



## Audience Participation in Virtual Wayang Performances of Post-Pandemic Covid – 19 in Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aims to understand the reauthorization of the dalang or the shadow puppet master and the increase in the role of the audience in the staging of wayang performances.

**Methods:** To understand this phenomenon, this research makes use of a qualitative methodology using a case study of the performances of the "Wargo Laras" wayang performance group, a group that stages the most performances in Yogyakarta. Data was collected through observation and in-depth interviews.

**Result:** Research shows that virtual wayang performances have contributed to increased audience participation resulting in reduced authority of the dalang. The role of the puppeteer, who in original traditional performances was the group's most powerful person, both on and behind the stage, has now been reduced, as it is distributed among other members of the performance (sinden or female singer, pengawit or gamelan players), or guest stars, and crew members who handle the media.

**Conclusions:** Virtual wayang performance have become part of post-pandemic performances. Wayang theatre, which were originally very traditional and far removed from new media, suddenly have had to coexist with new media. This study recommends further research on wayang wider selection of performance groups to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the audience of wayang performances.

**Keywords:** wayang desacralization, virtual wayang, *climen* wayang, post-pandemic performances

### مشاركة المشاهدين في عرض عرائس الظل الافتراضي في عروض الدمى ما بعد جائحة كورونا في إندونيسيا

كريستينا نوريانتا بواترا<sup>1</sup>, هنگار بودي براستيا<sup>1</sup>, ويسما نوغرافاها كريستيانتو<sup>2</sup>, لوشيا لوسي آني هنديانى<sup>3</sup>

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### ملخص

**الأهداف:** تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم إعادة تحويل دالانج أو سيد عرائس الظل، وزيادة دور الجمهور في تنظيم عروض عرائس الظل.

**المنهجية:** لفهم هذه الظاهرة، تعتمد هذه الدراسة منهجية نوعية باستخدام دراسة الحالة لأداء فرقه عروض "وارغو لاراس" للواياغن، وهي الفرقه التي تتنظم أكبر عدد من العروض في يوجياكارتا. تم جمع البيانات من خلال الملاحظة والمقابلات العميقه. **النتائج:** يُظهر البحث أن العروض الافتراضية للواياغن قد ساهمت في زيادة مشاركة الجمهور مما أدى إلى تقليل سلطة الدالانج. وقد تم تخفيض دور محركي الدمى، الذي كان في العروض التقليدية الأصلية للشخص الأكثر قوه في الفريق، سواء على المسرح أو خلف الكواليس، حيث تم توزيع دوره الآن بين أعضاء آخرين في العرض (الستدن أو المغنية الأنثى، ولاعبي جاميلان أو الموسقيين)، أو الضيوف المعروفين، وأفراد الطاقم الذين يتعاملون مع وسائل الإعلام.

**الخلاصة:** أصبحت عروض الواياغن الافتراضية جزءاً من العروض ما بعد الجائحة. فمسرح عرائس الظل، الذي كان في الأصل تقليدياً جداً ويعيده كل البعد عن وسائل الإعلام الجديدة، اضطر فجأة إلى التعايش مع وسائل الإعلام الجديدة. وتوصي هذه الدراسة بإجراء بحوث إضافية على مجموعة أوسع من فرق عروض عرائس الظل للحصول على صورة أكثر شمولية للجمهور في عروض الواياغن.

**الكلمات الدالة:** لاتقديمية لعب الظل، الواياغن الافتراضي، لعب الظل *climen*، عروض ما بعد الجائحة.

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## 1. Introduction

Wayang (shadow puppet) performances have undergone a process of desacralization due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, wayang performances were considered to be sacred performances as they were part of sacred ritual ceremonies and commemorations of certain semi-sacred events. The sacredness of the performance can be seen from the very central role of the dalang (puppet master). The dalang was often considered to be a person with spiritual abilities, and many were even believed to have the ability to perform purification ceremonies, to purify people from bad luck or experiences. The decline in the sacredness of wayang performances can be observed from the decline in the importance of the dalang's role caused by the increasing involvement of the audience in wayang performances and the reduced duration of those performances. This can be seen in the numerous virtual wayang performances that people are able to watch every day. Based on observations of the wayang YouTube channel, there is sure to be a virtual puppet performance ([kluban.net](http://kluban.net)) every night. On a normal day, you will be able to find more than two performances on YouTube. On Saturdays or holidays there are more than 20 performances. For example, on Saturday, December 10, 2022 there were 22 shows and Saturday, December 17, 2022 there were 23 shows (<https://kluban.net>), some of which have a short duration and often called *climen* performances, which means brief or what is necessary. Puppet performances that were usually staged all night long or for around 6-7 hours, are now only around 2-3 hours. The pandemic has resulted in a decline in the sacred value of the wayang performances. This shows that a desacralization of the wayang performance is occurring.

There have not been many studies on pandemic and post-pandemic puppet performances so far. The studies that have been carried out only focus on the efforts of the dalangs and their groups to stage the performances during the pandemic, for example Respa & Imelda's research (2022) on the use of digital capital by dalangs, or Windarsih's research (2021) on dalangs strategies to be able to survive during the pandemic. Other studies on wayang during the pandemic are the studies by Puguh (2021) and Kodi, et al (2022) regarding the ritual of wayang performances to resist the pandemic, or the emergence of alternative wayang during the pandemic (Hendro & Marajaya, 2022; Saadudin, et al, 2022). It has been found that the studies of wayang from an anthropological perspective considered to be the most comprehensive, namely *The Dalang Behind the Wayang* (1985) and *Phenomenology of Puppet Theatre* (2005), have several shortcomings, among others, the audience has not been studied. Both studies look at wayang performances from the perspective of the puppet masters and sponsors. The perspective of the audience has not been considered, even though the audience is a very important element and has the potential to become a sponsor. Therefore, it is relevant to conduct research on wayang audiences in post-pandemic performances.

The purpose of this paper is to fill in the shortcomings of previous studies which ignored aspects of audience involvement and the role of the dalang in post-pandemic performances. Previous research has focused more on the efforts of the dalangs to survive during the pandemic. In line with this, this paper contains three things related to (1) audience involvement in virtual performances; (2) public acceptance of short duration virtual wayang performances; and (3) the authority of the dalangs and their supporters in the post pandemic. The presentation of these three things will provide knowledge about the condition of the audience and the role of the post-pandemic dalang. These three things will be discussed in the following sections of this article.

This article is based on the argument that the desacralization of wayang performances is determined by the increasing involvement of the audience in those performances. During the pre-pandemic era, when there were no virtual performances and the wayang shows took place directly before an audience, the implementation of the shows was determined by the dalang and sponsors. Meanwhile, in virtual shows, the audience can freely interact with the dalangs and the support crew. A relationship that is too close between the dalang and the audience could reduce the dalang's authority. The audience will feel they have the right to control the performance. In fact, they feel as if they have the power to control the performance which causes a decrease in the authority of the dalang. This deauthorization of the dalang results in the desacralization of the wayang. Thus, the change in wayang performances from offline to online shows has resulted in a decrease in the dalang's authority and a loss of their control over the wayang performance.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Wayang Performance

Wayang is one of the most popular types of performing arts in the Indonesian society. The characters that appear in the wayang performance have personalities and traits that are revealed through the story revealed in the performances (Subiyantoro et al., 2020). Based on the form, puppet performance is divided into two categories. The first is *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet), which involves puppets made of buffalo skin and manipulated by a dalang (Nugraheni, 2021). The second is *wayang wong* (a performance involving human actors rather than puppets) which is staged like a drama (Ruastiti et al., 2021). Both wayang performances are accompanied by gamelan music and female singers known as *sinden*. In line with this, the wayang has become part of Javanese people's lives through historical events and the values contained in each story (Nur Awalin, 2019). Apart from being a performing art, wayang also plays an important role in conveying messages (Krishna, 2020; Purwantoro et al., 2022; Prasetya et al., 2023). This is similar to what Walisongo, revered saints of Islam in Indonesia, did in spreading the teachings of Islam in Java (Anggoro, 2018). As a work of art that contains meaning, values and moral messages and has implications for society, wayang was nominated as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2003.

Wayang was popular in the early 19th century. Richard Teschner described it to be similar to performances taking place on stage in Europe (Cohen, 2007). Wayang gained popularity in the post-colonial period and this popularity has continued to grow until today (Purwantoro et al., 2022). In line with this, wayang experienced a shift in the stories that are told. Previously, wayang performances were based on stories from the world of wayang and were staged all night long, but in the current era wayang performances have become a medium for conveying teachings and have a much shorter duration (Novica et al., 2020). This shift is also demonstrated in the development of the use of new technologies (Tomo et al., 2017). A shift as occurred in the place where the wayang was performed, a shift from the stage to social media (Nazren, 2022). This shift represents the negotiation between the performance and the staging of works of art and the continual advances in technology and information (Purwantoro et al., 2022).

### 2.2. Participation of the Virtual Audience

The audience consists of the people who watch a performance to appreciate the works of art displayed (Neira et al., 2021). In this case the audience is an important element in the performing arts. In line with this, the participation of the audience has implications for the rating of the performing arts produced by the artists. At the same time, the digital era has transformed real-life stages into virtual media. This in turn has also changed the way audiences enjoy the performing arts (Chollet, 2017). Virtual audiences can enjoy the performance using their mobile phones. Nevertheless, virtual performances share the same concepts as live performances, in that the scenes shown in virtual space are also performed in real-life performances. In virtual performances, the audience move between online and offline spaces. This confirms that this migration between those spaces generates a new set of aesthetic possibilities for the performing arts (Lennox, 2022). Thus, the audience in virtual space gets very personal, intimate and remote experiences at the same time (Fischer-Lichte, 2008).

In virtual performances, the audience becomes a kind of pervasive machine, in which the virtual blurs the boundaries of reality and fiction during the performance (Jacobson, 2022). Digital technology in the form of virtual space creates a new experience in watching shows in which the aesthetics of a show are less pronounced (Fischer, 2022). In a study conducted by Mark (2022), virtual art performances show that technology has become a medium for self-development through the interaction between the audience and the work of art that enables the viewers to be present both in the real and virtual world (Mark, 2022). Even though the audience is not visible, virtual performances can still have a social effect (Oh, 2018). This is shown by Sant's study (2013) which shows that virtual performances can motivate audiences. Thus, virtuality functions as a soft boundary that becomes a medium for the meeting of virtual reality and real-life, but also has an influence on material, physical and real life (Dixon, 2015; Wilson, 2020).

### 2.3. Desacralization

Sacred is considered to be something that is holy, huge, and powerful. Sacred is often associated with the existence of a belief, religion, and something that has an inner or spiritual meaning (Montemaggi, 2015). In modern society, this concept

of sacred has begun to fade along with the influence of technological and scientific advances (Kobzar, 2021). Advances in technology supported by the internet have brought about the occurrence of desacralization in society or the shift of society towards profanity. In a profane society, desacralization occurs because of commercialization brought about by the influence of capitalism (Zulkifli, 2019). Commodification occurring in a profane society has degraded values that are considered sacred in society (Zulkifli, 2019). This is in line with the secular tendencies of western culture (Tsepkova, 2021). Thus, the change from sacred to desacralization is influenced by technological developments and capitalism which are influenced by western culture (Tsepkova, 2021).

The beginnings of the emergence of desacralization in society can be seen in Emile Durkheim's work "The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life" which divides people's knowledge into three, namely animism, abstract, and modern. This division aims to observe the emergence of desacralization through the interpretation of religious symbols (Khair, 2020). This attitude of desacralization is shown through the degrading of the meaning of sacred phenomena or objects and partly or completely changing the existing meaning (Riabov, 2020). In line with this, desacralization can occur in various aspects, such as in religious sermons where there is the use of worldly rather than sacred vocabulary and a reduction of meaning in sacred vocabulary such as the use of worldly vocabulary in a sacred context (Kravchenko et al., 2021). Desacralization can also occur in public spaces; this, for example, happened in the communist era in Russia, where political and ideological factors in 1917, succeeded in changing the names of cities with holy names (Tsepkova, 2021). Thus, desacralization in society gives rise to a change in attitude that changes the way people understand things.

### 3. Methods

This research was conducted in Yogyakarta, one of the cultural cities in Indonesia. In this city, various arts are found, one of which is the wayang performance. The city of Yogyakarta is also the home of wayang in Indonesia and wayang performances can be found in many places, both in rural and urban areas. In this city wayang performances are frequent, because they are part of ritual ceremonies as well as part of various events commemorating the life cycle of human beings. Wayang performances are used as material objects in this study on the basis that community activities have been permitted after the Covid-19 pandemic; in other words, the government has allowed people to assemble. Under these conditions, direct wayang performances staged for long durations of time and involving large numbers of spectators are permissible.

This is a qualitative study, using a case study approach to gain a deeper understanding of virtual wayang performances. The research was conducted by observing wayang performances, both purely virtual and live performances through live streaming. Observations were focused on the wayang performance events organized by the Wargo Laras wayang performance group. The selection of this group is based on the following factors: (1) it has the most opportunities to perform, and (2) it is the group that started virtual performances during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, this group, led by the dalang Seno Nugroho, held the most wayang performances in Yogyakarta. It performs all-night shows in various regions almost every day and thus their fans are spread all over Indonesia. During the pandemic, Wargo Laras' PWKS channel broadcast live streaming YouTube wayang performances watched by an average of 15,000 viewers per performance. The performance from the pre-pandemic to the post-pandemic Covid-19 is worth careful observation as this period had significant social, economic, and cultural impacts that compressed the staging of various performing arts.

During the pandemic, due to the restrictions for people to assemble, this group stopped performing for several months. To accommodate themselves to this condition the group finally designed a short performance, lasting 2 hours, broadcast live streaming and uploaded on YouTube and watched by thousands of viewers (<https://www.merdeka.com>). These efforts to stage wayang during the pandemic received an extraordinary response and many supporters followed the shows. On November 3, 2020, Seno Nugroho died. The Wargo Laras group that he established built went into a vacuum for 2 months but started performing again in January 2021 with alternating dalangs who were previously the group's music players or female singers (*sinden*).

Informants who were the source of information for this study are the leaders and members of the Wargo Laras group, the sponsors, and the audience of the performances. Members of the Wargo Laras group include the dalang, musicians

(gamelan players), and *sinden* (female singers). The sponsors interviewed were show sponsors who organized virtual wayang performances. The audience interviewed was an active audience, responding to the performance as well as a passive audience.

For this study, data was first collected through a review of secondary data originating from recorded performances on YouTube. This was followed by in-depth interviews with the main informants, namely the leader of the Wargo Laras group, the dalang and singers who performed, the show sponsors, and the virtual audience. The data analysis was carried out using the process outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014). During data reduction, data was classified based on the theme and purpose. Tables, figures and quotes were used to display data. Verification was done by establishing linkages between data to build internal coherence. Further verification was carried out by placing the data in its socio-cultural context.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Community Acceptance of Virtual wayang

The pandemic period was the most difficult period experienced by all artists, among others the wayang artists, namely the dalangs and their musicians. During the pandemic, due to the government restrictions of mass gatherings, including ritual ceremonies, the dalangs were not allowed to perform. Many dalangs and proponents of the show experienced economic difficulties. These difficulties encouraged the dalangs to innovate which gave birth to virtual wayang.



**Figure 1. The performance schedule of Wargo Laras wayang performances**

(Source: [https://www.instagram.com/wargolaras\\_classic/?hl=id](https://www.instagram.com/wargolaras_classic/?hl=id))

The pandemic sanctioned the existence of virtual wayang performances. After the pandemic was over, the implementation of virtual wayang performances were still recognized and accepted by the people. To see the public's acceptance of virtual wayang, a survey of wayang fan groups, whose members numbered in the hundreds, was conducted. Currently, every famous dalang certainly has a fan group which is manifested in a WA group or Facebook. For example, the fans of the dalang Seno Nugroho established the PWKS (*Pandemen Wayang Ki Seno* or community of Ki Seno Wayang Performance fans), fans of the dalang Ki Hadi Sugito formed the PKHS community (*Pandemen Ki Hadi Sugito*), fans of the dalang Rudi Gareng formed PWRG (*Pandemen Wayang Rudi Gareng*), fans of the dalang Ki Eko Suwaryo formed PDES (*Pandemen Dalang Eko Suwaryo* or Fans of Dalang Eko Suwaryo), and Sigid Aryanto's fans formed SAFC (*Ki Sigid Aryanto Fans Club*). Based on a survey of 100 respondents for each of the 5 wayang fan groups (Table 1), it can be seen that the community has accepted the custom of virtual wayang and short wayang performances.

**Table 1. Acceptance of virtual wayang and shortened wayang performances**

No	Wayang Lovers Community	Acceptance of virtual wayang		Acceptance of shortened wayang performances ( <i>climen</i> )	
		Accept	Reject	Accept	Reject
1	PWKS (Fans of Ki Seno Nugroho Wayang)	100	0	90	10
2	PKHS (Fans of Ki Hadi Sugito)	100	0	54	46
3	PWRG (Fans of Rudi Garens's Wayang)	100	0	50	50
4	PDES (Fans of Ki Dalang Eko Suwaryo)	100	0	60	40
5	SAFC (Ki Sigid Ariyanto Fans Club)	100	0	59	41
<b>Average</b>		100	0	62	48

Source: Survey of 100 members of the wayang fans/communities in December 2022

Regarding the shortened wayang show (*climen*), not all respondents could accept the existence of the shortened show. Only about 62% of respondents could accept this shortened version. The respondents' acceptance of the shortened wayang show was also supported by the number of sponsor requests for the shortened wayang shows of the Wargo Laras group. In December 2022, out of the 8 performances held, two performances were held in the shortened version and broadcasted virtually, and the other six performances were held in full (all night) but still held via live streaming (Figure 1). Based on the acknowledgment of the wayang fans above, it appears that virtual wayang shows, both the all-night or a shortened version, have been accepted by the people. One of the sponsors from Jakarta who was holding a wedding in Jakarta sponsored a wayang show held at a studio in Yogyakarta said that:

"We sponsored the shortened wayang show because we had limited funds, while we all are fans of the wayang performances of the group Wargo Laras" (Interview with AW, September 2022).

The same thing was also conveyed by a member of the PWRG:

Virtual puppets can be an alternative for me when Ki Rudi Gareng is performing in a faraway place which prevents me from watching it at that venue (BS, PWRG member).

Another informant, a PKHS member, said that the existence of virtual wayang was very good as it became an alternative for the original, but the experience of watching live performances cannot be replaced by watching virtual shows. He further stated:

"I am happy with virtual performances as I can watch wayang without having to come to the performance venue; however, there are some sensations that are missing, for example feeling the cold evening air while eating peanuts or enjoying *sulukan* (mood songs) with the same atmosphere reflected in the songs" (Interview with TG, February 2023).

Virtual wayang performances have been enjoyed by the people. In addition to continuing to present entertainment as usual, this model of performance also allows the people to have other alternatives to enjoy it without having to come directly to the wayang performance. However, there is still something missing in this virtual wayang performance, for example community togetherness does not occur because they watch the performance in different places. Various customs that foster togetherness, such as sitting together while telling stories and enjoying typical village food, are no longer found.

#### **4.2. Audience involvement as a sponsor of wayang show organizers**

In virtual puppet shows, currently the puppet audience does not only act as spectators, but also take on the role of sponsors. Spectators donate to the puppeteer and the supporting team by sending a sum of money. This can be seen from the several performances organized by the Wargo Laras performance group in December 2022 (Table 2). The virtual audience transferred a certain amount of money to the puppeteers and the supporting team of the performance. This can be observed by the large number of spectators who send money to the dalangs or musicians.

**Table 2. The amount of Wargo Laras' donations and tips in December 2022**

No	Performance Date	Title of the Episode performed	Funding (IDR)		Notes
			Main Donations	Tips (saweran)	
1	02-12-2022	Semar Mbangun Kayangan (Semar Builds Kayangan/Heaven)	40.000.000	2.500.000	All night
2	09-12-2022	Aji Pancasona	20.000.000	5.500.000	All night
3	06-12-2022	Baladewa Labuh (Baladewa Defending the Country)	-	18.558.000	Climen/shortened performance
4	10-12-2022	Tejamaya's Revelation	30.000.000	4.500.000	All night
5	15-12-2022	Partakrama (The Marriage of Arjuna)	25.000.000	6.000.000	All night
6	20-12-2022	Abimanyu – Utari Krama (The Marriage of Abimanyu and Utari)	15.000.000	5.000.000	Climen/shortened performance
Total			130.000.000	32.000.000	

Source: Field observation of the Wargo Laras group Wayang puppet show in December 2022

During a virtual performance on December 9, 2022, there were 12 transfers of money from the audience to the dalang amounting to 5,500,000, as revealed by informant A who transferred money to the dalang.

I can easily send money to the dalang because now I can easily transfer money via Ovo and Shopee (Interview with A, December 2022).

Virtual performances were also able to cure the homesickness of an informant working abroad. For him, transferring money to the dalang or the show's supporting team was not unusual, especially when he was watching the show on Saturday.

For me, participating by sending money, even though it's not much, shows that I have a concern for the arts. At the same time watching the performance acts as a medicine to ease my longing for my hometown in Wonosari. (Interview via WA, December 2022)

In a virtual show, an audience member could act as a sponsor as well. Post-pandemic wayang performances have changed old habits and formed new ones; the passive role of the spectators have been changed into an active role, one of which is sponsoring the show (Table 2).

**Table 3. Duration of the shortened version of wayang performances**

No	Wayang story	Total duration of performance	Duration of main performance	Duration of Goro-goro scene
1.	Ontoseno Rabi (The Marriage of Ontoseno)	135 minutes	70 minutes	65 minutes
2.	Babad Alas Wanamarta (The Opening of the Wanamarta Forest)	131 minutes	73 minutes	58 minutes
3.	Wisanggeni Lahir (The Birth of Wisanggeni)	130 minutes	80 minutes	50 minutes
4	The Revelation of Makutharama	126 minutes	76 minutes	50 minutes
5	Wiroto Parwo	137 minutes	69 minutes	68 minutes
6	Pandu Swargo (Pandu Goes to Heaven)	175 minutes	95 minutes	80 minutes
7	The Revelation of Cakraningrat	178 minutes	93 minutes	85 minutes
8	Bima Suci (The Holy Bima)	125 minutes	70 minutes	55 minutes

No	Wayang story	Total duration of performance	Duration of main performance	Duration of Goro-goro scene
9	Gatotkaca Krama (The Marriage of Gatotkaca)	139 minutes	82 minutes	57 minutes
10	Kongso Adu Jago (Kangsa is Involved in Cock Fighting)	200 minutes	110 minutes	90 minutes

Source: Observation of the shortened wayang performances of Wargo Laras



**Figure 2. Sinden (female singers) and guest stars have reduced the role of the dalang (source: wayang performance 2<sup>th</sup> December 2022)**

Based on the observations and interviews with informants, currently the audience is no longer just a connoisseur of the show, but is also involved in funding or in determining the songs to be performed. In other words, the audience now has become part of the wayang performance organizers.

#### 4.3. *The decline in the authority of the puppeteer*

Virtual wayang performance allow deconcentration of income in the wayang performances. Income is not only monopolized by the dalang, but other members of the wayang support team, such as the sinden (female singers) and musicians. The Sinden and musicians, in addition to receiving fees from the dalang, also receive additional money from tips directly from the audience or the money is transferred. This can be observed from a performance on December 2, 2022 in commemoration of Heroes' Day, where overnight, the dalang received IDR 2,500,000 in transfers and the sinden received 8 transfers with a total amount of IDR 3,200,000. For performances in Yogyakarta, this amount was quite large, especially for the shortened performances. This amount could at least be considered as additional income.



**Figure 3. The dalang acts as a moderator and receives information from the audience (Source: Wayang performance December 2, 2022)**

Before the pandemic, the dalang was the main character in the performance. Besides being the leader of the show, the dalang was also the group leader who determined the distribution of the money. Currently the dalang and his crew, in addition to getting money from the main sponsors, also get additional income from the live audience or wayang fans. This was experienced by Elisa, one of the sindens who took part in the Wargo Laras wayang performance. By performing in the show, she got paid IDR 250,000 by the dalang. In addition to this fee, she received a transfer of IDR 500,000 from the audience. Based on this situation, it is evident that currently the money is not only controlled by the dalang, but also by the supporting team of wayang performances, especially the sinden and musicians, who get additional income directly from the audience. To avoid social jealousy between one sinden and another, the money transfers from the audience are collected and then divided equally among the sinden. This is done by the Wargo Laras performance manager.

The involvement of the audience in sending a sum of money either directly or indirectly to the dalang or the show's supporters, on the one hand, increases the income of the dalangs and the show's supporting team; however, on the other hand, it could reduce the authority of the dalang. When the audience sends a sum of money, it is often accompanied by a message, for example a request for the sinden to stand up while singing, or a request for additional songs which often is beyond the authority of the dalang to carry out. This condition, according to Kasidi, a professor in the puppetry, shows a decrease in the authority of the dalang.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *The Audience Feels It Has Ownership of the Show*

The involvement of the audience as sponsors of wayang performances results in weakening the power of the dalang. With the money transferred to the dalang or show's crew members, there is a shift in the dalang's power. Indirectly, the audience has the power to set the show time. This has the risk that the break scenes (Limbukan and Goro-goro scene) will be long, as a result, the main story or message to be conveyed in the performance might be curtailed. The story becomes incomplete and the quality of the show is reduced.

The people can accept virtual wayang performances because these virtual shows broadcast through YouTube channels offer various conveniences and benefits. Live streaming is one of the features developed by YouTube, namely the uploading videos of live broadcasts without having to record them first. YouTube provides two forms of broadcast, namely live streaming and recording. In addition to those two main services, there are also other services such as sharing, downloading, live chatting, saving, counting the number of views and subscribers, likes and dislikes, the uploader description column and captions. An interesting phenomenon of wayang performance on YouTube is that the number of viewers on YouTube recorded through views and subscribers is quite big and varied in terms of age, ethnicity and other factors.

YouTube media gives solutions by providing live streaming and recording that can be enjoyed by individual spectators on their interactive smartphones or tablets. Viewers can comment and respond directly via their smartphones. The asynchronous nature of the media allows internet users to watch the recordings on YouTube at any time. This media opens opportunities for the distribution of power in the performing arts. The real social world was affected by Seno Nugroho, the dalang and leader of Wargo Laras, whose performances went viral. This dalang became increasingly popular and was loved by the wider community as well as the virtual community. Seno Nugroho received numerous invitations to perform real all night long performances on stage. This means that traditional culture has a convergent media space, a space where the traditional and new media, cyberspace and virtual performances, meet. On the other hand, due to the prolonged pandemic, people are 'starving for entertainment'. When YouTube offers a wayang performance produced in a popular style and using a popular language style that can be understood across generations by Javanese sub-ethnicities, those who are "hungry for entertainment" spontaneously accept with open arms. Using the plot of a popular play, Seno Nugroho with Wargo Laras was able to enter a social discourse also trending among the social media's younger generation. On the other hand, live onstage performances have experienced various resistances, for example due to health reasons, economic reasons (the high expense), risk of crowds gathering, such performances required a large space and premises. The extensive virtual audience, can replace the decreasing number of spectators for live performances, which is in line with Gono & Rakhmad's research

(2021) which shows that from time to time the number of spectators for wayang performances tends decrease and the performance halls tends to be empty.

Wayang fans who have formed a specific group can be categorized as a fandom. Fan culture or fandom is a term that describes a community built around the mutual enjoyment popular culture. Fan culture is an example of participatory culture. Participatory culture involves fans who act not only as consumers but also as producers and creators of several forms of creative and participatory media. Fandom media in particular encourages creative expression and artistic production by its participants. Fandom has six characteristics, namely (1) relatively low barriers to artistic expression and community involvement, (2) strong support for creating and sharing creations with others; (3) some type of informal tutoring in which the more experienced members pass on their knowledge to the novices; (4) members who believe their contribution matters; (4) members who feel a social connection with each other and care about what other members think about their contribution.

### **5.2. The desacralization of Wayang**

When the pandemic ended, a euphoria arose in various matters, including in wayang performances. However, wayang performances have not been able to recover and return to the pre-pandemic conditions. The current audience already feels comfortable watching virtual performances. In addition, the community is already able to accept short virtual wayang performances – as well as full-blown virtual performances. However, it is true that the short virtual performances are not as frequent as they were during the pandemic. Currently, every live performance is accompanied by live streaming. The performances are held in a blended manner. However, purely virtual performances are still happening in the studios. This is mainly done to reduce production costs, especially transportation costs.

As a consequence of the shortened performance duration, the structure of the wayang shows has changed. This also resulted in a change in wayang philosophy. Wayang, which originally could be watched casually, became a pure performance. There has been a change in the aesthetics of wayang. When there is a reduction in the duration of a performance, there is a loss of meaning, namely the loss of the *wungon* concept in wayang performances. Initially, the wayang performances were held all night to keep the audience on guard. In Javanese society, one of the qualities that a leader must possess is the ability to overcome sleepiness or stay awake.

The audience seems to have become sponsors of the performance. The community of wayang spectators which has developed into a wayang performance fandom were prompted to donate money to cover the performance costs. This was of course due to the encouragement from members of the Wargo Laras team. The audience seemed to be triggered to donate because they considered those donations to be the homologue for tickets which had to be bought to watch an artistic performance. Active communities that construct live streaming and recording stages also need funds, so they monetize events on YouTube. This naturally required initial funds that had to be spent to get a large number of subscribers so that monetization will run smoothly in accordance with YouTube regulations or homepage rules.

### **5.3. De-authorization of the Dalang: The Decrease in the Authority and Authority of the Dalang**

Virtual performances have resulted in a decrease in the authority and power of the dalang. The dalang is no longer the one who has a dominant hand in determining the timing of the performance and the distribution of money. In traditional wayang performances, the dalang is the most powerful person both on stage and in managing finances. In virtual puppet shows, the audience has the freedom to send money to the performance crew. This keeps the dalang from being the only person paying the crew. The dalang and the show's supporting team not only receive money from the contract between the sponsor and the dalang, but they also receive transfers from the audience. In other words, the show crew besides getting money from the dalang as the leader of the show also get money through direct transfers from the audience.

In traditional performances, the phenomenon of giving money outside the performance also occurs, but only during the intermission scenes, namely *limbukan* and *goro goro*. In this case the spectators give envelopes containing money to the dalang and request for a particular song. Of course, this can only be done by a live audience present at the show. With the convenience of sending digital money, and the willingness of the show crew to provide information, the spectators can easily send an amount of digital money to them, especially to the favorite team members, especially the sinden and dalang.

De-concentration of income could lead to conflicts caused by social jealousy between the dalang and crew members who are the stars or the audience's favorites. To avoid this, it would be better for the management to manage the income from *sawer* (money handed directly to the performers during the show) to avoid social jealousy.

In virtual performances, the authority of the dalang has decreased. An example of this is the experience of the Wargo Laras group. The Wargo Laras group and the performance crew deliberately set up a special technical team to carry out live streaming on YouTube media with the aim of providing entertainment for the performance community and the general public. Therefore, the stories that are used are created tend to be popular stories. The language, plot structure, content and message, performance style, songs, mysticism/suluk and various elements of wayang performances are constructed in a communicative and popular manner mixed with comedy. With the concept and construction of this popular performance, the mediatization of the performance resulted in a performance art in which the traditional concept of the dalang's position, as the central figure and the central power holding the authority over the performance stage, is reduced. This happens because the media provides an open space for liquid power for mediated performance through live chat, subscribe, like, unlike, and so on. On the other hand, performers must submit to the authority of the media.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study found that the change in wayang performances from offline all-night shows to online shortened performances lasting only a few hours only has caused a disruption in the wayang performances. Wayang, which originally was closer to sacred matters, has now become a much more profane performance. The dalang who used to be the center of everything, now has had his role divided among crew members different new professions. The wayang performance crew, which previously only consisted of the dalang, pengawit (musicians), sinden (female singers), and puppet manager, now has an additional crew member to handle the media. The dalang who was originally the center of the show, has had some of his workload distributed to the show's guest stars. Spectators who were originally passive and without any role in offline performances, became active and holding a determining role in online performances.

Wayang observers are attempting to respond to the development of the performances in accordance with the development of the audience in various media, including the mediatization process in cyberspace or virtual performances. The development of the wayang performance is making it livelier, so that when the show is uploaded to the YouTube channel it is welcomed by audiences consisting of people of all ages and with various ethnicities. Currently wayang performances can be classified as performing arts which can be accessed without any time limits through live streaming and recordings on YouTube. This phenomenon of the presence of the wayang performance on the YouTube platform has been able to change people's views of the shows and the way in which they watch them. The term viral dalang has appeared on YouTube, which is of course accompanied by the presence of a fandom or a community of viral dalang fans, for example the dalang Seno Nugroho in Yogyakarta was followed by the PWKS channel community (Fans of Ki Seno Nugroho Performance). This shift shows that the performance and staging of works of art can be negotiated with the development and advances in technology and information.

This research has contributed to the world of wayang and the education of dalangs. Public acceptance of short virtual performances will be a study that can support dalang education. A person who is learning to become a dalang does not only need to learn about the world of wayang, but also needs to learn about the new media.

This study has limitations in that the samples are taken from only one case. The case of virtual performances experienced by one wayang performance group were used as the main reference for data collection and analysis. Due to these limitations, the research results are not able to provide a comprehensive picture which can be used as the basis for a policy. Thus, further research is needed which includes more diverse cases or different places so that they can be compared and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

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