

AUDIENCE INTEREST AND CULTURAL APPRECIATION OF BANGSAWAN THEATRE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE TRIBUANA BANGSAWAN ASEAN PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Bangsawan theatre is one of the significant traditional performing arts forms within the Malay cultural sphere, historically functioning as both entertainment and a medium of cultural storytelling. Despite its historical importance, the sustainability of Bangsawan theatre in the contemporary era depends greatly on the interest and engagement of younger audiences and cultural communities. This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to examine audience interest in watching or participating in Bangsawan theatre. Data were collected through a survey distributed during the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance 2025 at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Auditorium in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 121 responses were received, of which 95 valid responses were analyzed after removing incomplete data. The study focuses on a single open-ended survey question asking respondents whether they were interested in watching or participating in Bangsawan theatre and the reasons behind their response. In the first qualitative phase, responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, which identified five primary themes: artistic engagement and personal experience, learning and knowledge, cultural heritage preservation, social influence, and lack of interest. In the second quantitative phase, themes were coded numerically and analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS to determine frequency distributions and valid percentages. The findings reveal that artistic engagement and personal experience is the dominant motivation, followed by learning and knowledge, and cultural heritage preservation. Social influence and lack of interest represent smaller proportions. The results highlight that audience interest is primarily driven by intrinsic factors related to arts participation and personal experience rather than external influences. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on contemporary audiences for traditional Southeast Asian performing arts and provides evidence-based insights for cultural preservation strategies.

Keywords: Bangsawan theatre, audience motivation, cultural heritage, traditional performing arts

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional performing arts represent an important component of cultural identity and collective memory within many societies. In Southeast Asia, various theatrical forms have served as platforms for storytelling, cultural transmission, and artistic expression. One such form is Bangsawan theatre, a genre of Malay traditional theatre that emerged in the late nineteenth century and gained popularity across the Malay Peninsula, Indonesia, and Singapore (Latiff & Cheng, 2019; Putten, 2014).

Historically, Bangsawan theatre combined dramatic storytelling with music, dance, elaborate costumes, and stage performances. The narratives often drew from historical legends, folklore, and literary traditions, reflecting both local cultural influences and external theatrical traditions such as Indian Parsi theatre (Meddegoda, 2020). During its peak period in the early twentieth century, Bangsawan theatre was widely performed and enjoyed by diverse audiences throughout the Malay world (Masri & Chin, 2025; Chopyak & Beng, 1993).

However, like many traditional art forms, Bangsawan theatre has faced challenges in maintaining its relevance in the modern era. The rise of digital media, film, and contemporary entertainment platforms has transformed audience preferences and cultural consumption patterns (Nurhayati et al., 2025). Post-1940s, significant social and political changes, along with the emergence of new technologies such as radio and television, contributed to declining audience interest (Deneerwan & Kahn, 2018). As a result, traditional theatre forms must adapt to new social contexts while preserving their cultural authenticity.

Scholars have emphasized that audience engagement is crucial for sustaining traditional performing arts. Cultural heritage cannot survive solely through institutional preservation; it requires active participation and appreciation from contemporary audiences (Zulhidayati et al., 2024). Understanding the motivations behind audience interest in traditional performances therefore becomes essential for both researchers and practitioners.

In this context, the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance represents an important cultural initiative aimed at revitalizing interest in Bangsawan theatre while fostering regional cultural collaboration. The performance involved theatrical works from three Southeast Asian countries Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia highlighting the shared cultural heritage of the Malay world. Such cross-border collaborations have been recognized as effective platforms for cultural diplomacy and strengthening regional cultural ties (Goodlander, 2018; Flores, 2023).

Despite the significance of such initiatives, limited empirical research has examined audience perceptions and motivations regarding Bangsawan theatre in contemporary contexts. Most studies have focused on historical analysis or performance aesthetics rather than audience reception. In Indonesia, for instance, only a limited number of in-depth studies have examined the characteristics or motivations of local performing arts audiences over the past decade (Dhani, 2021).

Furthermore, studies that employ mixed-method approaches to capture both the depth of audience motivations and their prevalence are particularly scarce.

This study aims to address this gap by employing a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to examine audience interest in Bangsawan theatre. By analyzing audience responses through both qualitative thematic analysis and quantitative descriptive statistics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how contemporary audiences perceive traditional performing arts and how such art forms can remain relevant in modern cultural landscapes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Bangsawan Theatre and Cultural Heritage

Bangsawan theatre is widely recognized as a significant form of Malay traditional theatre. Scholars have described it as a hybrid performance genre that integrates elements of drama, music, dance, and storytelling (Samsuddin & Bujang, 2013). The narratives typically revolve around royal tales, historical legends, and moral stories that reflect cultural values and social norms.

The historical development of Bangsawan theatre can be traced to the late nineteenth century, when it emerged as an adaptation of Indian Parsi theatre and subsequently spread throughout the Malay Archipelago (Latiff & Cheng, 2019; Putten, 2014). During its golden era in the early twentieth century, Bangsawan achieved widespread popularity across the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, and Singapore. Strategic promotion using the AIDA model (Attention-Interest-Desire-Action) proved effective in attracting audiences during this period (Masri & Chin, 2025).

As part of intangible cultural heritage, Bangsawan theatre plays a vital role in preserving cultural narratives and artistic traditions. Cultural heritage scholars argue that performing arts function as living cultural expressions that transmit knowledge, beliefs, and traditions across generations (Zulhidayati et al., 2024). However, preserving traditional performing arts requires not only documentation but also active performance and audience engagement. Without audiences and practitioners, traditional theatre forms risk becoming static museum artifacts rather than living cultural practices.

2.2 Audience Engagement in Traditional Performing Arts

Audience engagement has been identified as a key factor in sustaining traditional performance traditions. Research in performing arts studies highlights that audience motivations often include cultural appreciation, educational interest, social participation, and artistic curiosity (Snyder-Young & Omasta, 2022; Suh & Byul, 2020).

Younger audiences, in particular, may engage with traditional performances for different reasons compared to older generations. For some, traditional theatre offers an opportunity to reconnect with cultural heritage, while for others it provides a unique artistic experience. However, studies indicate that younger generations tend

to be more attracted to modern entertainment, requiring specific strategies to draw them back to traditional theatre (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Deenerwan & Said, 2021).

Changes in demographic composition due to urbanization and the dominance of younger generations have significantly impacted community participation in watching traditional theatre (Zulhidayati et al., 2024). Understanding these motivational factors is essential for cultural institutions, theatre organizations, and policymakers seeking to revitalize traditional art forms.

2.3 Cultural Diplomacy and Regional Collaboration

Cultural performances can also function as platforms for cultural diplomacy and regional collaboration. In Southeast Asia, shared cultural traditions often transcend national boundaries, creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange (Flores, 2023). The ASEAN region has witnessed various intercultural theatre initiatives aimed at fostering community and regional understanding (Goodlander, 2018).

The Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance represents such an initiative, bringing together theatrical traditions from Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. By showcasing shared cultural heritage, the event highlights the role of performing arts in strengthening regional cultural ties. Cross-cultural dialogue through performing arts has been shown to engage diverse audiences and contribute to identity formation (Jia, 2025).

2.4 Innovation and Adaptation in Bangsawan Theatre

Recent scholarship has examined various strategies for revitalizing Bangsawan theatre. These include artistic innovation, such as the use of digital backdrops and adaptation of contemporary stories to attract new audiences without abandoning traditional roots (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Husain & Zulkafli, 2023). Studies have also explored the role of creative cities like Kuala Lumpur in building arts ecosystems that support audience regeneration (Deenerwan & Said, 2021).

Efforts to transmit Bangsawan conventions to new generations have been documented, including frameworks for teaching traditional performance techniques to contemporary audiences (Marlenny, 2017). Invigoration projects in Malaysia have demonstrated the potential for renewing interest in Bangsawan through targeted interventions (Deneerwan & Kahn, 2018).

2.5 Educational Value of Traditional Theatre

Beyond entertainment, Bangsawan theatre serves an educational function, teaching moral values, history, and artistic skills to communities (Zulhidayati et al., 2024; Wita & Apip, 2020). School-based programmes such as "theatre excursions" have proven effective in cultivating cultural appreciation from an early age (Wita & Apip, 2020). The integration of traditional theatre into educational curricula represents a promising avenue for sustaining audience interest among younger generations.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a sequential exploratory mixed-method design to examine audience interest in Bangsawan theatre, combining qualitative exploration of

motivations with quantitative analysis of their prevalence. The research was conducted during the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance, which took place on 30 August 2025 at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Auditorium in Kuala Lumpur, featuring three Bangsawan scripts from Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. A total of 121 respondents participated in the survey, with 95 providing complete responses that were included in the final analysis, while 26 incomplete responses were excluded as missing data.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Group	Below 18 years old	37	38.9
	18 - 25 years old	25	26.3
	26 - 40 years old	9	9.5
	41 - 59 years old	21	22.1
	60 years old and above	3	3.2
	Total	95	100.0
Citizenship Status	Citizen	74	77.9
	Non-citizen	21	22.1
	Total	95	100.0
Country of Origin	Malaysia	74	77.9
	Indonesia	15	15.8
	Singapore	6	6.3
	Total	95	100.0
Institution / Organization	Educational Institution	28	29.5
	Government Agency	28	29.5
	Organization /	31	32.6
	Association / Company		
	Individual / Private	8	8.4
	Total	95	100.0
Position	Management /	9	9.5
	Leadership		
	Officer / Staff	17	17.9
	Artist / Active Member	32	33.7
	Student	35	36.8
	Independent / Freelance	2	2.1
	Total	95	100.0

The analysis proceeded in three phases following the sequential exploratory approach. In the first qualitative phase, all responses were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final thematic structure. This process identified five primary themes: artistic engagement and personal experience, learning and knowledge, cultural heritage preservation, social influence, and lack of interest.

In the second quantitative phase, each theme was assigned a numerical code and all responses were coded accordingly before being entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 for descriptive statistical analysis to generate frequency

distributions and valid percentages. Transforming coded qualitative responses into frequency counts enables researchers to identify dominant patterns in textual data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

In the third integration phase, qualitative findings in the form of illustrative respondent quotations were integrated with quantitative frequency data to provide a comprehensive understanding of audience motivations. This integration follows the weaving approach, where qualitative and quantitative findings are discussed together thematically (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). All responses were collected anonymously. No personally identifying information was recorded. Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that data would be used for research purposes only.

4. FINDING

4.1 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis of 95 responses to question S1 revealed five distinct themes capturing the range of audience motivations and barriers. Each theme is presented below with illustrative quotations from respondents.

Theme 1: Artistic Engagement and Personal Experience

This theme encompasses responses where respondents expressed interest in Bangsawan theatre due to personal involvement in the arts, identity as artists or arts practitioners, or desire for direct artistic experience. These responses reflect intrinsic motivation rooted in artistic identity and practice.

Table 2. Theme 1 Quotations

Respondent	Quotation
R53	"Saya sangat berminat, kerana saya memang menggemari untuk menyertai program teater seperti ini." (I am very interested because I really enjoy participating in theatre programmes like this.)
R79	"kerana sy adalah anak seni" (because I am an arts practitioner)
R89	"berminat, sebab saya mempunyai pengalaman" (interested, because I have experience)
R42	"Saya suka seni persembahan tradisional" (I love traditional performing arts)
R61	"Menonton teater bangsawan memberi inspirasi untuk karya seni saya" (Watching Bangsawan theatre inspires my artistic work)

Table 2 reflect the strong presence of artists and arts students in the audience (33.7% artists, 36.8% students), who view Bangsawan as relevant to their artistic practice and identity.

Theme 2: Learning and Knowledge

This theme captures responses emphasizing the educational value of Bangsawan theatre. Respondents highlighted opportunities to learn about history, traditional stories, cultural values, and moral lessons.

Table 3. Theme 2 Quotations

Respondent	Quotation
R17	"Menonton.. Sbb banyak kisah yg hebat tentang sejarah Malaysia" (Watching.. because there are many great stories about Malaysian history)
R80	"Saya berminat kerana Teater Bangsawan sarat dengan nilai sejarah, budaya, dan estetika tradisional Melayu. Persembahannya bukan sekadar hiburan, tetapi juga menyampaikan cerita rakyat, adat, dan pengajaran moral yang mendalam. Menontonnya memberi peluang untuk merasai suasana seni tradisi yang penuh warna melalui pakaian, muzik, dialog berirama, serta lakonan yang dramatik." (I am interested because Bangsawan Theatre is rich with historical values, culture, and traditional Malay aesthetics. The performance is not just entertainment, but also conveys folklore, customs, and profound moral teachings. Watching it provides an opportunity to experience the vibrant atmosphere of traditional art through costumes, music, rhythmic dialogue, and dramatic acting.)
R84	"Berminat, kerana ia menambah pengetahuan saya tentang pementasan teater yang tidak dapat saya pelajari di mana mana." (Interested, because it adds to my knowledge about theatre production that I cannot learn anywhere else.)
R23	"Saya belajar tentang budaya Melayu lama" (I learn about old Malay culture)
R56	"Memberi pemahaman baru tentang sejarah Nusantara" (Provides new understanding of Nusantara history)

Table 3 highlight that audiences perceive Bangsawan as a valuable educational resource, not merely entertainment.

Theme 3: Cultural Heritage Preservation

This theme encompasses responses where respondents expressed motivation rooted in preserving Malay cultural identity, heritage, and traditions. These responses reflect a sense of cultural responsibility and connection to ancestral heritage.

Table 4. Theme 3 Quotations

Respondent	Quotation
R15	"Tertarik karna ini kesempatan untuk memperlihatkan kepada masyarakat Internasional bagaimana bentuk teater bangsawan

	di Indonesia memiliki beragam keunikan dan ciri khas yang berdasar pada hal-hal tradisi, ritus maupun budaya lokal yang kaya dengan muatan ilmu pengetahuan juga kesempatan untuk bersilarurajim dengan komunitas teater lain khususnya di negara-negara Asean" (Interested because this is an opportunity to show the international community how Bangsawan theatre in Indonesia has various uniqueness and characteristics based on traditions, rites, and local culture rich with knowledge, as well as an opportunity to connect with other theatre communities, especially in ASEAN countries.)
R25	"Saya berminat untuk menonton dan menyertai persembahan bangsawan kerana saya dapat menikmati dan menghargai seni, budaya dan agama dengan menonton dan mengalaminya secara langsung" (I am interested in watching and participating in Bangsawan performances because I can enjoy and appreciate art, culture, and religion by watching and experiencing them directly.)
R11	"Bangsawan adalah warisan Melayu. Kita perlu sokong." (Bangsawan is Malay heritage. We must support it.)
R34	"Ingin memastikan budaya ini tidak hilang" (Want to ensure this culture does not disappear)
R72	"Bangga dengan identiti Melayu" (Proud of Malay identity)

Table 4 reflects the continued significance of Bangsawan as a marker of cultural identity and the audience's desire to participate in its preservation.

Theme 4: Social Influence

This theme captures responses where motivation stemmed from external social factors, including invitations from friends, peer influence, or institutional participation.

Table 5. Theme 4 Quotations

Respondent	Quotation
R3	"ya, sebab kawan ajak" (yes, because friend invited)
R77	"Karena Saya ikut terlibat dalam program tersebut" (Because I was involved in the programme)
R19	"Datang dengan organisasi" (Came with organization)
R48	"Diajak oleh pensyarah" (Invited by lecturer)
R3	"ya, sebab kawan ajak" (yes, because friend invited)

This theme captures responses where motivation stemmed from external social factors, including invitations from friends, peer influence, or institutional participation. Table 5 responses, while fewer in number, highlight the role of social networks in facilitating attendance and exposure to Bangsawan theatre.

Theme 5: Lack of Interest

This theme encompasses responses expressing limited or no interest in watching or participating in Bangsawan theatre. Reasons included personal disinterest in performing, lack of talent, or preference for other activities.

Table 6. Theme 5 Quotations

Respondent	Quotation
R45	"tidak berminat kerana saya tidak suka membuat persembahan" (not interested because I don't like performing)
R47	"saya hanya minat menonton sahaja , kerana saya tiada bakat untuk membuat persembahan" (I am only interested in watching, because I have no talent for performing)
R52	"Kurang faham tentang bangsawan" (Lack understanding about Bangsawan)
R68	"Lebih suka hiburan moden" (Prefer modern entertainment)

This theme as show in table 6, while representing a minority, confirms the ongoing challenge of engaging certain audience segments with traditional theatre forms.

4.2 Quantitative Findings: Frequency Analysis

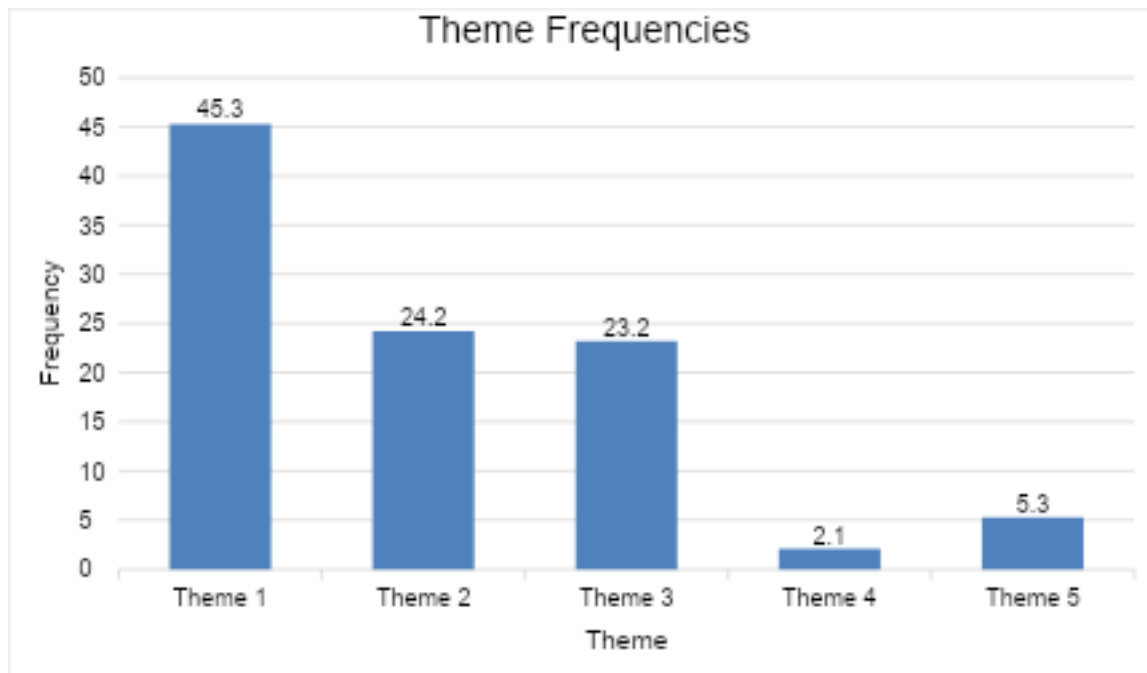
Following the qualitative thematic analysis, responses were coded numerically and analyzed using SPSS to determine the frequency distribution of each theme across the 95 valid responses.

Table 7. Theme Codes and Descriptions

Theme	Code	Description
Artistic Engagement and Personal experience	1	Interest driven by personal involvement in arts, identity as artist, or desire for artistic experience
Learning and Knowledge	2	Interest driven by educational value, historical learning, or knowledge acquisition
Cultural Heritage Preservation	3	Interest driven by desire to preserve Malay cultural identity and heritage
Social Influence	4	Interest driven by peer influence, friends, or social networks
Lack of Interest	5	No interest or limited interest in watching or participating

Table 8. Frequency Distribution of Themes (N=95)

Theme	Frequency	Valid Percent (%)
Artistic Engagement & Personal Experience	43	45.3
Learning and Knowledge	23	24.2
Cultural Heritage Preservation	22	23.2
Social Influence	2	2.1
Lack of Interest	5	5.3

Total**95****100.0****Figure 1.** Chart of Theme Frequencies

The quantitative analysis revealed distinct patterns in audience motivation, as presented in Table 7 (Theme Codes and Descriptions) and Table 8 (Frequency Distribution of Themes), with visual representation provided in Figure 1 (Chart of Theme Frequencies). Artistic Engagement and Personal Experience emerged as the most frequent motivation, accounting for nearly half of all responses (45.3%), indicating that intrinsic motivation related to arts participation and personal identity as artists or arts enthusiasts is the primary driver of interest among this audience. Learning and Knowledge (24.2%) and Cultural Heritage Preservation (23.2%) together account for 47.4% of responses, indicating that educational and cultural motivations are nearly as significant as artistic engagement when combined and suggesting that audiences value Bangsawan for both its educational content and its role in cultural preservation. Social Influence represents a very small proportion (2.1%), suggesting that external social factors play a minimal role in motivating this particular audience, which may reflect the composition of the sample that predominantly consists of individuals with pre-existing connections to arts and education. Finally, a small minority (5.3%) expressed lack of interest, confirming that while challenges exist, the majority of attendees at this performance were positively disposed toward Bangsawan theatre.

4.3 Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The mixed-method integration reveals important patterns:

Table 9. Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

Theme	Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Insight	Integrated Interpretation
Artistic Engagement	45.3% (dominant)	"saya adalah anak seni," "saya mempunyai pengalaman"	The high proportion of artists and students in the sample (70.5%) directly explains the dominance of this theme. Bangsawan attracts those already connected to the arts community.
Learning & Knowledge	24.2% (substantial)	"banyak kisah hebat tentang sejarah," "sarat dengan nilai sejarah"	Audiences perceive Bangsawan as an educational resource, not just entertainment. This suggests potential for school and university programmes.
Cultural Heritage	23.2% (substantial)	"warisan Melayu," "bangga dengan identiti Melayu"	Cultural pride remains a strong motivator. Bangsawan continues to function as a marker of Malay cultural identity.
Social Influence	2.1% (minimal)	"kawan ajak," "ikut terlibat"	While social networks facilitate attendance for some, they are not the primary driver for most attendees.
Lack of Interest	5.3% (minority)	"tidak suka membuat persembahan," "tiada bakat"	Disinterest is primarily related to perceived lack of talent or preference for watching rather than participating, rather than rejection of the art form itself.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Demographic Profile and Its Implications

The demographic profile of respondents, as detailed in Table 1, reveals important patterns for understanding Bangsawan audience engagement. The dominance of younger audiences, with 65.2% under 25 years comprising 38.9% below 18 years and 26.3% aged 18-25 years. This is particularly noteworthy given scholarly concerns about declining youth interest in traditional performing arts (Zulhidayati et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2025). This finding suggests that the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance successfully attracted the demographic segment most crucial for the art form's sustainability. The substantial youth representation offers hope for the future of Bangsawan, provided that engagement strategies continue to evolve. The presence of international respondents from Indonesia and Singapore, accounting for 22.1% of the sample with 15.8% from Indonesia and 6.3% from

Singapore. This reflects the regional appeal of Bangsawan and supports the role of cross-border cultural initiatives in fostering shared heritage appreciation (Goodlander, 2018; Flores, 2023). This finding aligns with research on the importance of regional collaboration in sustaining traditional arts across Southeast Asia. The occupational distribution, with 70.5% of respondents being either students (36.8%) or arts practitioners (33.7%). This indicates that the audience comprised individuals with pre-existing connections to educational or creative communities. This pattern is consistent with research on the role of creative cities and arts ecosystems in audience development (Deenerwan & Said, 2021). However, it also suggests that reaching audiences beyond these networks remains a challenge that requires targeted outreach strategies.

5.2 Artistic Engagement as Dominant Motivation

The finding that artistic engagement and personal experience is the most frequently cited motivation, at 45.3% as shown in Table 8 and Figure 1. This reflects the composition of the sample which includes a high proportion of artists, creative practitioners, and arts students. This result aligns with research on the role of creative communities in sustaining traditional performance traditions (Deenerwan & Said, 2021; Marlenny, 2017). Artists and practitioners serve not only as producers but also as audiences, creating a community of practice that supports the art form's continuation. The qualitative responses within this theme, presented in Table 2, such as "saya adalah anak seni" (R79) and "saya mempunyai pengalaman" (R89). This reveals that for these respondents, interest in Bangsawan is intertwined with their professional or educational identity. This finding has implications for audience development strategies: engaging arts students and emerging artists with traditional forms can create a pipeline of future practitioners and informed audiences. This finding also resonates with research on innovation in Bangsawan production, including the use of digital backdrops and contemporary adaptations (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Husain & Zulkafli, 2023). Such innovations may particularly appeal to those with artistic interests, who appreciate both traditional techniques and contemporary interpretations.

5.3 Educational Value and Learning Motivations

The substantial proportion of respondents citing learning and knowledge motivations, at 24.2% as indicated in Table 8. This confirms the educational function of Bangsawan theatre identified in previous studies (Zulhidayati et al., 2024; Wita & Apip, 2020). The qualitative responses within this theme, detailed in Table 3, such as "banyak kisah hebat tentang sejarah" (R17) and "sarat dengan nilai sejarah, budaya, dan estetika tradisional Melayu" (R80). This demonstrates that audiences perceive traditional theatre as a valuable source of cultural and historical education. This finding has significant implications for educational integration. The presence of students comprising 36.8% of respondents, as shown in Table 1. This supports the potential of school and university programmes in cultivating cultural appreciation (Wita & Apip, 2020). Theatre excursion programmes, where students attend performances as part of their curriculum, could be expanded to reach more young

people. Additionally, collaborations between theatre companies and educational institutions could develop study guides and educational materials that enhance the learning experience. The finding also suggests that marketing and promotional materials could emphasize the educational value of Bangsawan performances to attract audiences interested in history, culture, and traditional knowledge.

5.4 Cultural Heritage Preservation as Sustained Motivation

The finding that cultural heritage preservation motivates 23.2% of respondents, as presented in Table 8. This demonstrates that Bangsawan theatre continues to hold cultural significance among contemporary audiences. The qualitative responses within this theme, shown in Table 4, such as "warisan Melayu" (R11), "bangga dengan identiti Melayu" (R72), and "memastikan budaya ini tidak hilang" (R34). This reveals a sense of cultural responsibility and connection to ancestral heritage. This result supports the theoretical understanding of traditional performing arts as carriers of cultural identity and collective memory (Samsuddin & Bujang, 2013; Latiff & Cheng, 2019). The strength of this motivation across age groups suggests that efforts to position Bangsawan as valuable cultural heritage resonate with audiences. The international responses within this theme, such as R15's reference to "memperlihatkan kepada masyarakat Internasional bagaimana bentuk teater bangsawan di Indonesia." This highlights the role of Bangsawan in cultural diplomacy and regional identity. This finding aligns with research on intercultural theatre and community building in Southeast Asia (Goodlander, 2018; Flores, 2023).

5.5 Social Influence as a Minor Factor

The finding that social influence represents only 2.1% of responses, as indicated in Table 8 and Figure 1. This is notable given that research on arts participation often emphasizes the role of social networks in facilitating attendance (Snyder-Young & Omasta, 2022; Šimić et al., 2018). Several factors may explain this low proportion. First, with 70.5% of respondents being students or arts practitioners as shown in Table 1, many attendees may have had independent motivation based on their educational or professional interests rather than relying on social invitations. Second, the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance was a special regional event that may have attracted motivated attendees rather than casual visitors. Third, the 32.6% of respondents from organizations, associations, and companies may have attended as part of institutional groups, which they may not have coded as social influence in their responses. Nevertheless, the presence of responses such as "kawan ajak" (R3) and "ikut terlibat" (R77), presented in Table 5. This confirms that social networks do play a role for some attendees. This suggests that word-of-mouth and institutional partnerships remain valuable channels for audience development.

5.6 Understanding Lack of Interest

The minority of respondents expressing lack of interest, at 5.3% as shown in Table 8. This provides insights into barriers to engagement. The qualitative responses within this theme, detailed in Table 6, such as "tidak suka membuat persembahan" (R45), "tiada bakat untuk membuat persembahan" (R47), "kurang faham" (R52), and "lebih

suka hiburan moden" (R68). This reveals multiple dimensions of disinterest. Performance anxiety is evident among some respondents who are interested in watching but not participating due to perceived lack of talent or discomfort with performing. Unfamiliarity with Bangsawan contributes to lack of interest, suggesting the need for introductory materials and outreach. Competition with modern entertainment, particularly preference for contemporary media, confirms challenges identified in previous research (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Husain & Zulkafli, 2023). These findings underscore the need for continued efforts to introduce Bangsawan to new audiences through accessible formats, educational programmes, and adaptations that bridge traditional and contemporary preferences.

5.7 Integrated Discussion of Audience Motivation

The convergence of demographic and motivational findings reveals that contemporary Bangsawan audiences are predominantly drawn from communities with pre-existing investment in arts and education. As shown in Table 1, 70.5% of respondents were either students or arts practitioners, while Table 8 demonstrates that artistic engagement and personal experience constitutes the dominant motivation at 45.3%. This alignment indicates that Bangsawan currently sustains itself through what might be termed a "community of practice," where audiences are simultaneously practitioners, students, or cultural insiders. This finding confirms research on the role of creative cities and arts ecosystems in nurturing traditional performance (Deenerwan & Said, 2021), yet it also raises critical questions about whether reliance on this insider community is sufficient for long-term sustainability, particularly given concerns about declining youth interest in traditional performing arts (Zulhidayati et al., 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2025). The substantial youth representation at 65.2% under 25 years (Table 1) offers optimism, but the fact that these youth are predominantly arts students rather than the general young population suggests that Bangsawan's reach remains narrow beyond educational and creative networks.

The intrinsic nature of audience motivation is further underscored by the minimal role of social influence at only 2.1% (Table 8), diverging significantly from broader arts participation research that emphasizes social networks as primary facilitators of attendance (Snyder-Young & Omasta, 2022; Šimić et al., 2018). The educational and cultural motivations, together accounting for 47.4% of responses (Table 8), reinforce that audiences approach Bangsawan with intentionality, seeking either knowledge acquisition or cultural connection as evidenced in responses such as "banyak kisah hebat tentang sejarah" (Table 3) and "warisan Melayu" (Table 4). This intentionality aligns with theoretical understandings of traditional performing arts as carriers of collective memory and cultural identity (Samsuddin & Bujang, 2013; Latiff & Cheng, 2019), while also supporting claims about the educational function of traditional theatre (Zulhidayati et al., 2024; Wita & Apip, 2020). However, the very strength of these intrinsic motivations may paradoxically limit audience expansion, as those without pre-existing cultural or educational investment may lack the motivational framework to attend.

The 5.3% expressing lack of interest (Table 8) provides crucial insights into barriers that must be addressed for audience diversification. The qualitative responses in Table 6 reveal multiple dimensions of disinterest: performance anxiety, unfamiliarity, and competition with modern entertainment, confirming challenges identified in research on the need for innovation in Bangsawan production (Nurhayati et al., 2025; Husain & Zulkafli, 2023). Yet the presence of international respondents at 22.1% (Table 1) and responses highlighting cultural diplomacy (Table 4) suggest that regional initiatives like the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance can effectively position Bangsawan as shared Southeast Asian heritage (Goodlander, 2018; Flores, 2023). The mixed-method approach, as integrated in Table 9 and visualized in Figure 1, enables critical interpretation that purely quantitative or qualitative methods could not achieve, revealing not only what motivations exist but their relative prevalence and the relationships between them. This study thus addresses research gaps concerning the scarcity of empirical audience studies in Southeast Asian performing arts contexts (Dhani, 2021) while demonstrating that strategic efforts must balance deepening engagement within existing communities while developing targeted outreach to those outside arts and education networks, ensuring that this rich theatrical tradition achieves both sustainability and accessibility.

5.10 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, regarding sample specificity, the sample was drawn from a single performance event at a specific venue, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur. This means findings may not be generalizable to all Bangsawan performances or all geographic contexts. Second, sampling bias is evident in the high proportion of students and arts practitioners at 70.5% as shown in Table 1. This means the findings may overrepresent perspectives from these groups and underrepresent general public audiences. Third, the single question focus means the study analyzed only one open-ended question. This may not capture the full complexity of audience motivations, and multiple questions or follow-up probes could provide richer data. Fourth, the cross-sectional design captured audience perspectives at a single point in time rather than tracking changes in interest over time or across multiple exposures. Fifth, limited qualitative depth is acknowledged because while thematic analysis identified main themes, the study did not include in-depth interviews or focus groups that could explore motivations more deeply. Sixth, single coder reliability is a consideration as thematic analysis was conducted by a single researcher without inter-coder reliability checks. This may introduce subjectivity in theme identification.

6. CONCLUSION

As digital entertainment continues to reshape cultural consumption patterns across Southeast Asia, the sustainability of traditional performing arts like Bangsawan

theatre depends critically on understanding what draws contemporary audiences to these heritage forms. While the historical significance of Bangsawan is well documented, less attention has been paid to empirically examining the motivations of those who still attend these performances in the modern era. This study addressed that gap by investigating audience interest during the Tribuana Bangsawan ASEAN performance, exploring whether and why Bangsawan remains meaningful in today's cultural landscape through a sequential exploratory mixed-method analysis of survey responses. The findings revealed that audience interest is predominantly driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic factors, with artistic engagement and personal experience emerging as the dominant motivation, reflecting an audience drawn largely from arts and education communities. Educational and cultural motivations together proved equally significant, confirming that audiences value Bangsawan not merely as entertainment but as a source of historical knowledge and a marker of Malay cultural identity. Social influence played a minimal role, indicating that attendees are motivated by personal interest rather than peer pressure, while a small minority expressed lack of interest due to performance anxiety, unfamiliarity, or preference for modern entertainment. Notably, the substantial youth representation demonstrates that Bangsawan can attract younger generations, though the concentration of audiences within arts and education networks suggests that its reach beyond these communities remains limited. These findings answer the research objectives by confirming that Bangsawan continues to hold deep meaning for those already connected to arts and culture, while highlighting that strategic efforts are needed to extend its accessibility and appeal to the broader public.

The implications of this research point to concrete actions for cultural institutions, theatre practitioners, and future scholarship. For cultural institutions, the strong educational and cultural motivations support integrating Bangsawan into school curricula through programmes that introduce young people to traditional performance as part of their formal education. For theatre practitioners, the dominance of artistic engagement suggests that while innovations can effectively engage arts communities, addressing barriers of unfamiliarity and competition with modern media requires accessible introductory formats and outreach initiatives. The presence of international respondents demonstrates that regional cultural diplomacy initiatives can successfully position Bangsawan as a shared Southeast Asian heritage, meriting continued investment in cross-border collaboration. Future research should build on this study by conducting comparative analyses across multiple performances, employing in-depth interviews to explore motivations more deeply, and investigating non-attendees to understand barriers among those who do not engage with traditional theatre. By balancing deep engagement within existing arts communities with targeted outreach to those outside these networks, stakeholders can work toward ensuring that Bangsawan theatre remains not only preserved as heritage but actively lived as a vibrant, accessible, and evolving art form for generations to come.

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