang's use of humor, satire, and symbolic representation allows them to address contemporary issues while preserving the traditional elements of the art form. This adaptability is crucial in maintaining the relevance of wayang golek in a rapidly changing societal context. The findings also highlight the role of Wayang Golek as a platform for participatory communication. The interactive nature of the performances ensures that social critiques are not only presented but also actively discussed and reflected upon by the audience. This participatory approach enhances the impact of the social messages conveyed through the performances.

Furthermore, the use of cultural symbols in Wayang Golek aligns with the concept of cultural symbolism, illustrating how traditional art forms can adapt to address modern social issues. By leveraging culturally resonant symbols, dalang effectively communicates social critiques in a manner that is both accessible and meaningful to their audience.

#### **5. Theoretical Implications**

The results of this study underscore the relevance of symbolic interactionism and cultural symbolism in understanding the communication patterns of wayang golek puppeteers. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework for analyzing how dalang uses symbols and interactions to convey social critiques, while cultural symbolism highlights the significance of traditional symbols in addressing contemporary issues. Additionally, the findings contribute to the broader discourse on participatory communication, demonstrating how traditional art forms can engage audiences in meaningful dialogue about social issues. The adaptability of wayang golek performances exemplifies the potential of cultural practices to address modern societal challenges while preserving their traditional roots. This dynamic interaction between traditional performance art and contemporary social issues offers a compelling case for the relevance and resilience of cultural expressions in a globalized world.

In examining the participatory aspects of Wayang Golek, it becomes clear that these performances are not merely passive exhibitions of art but active forums for social discourse. The wayang golek puppeteers, or dalang, utilize their performances as a platform for engaging their audiences in critical discussions about societal norms, governance, and ethical behavior. This engagement is facilitated through various interactive techniques, including direct audience participation, responsive dialogue, and the incorporation of contemporary issues into the narratives. The role of the dalangs as facilitators of dialogue highlights the significance of participatory communication in fostering a deeper understanding of social issues. By involving the audience in the performance, dalang not only entertains but also provokes thought and reflection on the issues presented. This interactive approach aligns with the principles of participatory communication theory, which emphasizes the importance of audience engagement in shaping and reinforcing messages (Nuswantoro dkk., 2022). Through this engagement,



Wayang Golek's performances transform into a collaborative space where social critique is explored, discussed, and addressed collectively.

Furthermore, the adaptability of wayang golek performances demonstrates how traditional art forms can evolve to remain relevant in the face of changing social contexts. The integration of modern themes and issues into the performances reflects the ability of cultural practices to respond to contemporary challenges while maintaining their traditional essence. This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that traditional art forms continue to resonate with audiences in a rapidly changing world. It also underscores the potential for cultural practices to serve as a bridge between past and present, offering valuable insights into how societies navigate and address ongoing social issues (Hidayat & Kasiyan, 2024).

The use of cultural symbols and allegories in wayang golek performances is particularly noteworthy in this regard. By employing symbols that are deeply embedded in Javanese culture, dalang creates a bridge between traditional values and modern social critiques. These symbols serve as a means of connecting the audience with both historical and contemporary narratives, allowing for a richer and more nuanced exploration of social issues. The effectiveness of this approach is evident in the audience's engagement with the performances and their responses to the social critiques presented.

The findings also highlight the importance of maintaining cultural heritage while addressing modern issues. The preservation of traditional elements in wayang golek, such as the use of traditional music, costumes, and puppetry techniques, ensures that the art form retains its cultural significance. At the same time, the incorporation of contemporary themes allows Wayang Golek to remain relevant and impactful in addressing current social challenges. This balance between tradition and innovation is a key factor in the continued success and influence of Wayang Golek as a medium for social critique.

In addition to its role in participatory communication, Wayang Golek also contributes to the broader discourse on the role of art in societal change. Art forms, including traditional performance arts, have long been recognized for their potential to inspire, provoke, and effect change. Wayang Golek's ability to address social issues through its performances exemplifies the power of art to challenge societal norms, raise awareness, and promote social change. This aligns with the broader understanding of art as a catalyst for societal reflection and transformation (Widiastuti dkk., 2024).

The study of Wayang Golek's role in social criticism also underscores the importance of context in understanding the impact of cultural practices. The unique cultural and historical context of Bandung Regency provides a rich backdrop for exploring how traditional art forms can adapt to address contemporary issues. This context-specific approach highlights the value of examining cultural practices within their local settings to gain a deeper understanding of their significance and impact.

The findings also suggest potential avenues for future research. For instance, further studies could explore how wayang golek performances are received by different demographic groups, including younger audiences and those outside the immediate

cultural context of Bandung Regency. This could provide additional insights into the effectiveness of Wayang Golek as a medium for social critique and its potential to engage diverse audiences. Additionally, the research could investigate the impact of technological advancements on traditional performances, including how digital media and platforms influence the presentation and reception of Wayang Golek.

In conclusion, the study of Wayang Golek's communication patterns reveals the profound ways in which traditional art forms can engage audiences in meaningful dialogue about social issues. The adaptability of wayang golek performances underscores the potential for cultural practices to address modern societal challenges while preserving their traditional roots. By fostering participatory communication and incorporating contemporary themes, Wayang Golek demonstrates the resilience and relevance of traditional art forms in a globalized world. The insights gained from this study contribute to the broader understanding of the role of art in societal change and offer valuable perspectives on how cultural practices can navigate and address ongoing social issues.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study of communication patterns in Wayang Golek's performances reveals a sophisticated approach to delivering social criticism. Dalang's use of humor, satire, and symbolic representation allows them to address contemporary issues while maintaining the cultural integrity of the art form. The interactive nature of the performances and the use of cultural symbols underscore the relevance of traditional practices in modern social discourse. This research highlights the dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity and provides valuable insights into how cultural practices can adapt to address contemporary challenges.

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