

From Sheet to Screen: The Transformation of Javanese Literature and the Reception Pattern of Generation Z

Sungging Widagdo^{1*}, Sri Prastiti Kusuma Anggraeni², Ruruh Jatmiko³

^{1*} Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

² Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

³ SMA Negeri 7 Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia



ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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This article discusses the reception of modern Javanese literature among Generation Z, focusing on changes in current readers' interests and preferences. This research starts from the phenomenon of declining interest among the youth in reading Javanese language texts, especially modern literary works. Through a qualitative approach using literature study and interviews, this study finds that the shift in preferences is caused by factors such as digitalization, the dominance of global popular culture, and the transformation of values in Javanese society. The study results show that Generation Z has a complex relationship with modern Javanese literature. On one hand, they demonstrate an interest in local cultural expressions that are packaged creatively and digitally, such as *geguritan* in the form of dangdut koplo song lyrics, short video parodies, Javanese language memes, or poetry content on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. On the other hand, their depth of understanding regarding the content, values, and aesthetics of Javanese literature is still limited. This is influenced by their fast-paced, visual, and instant information consumption patterns, as well as the lack of integration of Javanese literature in digital spaces that are relevant to them. As a result, there is a shift in preferences and forms of reception compared to previous generations. This calls for a new approach in the preservation and transmission of Javanese literary values. This article offers a critical reflection on how modern Javanese literature can be revitalized through technology- and education-based adaptive strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Modern Javanese literature is a form of cultural expression that develops along with the changing times. In contrast to classic works such as *Serat Centhini* or *Suluk Malang Sumirang*, modern Javanese literary works use a more communicative form of language and contain contemporary themes (Hariyanto & Prasetyawati, 2025). However, in the midst of the rapid flow of globalization, the attention of the younger generation, especially generation z, to regional literature, especially Javanese literature, is suspected to have regressed. Therefore, this study explores how changes in interest and reception of modern Javanese literature occur among the younger generation, as well as examine the factors that affect the dynamics that occur in Javanese language and literature.

Javanese language and literature are an essential part of the cultural identity of the Javanese people that have been tested by the times. As a means of expressing philosophical, ethical, and aesthetic values, Javanese literature not only records collective history, but also shapes people's perspective on the world (Mashuri, 2017). However, in the modern era marked by globalization and the digital revolution, the existence of Javanese language and literature faces serious challenges (Rhamadona & Anis, 2025). Social transformation, the dominance of national and foreign languages, and changes in the lifestyle of the younger generation – especially generation Z – are suspected to contribute to the decrease in the intensity of interaction with regional languages and literature, especially in the form of literary traditions such as *geguritan*, *cerkak*, or modern Javanese dramas.

Generation Z, namely individuals born in the mid-1990s to early 2010s, is known as the *digital native generation* (Nurijadi & Novida, 2025). Generation Z grew up in an environment that is heavily influenced by information technology, social media, and instant communication (Juliah, Romawinsa, Siti, & April, 2025). Their information consumption patterns tend to be fast, visual, and interactive experience-based. In the cultural context, Generation Z is more exposed to global cultural products that speak English or Indonesian than local treasures that use regional languages (Nasrullah, 2024). This phenomenon is suspected to shape tastes, preferences, and mindsets that are fundamentally different from previous generations, including in terms of appreciating literary works.

Generation Z is a generation that has been exposed to digital technology and social media since childhood. According to research from Twenge (2017) and Prensky (2001), Generation Z tends to have high multitasking skills, likes to absorb information visually and quickly, and prefers interactive and instant forms of communication. This tendency makes them more familiar with visual narratives such as short videos, memes, or podcasts, as opposed to long texts that require deep concentration (Hasanah, 2024). In the context of literacy, Generation Z is more moved by content that is relevant to their daily lives and packaged in a format that is visually and emotionally appealing. Therefore, their interaction with traditional or modern literature based on regional languages, which tend to demand the skills of reading *krama*, understanding cultural symbols, and diving into old social contexts, often encounters obstacles. This perspective is important to understand the reception of Javanese literature by this age group more realistically and contextually.

The study of literary reception departs from the idea that the meaning of literary works is not only determined by the author, but also greatly influenced by the reader as an active subject. The main figures in this theory are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the Konstanz school (Rokib, 2023). According to Jauss (1982), the meaning of literary works always changes depending on the reader's *horizon of expectations*, namely the frame of reference formed by the reader's historical, social, and cultural experiences. Meanwhile, Iser (1978) emphasized the importance of blank spaces (*gaps*) in the text that must be filled by the reader, so that the interaction between the text and the reader is the key in the process of literary aesthetics (Rahima, 2016). In this context, the reception of modern Javanese literature by Generation Z can be analyzed based on how they interpret, respond, and construct the meaning of the works according to their cultural background and customs. This theory is particularly relevant to see the dynamics of interaction between traditional literary products and modern readers in the trajectory of time and technological transformation.

The development of digital technology has brought about a major change in the way humans produce, distribute, and consume literary works. Jenkins (2006) through the concept of *convergence culture* explains how traditional media and new media come together in a participatory space, where users are not only consumers but also producers of meaning. In this case, digitalization opens up new opportunities for regional literature, including Javanese literature, to reach young audiences in a more dynamic way. Furthermore, the concept of digital literacy (Gilster, 1997) expands the meaning of literacy not only as the ability to read and write, but also to include the ability to

understand, assess, and use digital information critically. In this context, understanding the reception of Javanese literature by Generation Z must also consider the dimension of their digital literacy, namely how they interact with literary works in online formats, including on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok.

The difference in consumption patterns and cultural expression between generation Z and previous generations creates challenges in the process of transmitting and preserving Javanese literature. Modern Javanese literary works, although they have tried to approach contemporary themes, often still use language forms and delivery mediums that are less adaptive to the habits of the digital generation (Insani and Rokhim, 2023). This gives rise to a reception gap: on the one hand, Javanese literature holds noble values and educational potential; But on the other hand, the younger generation has difficulty accessing, understanding, or relating the work to the reality of their lives. The onslaught of global popular culture has further narrowed the space for local literature (Dewojati: 2021), so critical efforts are needed to understand and respond to this challenge contextually.

Various previous studies have highlighted the problem of preserving regional languages and literature in the midst of changing times. Suyatmini (2018) examined the low interest in reading Javanese literature among high school students in Yogyakarta and concluded that the limitations of teaching Javanese literature contextually are the main cause. Research by Hidayati & Subroto (2020) also emphasizes the importance of packaging Javanese literature in digital form so that it is relevant to the younger generation. Meanwhile, Sastratenaya (2022) conducted a survey of literary reception in the reader community and found that visual forms such as video poems are more effective in attracting attention than conventional texts. However, the majority of these studies focus more on preservation strategies in general and have not explored specifically how Generation Z actually represents, receives, and interacts with modern Javanese literature in the context of digital and pop culture.

In this context, this research tries to fill a *research gap* that has not been touched much, namely to understand in depth the pattern of reception of modern Javanese literature by Generation Z in terms of representation, acceptance, and changes in their preferences in accessing and appreciating literary works. The novelty of this research lies in its approach that combines the study of literary reception with the phenomenon of cultural digitalization, as well as the mapping of the literacy behavior of the digital generation towards literary works based on local wisdom. By using a qualitative method that emphasizes in-depth interviews and participatory observation of the young reader community (Momuat, Boham, & Runtuwene, 2021), this study is expected to provide a more actual and contextual picture of the challenges and opportunities for Javanese literary revitalization in the digital era.

The main problem to be studied in this article is the lack of a deep understanding of how generation z as a certain socio-cultural group receives, represents, and interacts with modern Javanese literature? How much do generation z have an interest in? What is the form of reception of Generation Z and what values are captured or ignored from Javanese literary texts? These are key questions that need to be answered. In addition, this study will also explain the changes in preferences and motivations of Generation Z in choosing or leaving Javanese reading, as part of broader cultural dynamics.

This research has a high urgency in the context of preserving local culture in the global era. Through an empirical understanding of how generation z views and responds to modern Javanese literature, the findings of this study can be the basis for formulating more effective education and revitalization strategies. The results of the research are expected to contribute not only to the academic realm in the field of literature and regional language education, but also to the formulation of cultural policies that are able to bridge traditional values with the needs and tendencies of today's generation. The relevance of this research lies in the effort to maintain the sustainability of Javanese literature without having to lose its attractiveness in the midst of changing times.

RESEARCH METHOD

Approaches and Types of Research

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach aims to deeply understand the experiences, perceptions, and reception patterns of Generation Z towards modern Javanese literary works. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the meanings and social-cultural dynamics underlying literary preferences, as well as to explain phenomena in a contextual and holistic manner according to Creswell (Mariyono, 2024).

Location and Research Subject

The research was conducted in an area that has a coastal Javanese cultural base, namely Semarang, and supported by online data from the Javanese literary community on social media. The research subjects are Generation Z (ages 15 to 25 years) who have educational backgrounds in high school/vocational schools and universities, both those who have intersected with the learning of Javanese literature and those involved in the digital literary community. The selection of subjects was carried out by purposive sampling, taking into account variations in social background, literacy level, and access to digital media.

Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through three main techniques, which are as follows.

1) Semi-structural interviews.

Questions were asked to 15 informants from the Generation Z age group. Questions included their experiences reading or accessing Javanese literary works, preferences for forms and themes, perceptions of the relevance of Javanese literature to their lives, and their interaction with digital-based literary content.

2) Participatory observation.

The researcher participated in online literary community activities such as Instagram accounts, zoom discussion forums with local cultural themes, and YouTube channels that displayed poems, short stories, and dramas in digital form. This observation aims to capture the actual practice of digital reception and interaction with literary works.

3) Digital content analysis.

It is carried out on the forms of modern Javanese literary works available online, both in text format (e-books, poetry uploads on social media), audio-visual (video poems, short stories, YouTube dramas), as well as user comment and reaction interactions on the

platform. This analysis examines how content is presented and how audience responses are formed.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis method of Braun & Clarke (Rozali, 2022), which involves the process of identifying, categorizing, and interpreting themes that emerge from the results of interviews, observations, and digital content. This process includes the following. (1) Transcription and coding of data. Each result of the interviews and observations is transcribed and then coded using initial categories such as reading interest, forms of appreciation, preferred media, and cultural meanings. (2) Searching for reception patterns, where the researcher looks for interconnected patterns between Generation Z's preferences and the forms of works and their media of delivery. (3) Contextual interpretation, where the analyzed data is interpreted with reference to the framework of literary reception theory, characteristics of digital natives, and cultural literacy.

Validity and Legitimacy of Data

To maintain validity, researchers utilized source and method triangulation techniques by comparing data from interviews, observations, and digital content. Additionally, member checking was conducted with several informants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. Field notes and the researcher's reflections were also used as part of the audit trail to enhance the credibility and validity of the data. Through this method, it is expected that the research can comprehensively depict how Generation Z, as a digital cultural group, understands and responds to modern Javanese literature in the context of their ever-changing lives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Minimal Exposure and Access to Javanese Literature

Based on interviews with 15 Generation Z informants in Semarang, 13 of them stated that they have never voluntarily read Javanese literary works. Only 2 informants admitted to having read *cerkak* or *geguritan* outside of school obligations. Furthermore, the results for Javanese language drama scripts are concerning. This is due to the scarcity of published Javanese language drama scripts specifically, although, in general, Javanese literary works in the form of *cerkak* and *geguritan* are also rarely encountered. One informant stated the following.

"Aku ngerti sastra Jawa ya waktu pelajaran bahasa Jawa, tapi itu pun cuma tugas, ora ana sing tak delok maneh nek wis rampung."

"I understand Javanese literature during Javanese language lessons, but that was just an assignment, I haven't looked at it again once it's done." (Informant 4, Student, 19 years old)

This result is also supported by observations in two high schools, where literary material appeared no more than 5 times out of 16 meetings of the Javanese language subject over

one semester. In addition, the constraints faced by high school students are the availability of learning materials in the form of novels that have a standard thickness of more than 100 pages. The lack of thin novels in terms of page count has led to a tendency for high school students to be reluctant to read (Zustiyanoro et al., 2020). The absence of literary works as part of the free reading experience explains the lack of formation of young readers' horizons of expectation towards Javanese literature. They do not possess a schema or value expectations that can connect the text with their lives.

Based on interviews with students, it is stated that access to Javanese literary works is quite limited. However, this is identified due to the students' low interest in searching for them. They need to visit libraries and read Javanese-language magazines like *Panjebar Semangat* and *Jayabaya*. They must actively seek out printed literary works through libraries and Javanese-language magazines. However, with the advancement of technology, Javanese literary works are also starting to be accessible online. Nevertheless, students with an interest in Javanese literature may find it easy to access these works online without having to go to a library or read specialized magazines. This shows that with the presence of technology, access to printed literary works is no longer a major obstacle for Javanese literature enthusiasts.

Students today can easily read and research Javanese literary works without the hassle of searching for print versions. They can access it anytime and anywhere through the internet. Nevertheless, it is important for them to continue to appreciate and maintain the existence of printed literary works as part of the cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. This way, technology can serve as a means to assist in accessing Javanese literary works, while still preserving the value and authenticity of those works.

Favorite Media: Brief, Visual, and Entertaining

Most informants (13 out of 15) mentioned that they find it easier to engage with Javanese literature in digital media, especially when presented in a concise and visually appealing manner. For example, Javanese storytelling videos lasting less than 1 minute on TikTok with humorous or romantic narration styles. One example of content they frequently enjoy is the TikTok account @Hi.kaaal, which creatively and attractively showcases Javanese content. The Javanese content on the TikTok account @Hi.kaaal has successfully garnered 3.6 million views and ranked second on the TikTok popular video list of 2025. However, once again, amidst the buzz of Javanese TikTok, there is a noticeable absence of TikTok content featuring adaptations of Javanese poetry or other literary works that are popular and reach a wide audience. This is reinforced by one informant's statement, which supports the fact of how distant Javanese poetry is for them, as follows.

"Aku ngerti beberapa geguritan, tapi ya lewat video YouTube utawa TikTok, sing biasane dianggo conto Pak Guru/Bu Guru mulang nang kelas." (Informan 7, Siswa SMA, 17 tahun).

"I understand some poems, but it's through YouTube or TikTok videos, which are usually used as an example of a teacher teaching in class." (Informant 7, High School Student, 17 years old).

This statement is verified through an analysis of 5 uploaded videos from several YouTube accounts related to *geguritan*, which are predominantly filled with content from Javanese

language teachers. There is indeed a lot of content about *geguritan* scattered around, but its main purpose is as teaching material in the classroom. This shows a lack of interest from the Gen Z community in the transformation of *geguritan*, i, or novels. However, the case of the TikTok account @Hi.kaaall shows that the Javanese language is still of interest to Generation Z. This indicates that the form, tempo, and context of presentation greatly influence positive reception towards Javanese literature, surpassing the content or depth of the text itself.

Javanese Literature Is Considered "Old Language" and Less Relevant

Some informants mentioned that the language used in Javanese literature feels 'ancient', 'heavy', and 'less suitable for the current generation'. This was revealed through the following interview transcript.

"Wacanan cerkak Jawa nganggo krama kuwi abot, kudu diterjemahke sik. Aku malah bingung pesene apa." (Informant 12, Mahasiswa, 21 tahun).

"The reading of the Javanese short story that uses the krama language is difficult; it must be translated first. I am actually confused about what the message is." (Informant 12, Student, 21 years old).

As many as 9 out of 15 informants stated that they preferred to read Indonesian poetry rather than poetry. According to them, it is easier to understand and express if you use Indonesian. A lack of understanding of the language, traditional symbols, and classical structures creates an affective distance that hinders the emotional engagement of the reader. In the perspective of Iser (1978), this shows a failure in the realization of the aesthetic potential of the text by the reader.

The prose genre or poetry in the form of short stories and poems in the printed version creates a distance from Gen Z. Understanding of the Javanese language is very low when compared to Indonesian mastery. However, when viewed from the movement in the world of social media, the opposite happens. The conversion of *geguritan* or prose vehicles into the lyrics of Denny Cak Nan's *dangdut koplo* songs or Javanese-language drama genres such as the short film *Tilik*, received extraordinary appreciation from Generation Z. It is noted that the number of subscribers on Denny Cak Nan's YouTube account which contains *dangdut koplo* songs featuring song lyrics ranging from Kartonyono Medhot Janji to Sinarengan was able to achieve 6.8 million subscriptions.

The high number of subscribers on the YouTube account of Denny Cak Nan and other Javanese *koplo dangdut* song singers, indicates the high interest of Gen Z in the Javanese language. This statement becomes the anti-thesis that Javanese literature is considered ancient and less relevant and broken. Through the lyrics of the song – in the *geguritan* genre – *Pamer Bojo*, for example, Gen Z enjoys the music while singing and saying lyrics in the *geguritan* genre and even simultaneously making *senggakan* a send-off simultaneously, *Cendhol... Cendhol... Dhawet Pira? Lima ewunan, nggak pake ketan...*."

(Cendhol... Cendhol... "How much is Dhawet? Five thousand, without sticky rice..."). This once again proves that Javanese literature has transformed into a different packaging with a language that is light and easily digestible by every generation of its enthusiasts.

Literary Transformation to Digital and Participatory Formats

The results of observations of two types of social media that present modern Javanese literary content show that when these works are presented in a contextual digital format, the interest of Generation Z increases significantly. This is captured in the following description.

Account/Platform	Content Type	Number of Followers	Average Interaction
YouTube: Ravacana Film	Video: Tilik	471.000	29.737.379 views/video
YouTube: Denny Caknan	Video Kartonyono Medhot Janji	6.800.000	320.000.000 views/video
TikTok: @Hi.kaaal	Pov. Dilabrak di zaman Mataram	86.200	3,600,000 views/video

One of the popular uploads on TikTok titled "*Dilabrak Di Zaman Mataram*" received 36,000,000 views, with a positive response in the comment column from teenagers who felt represented by their feelings. However, based on the digital footprint in the comment column, it is very common to ask translete about parody shows that use Javanese. This proves that Javanese literature still has a reception room, as long as the medium and language are in accordance with the digital lifestyle of Generation Z.

The positive response of the younger generation to Javanese literature can be witnessed through Denny Caknan's YouTube account. There are 320,000,000 viewers in one of the songs titled "*Kartonyono Medhot Janji*." This is a sign that the younger generation is interested in the Javanese language, especially Javanese literature in digital format. The lyrics of the song -*geguritan*, *Kartonyono Medhot Janji*, supported by the rhythmic melody of dangdut koplo offer its own attraction for the younger generation who are far from the Javanese language. Although at first, they did not understand Javanese language and literature very well, they were able to absorb and understand when they already had an interest in the song. This is one of the strategies in developing Javanese literature to the younger generation, the interest of interest through digital format is a decisive element.

Fragmentation between Appreciation and Understanding of Cultural

Appreciation and cultural understanding by Gen Z for digital Javanese literary works is still relatively low. Despite the increase in digital consumption of Javanese literary content, not all connoisseurs of Javanese literature understand the cultural context or moral values contained in it. When asked about the philosophical meaning of the lyrics of Denny Caknan's song that they liked, most of the informants replied:

"Enak didenger tapi ora ngerti artine." (Informan 10, Pelajar, 16 tahun).

"It's good to hear but I don't know what it means." (Informant 10, Student, 16 years old).

This shows that aesthetic reception is not always directly proportional to cultural understanding. Without educational assistance or contextual explanations, literary works are prone to becoming mere viral content without deep meaning. This reinforces the importance of synergy between technological approaches and culture-based literary education.

These findings show that Generation Z's changing interest and preference for Javanese literature is not only about taste, but is closely related to the cultural, linguistic, and technological ecosystem that surrounds them. Javanese literature still has vitality, but in a more fluid, visual, and often entertaining form. Receptions that are passive, enjoying without understanding, need to be bridged through innovative and participatory cultural literacy strategies.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that Generation Z has a complex relationship with modern Javanese literature. On the one hand, they show interest in local cultural expressions that are packaged creatively and digitally, such as poems in the form of *dangdut koplo* song lyrics, short video parodies, Javanese memes, or poetry content on YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. But on the other hand, their depth of understanding of the content, values, and aesthetics of Javanese literature is still limited. This is influenced by the fast-paced, visual, and instant information consumption patterns, as well as the lack of integration of Javanese literature in the digital space that is relevant to them. Thus, there is a shift in preferences and different forms of reception compared to the previous generation. This requires a new approach in the preservation and transmission of Javanese literary values. The suggestions that can be submitted are as follows. A collaborative strategy is needed between educators, content creators, and cultural institutions to redesign the way Javanese literature is conveyed to Generation Z. Adaptive approaches, such as the use of social media, short video formats, and digital interactivity, can be an effective bridge to arouse interest while deepening their understanding of Javanese literary treasures. In addition, it is important to conduct more in-depth and longitudinal follow-up research to observe how these reception patterns evolve as technology and popular culture change. With the right approach, Javanese literature can not only survive, but also develop as part of the cultural identity of today's generation.

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