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## PRESERVING *BEGENDANG* SARAWAK THROUGH DIGITALIZATION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the digitalization of *Begendang* Sarawak, a traditional Malay drumming performance that is integral to the cultural identity of the Malay people in Sarawak, Malaysia. This study aims to explore how digital platforms can help keep the *Begendang* Sarawak drumming performance alive and important today, especially as there are increasing worries about losing cultural traditions and the need for effective ways to preserve them. The ethnographic approach drives the research, which includes fieldwork, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews with local practitioners and cultural activists. While attempting to digitize performance techniques, educational strategies, and oral traditions, the article depicts the current status of *Begendang*, Sarawak. The results indicate that digitization has major implications for cultural transmission, particularly in terms of enhancing public access, documenting at-risk practices, and facilitating cross-cultural artistic partnerships. Additionally, using digital tools alongside traditional methods shows a positive relationship between technology and tradition, which questions the usual separation between them. Based on cultural sensitivity and community engagement, this study concludes that digitization may be a viable strategy for preserving intangible cultural heritage. It contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on heritage preservation by offering critical analysis of how traditional art forms might adapt and thrive in the digital age while maintaining their authenticity.

**Keywords:** Digitalization, Preservation, Traditional Malay, Sustainability

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## INTRODUCTION

The preservation of cultural legacies has become increasingly difficult in an age characterized by swift technical progress and globalization. Traditional art forms such as *Begendang* Sarawak, a vital component of Malay cultural identity in Sarawak, Malaysia, are at risk of decline as younger generations are drawn to contemporary entertainment. Sustainability, in this context, transcends the mere conservation of natural advances, the tactics for preserving intangible cultural assets must also adapt to ensure their vibrancy and relevance for future generations.

This study investigates the possibilities of digitalization as a technique for preserving *Begendang* Sarawak, a performance art that integrates drumming, quatrain singing, and dancing. Digitalization provides a distinctive opportunity to record, save, and distribute ancient cultural practices, enhancing their accessibility to both local and worldwide audiences. Prior research has emphasized the necessity of maintaining the authenticity and cultural relevance of traditional performances while adapting them to contemporary circumstances (Pangestu & Pradoko, 2020). Digitalization is emphasized as an essential instrument for the preservation and transfer of cultural heritage, guaranteeing the relevance of traditional artistic forms in the digital era (Idris *et al.*, 2017). This research used a method that involves studying people in their natural environment and talking to those who practice it to document the current state of *Begendang* Sarawak and evaluate how digitalization affects its ability to continue. This study enhances the debate on cultural preservation by analyzing how technological integration might sustain the significance of indigenous art forms, such as *Begendang* Sarawak. This research aims to balance the preservation of the cultural integrity of this art form with its adaptation to 21st-century realities, assuring its continued vibrancy within Malaysia's cultural legacy for future generations through the use of digital resources.

*Begendang* Sarawak, or *Bermukun*, is a traditional Malay performance art that combines drumming (*gendang*), quatrain singing (*pantun*), and dance (*tandak*), possessing profound cultural importance within the Malay community of Sarawak, Malaysia (Hassan, 2012; Narawi, 2016). Traditionally conducted during social events like weddings and harvest festivals, it functioned as both entertainment and a means for social contact, courting, and communal cohesion (Abdul Wahid, 2024). Initially unstructured and improvisational, *Begendang* Sarawak has evolved into an organized performance that embodies Malay values, aesthetics, and communal engagement (Hamza & Saearani, 2024). Recently, the tradition has seen problems due to modernization, globalization, and changes in social ideals. The transition from informal community performances to official stage presentations has increased public attention, although it has also prompted concerns regarding the erosion of its participatory and