

Continuity & Transformation of Zapin Meskom Music in Bengkalis Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the continuity and transformation of Zapin Meskom music in Bengkalis Regency, Riau, as a Malay cultural heritage amid modern social change. It aims to explain the tradition's forms of sustainability and the performance changes occurring in a contemporary context. The study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. We gathered data through observation, in-depth interviews with artists, traditional leaders, and community members, and documentation studies. We analysed the data using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results show that Zapin Meskom's continuity rests on preserved core elements: basic movement patterns, the rhythms of gambus and marwas, Malay-language verses, and the values of courtesy and togetherness. Intergenerational transmission through families, art studios, and cultural communities supports this continuity. Transformation shows up in adjusted performance duration, modern stage arrangements, costume innovations, and the use of digital media and cultural festivals as new spaces of expression. Technological developments, tourism, cultural policy, and globalization drive these changes. Zapin Meskom demonstrates a dynamic relationship between tradition and modernity. Tradition preserves local cultural identity. Transformation works as an adaptation strategy that keeps the art relevant. Zapin Meskom continues to endure as a living, evolving cultural heritage in the Bengkalis community.

KEYWORDS

Continuity
Malay Culture
Modernity
Transformation
Zapin Meskom

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INTRODUCTION

Zapin stands as an intangible cultural heritage carrying historical, social, and spiritual value for the Malay community (Nora & Efi, 2022; Yulinis & Widyarto, 2023). It conveys life values, ethics, and religious teachings passed down from generation to generation. Zapin emerged from the meeting of local Malay culture with Middle Eastern influences, reflecting the Malay community's openness to external elements while keeping its own cultural identity (Fernandes & Idawati, 2024; Susanti, 2019). Through the rhythms of the gambus, marwas, and advisory-themed verses, Zapin carries a tradition rich with meaning (Suroyo et al., 2024; Zaini, 2018). Zapin Meskom represents these values. It shows how the Zapin tradition develops locally while keeping the main characteristics of Malay art (Jailani et al., 2023). Its dance movements stay agile and compact within group formations, paired with rhythmic musical accompaniment and Malay-language verses that carry messages of togetherness and respect for customs.

Zapin's importance as intangible cultural heritage also shows in how it strengthens the collective identity of the Malay community amid modernization (Nora & Efi, 2022). As

popular culture increasingly fills public spaces, Zapin marks the presence of local traditions that stay relevant and valuable. Communities perform this art form at customary events, religious celebrations, guest receptions, and cultural festivals, strengthening social bonds among community members (Jailani et al., 2023; Mastura & Darwis, 2023). Zapin Meskom offers a concrete example of how local cultural heritage sustains tradition through adaptation to changing times. Its orderly movement patterns, the dancers' cohesiveness, and lyrics rich in advice show that Zapin Meskom serves as a space for passing social and cultural values to the younger generation (Rofiah et al., 2026; Susanti, 2019). Preserving Zapin upholds the community's identity and the pride of Malay generations in their ancestral heritage.

Zapin Meskom carries a distinctive character in how it combines dance movements, accompanying music, and local Malay-language poetry, setting it apart from other Zapin variants (Rofiah et al., 2026). Most Zapin dance movements follow uniform, repetitive basic step patterns. Zapin Meskom instead presents movements that are more dynamic and agile, emphasizing coordination between pairs and groups of dancers (Jailani et al., 2023; Rofiah et al., 2026). This art form expresses the local identity of the Bengkalis Regency community. As a Zapin variant that grew in the Malay coastal area, Zapin Meskom blends the traditional values of Zapin with the social character of the local community (Jailani et al., 2023; Rofiah et al., 2026). Its uniqueness also shows in its use of the Bengkalis Malay dialect in poetry and pantun, setting it apart from Zapin variants that use standard Malay or carry stronger Arab influences (Hadi & Yuwanti, 2022; Jailani et al., 2023). Traditional musical accompaniment, such as gambus and marwas, produces a distinctive rhythm that reinforces the performance's local identity.

As a form of local wisdom, Zapin Meskom embodies the social values that thrive within the Bengkalis Regency community. Its movements demand harmony among dancers, reflecting togetherness, while its maintained expressions and choreography reflect politeness (Fitriah et al., 2022; Jailani et al., 2023). Its verses often carry advice about life, respect for parents, the importance of preserving customs, and harmonious relationships among residents (Mastura & Darwis, 2023; Zaini, 2018). Zapin Meskom works as a cultural medium that records the Bengkalis community's worldview while strengthening regional identity amid modernization.

Contemporary social and cultural dynamics have brought significant change to traditional arts, including local arts passed down through generations. Digital technology, globalization, urbanization, changes in societal entertainment patterns, and shifts in the younger generation's lifestyle have pushed traditional arts out of the primary position they once held (Cahyaningrum et al., 2024; Zahreddine, 2023). Traditional arts once anchored customary ceremonies, social celebrations, and community interaction. Now they compete with modern entertainment that offers more practicality, quicker access, and greater popularity on digital media (Cahyaningrum et al., 2024). This shift presents serious challenges for the sustainability of traditional arts, particularly in regenerating artists, sustaining audience interest, and transmitting cultural knowledge.

This situation raises questions of continuity and transformation in the life of traditional arts. Continuity means maintaining the original values, forms, functions, and identity that keep cultural heritage alive from one generation to the next (Harnoko et al., 2023; Hartati, 2019). Transformation arises as a response to changing times: modifications in performance form, social media promotion, collaborations with modern music, or adjustments in duration and packaging that appeal to contemporary audiences (Guntoro, 2020; Aulia et al., 2024). These two aspects often occur together, since traditional arts need to preserve their authenticity while adapting to stay relevant. Contemporary social and cultural dynamics

place traditional arts in continuous negotiation between cultural roots and the demands of modern society. This study focuses on two research questions: 1) How does the Meskom zapin music performance sustain itself in the cultural life of the Bengkalis Regency community, Riau? 2) How has the Meskom zapin music performance changed in Bengkalis Regency, Riau?.

Discussing the continuity of Zapin Meskom in the cultural life of the Bengkalis Regency community means examining how thoroughly this art form persists, passes down, and functions amid changing times. This continuity shows in Zapin Meskom's presence at traditional ceremonies, religious celebrations, guest receptions, cultural festivals, and social activities that still make it central to local identity (Nora & Efi, 2022; Rofiah et al., 2026). It also shows in how the community passes the tradition to younger generations, through art studios, informal education, and families or art communities preserving the musical patterns, dance movements, lyrics, and Malay values it carries (Trirahmayati & Yasnel, 2025). This continuity positions Zapin Meskom as a means of shared preservation, cultural identity, and social solidarity for the Bengkalis community.

Examining changes in the Zapin Meskom music performance in Bengkalis Regency means tracing how its elements transform alongside social, cultural, and technological developments. These changes appear in presentation: shorter, more flexible performance duration, schedules adjusted to modern events, and more modern stages, lighting, and sound systems. Musical arrangements have also grown through new instruments or tempo adjustments that appeal to contemporary audiences, without abandoning traditional accompaniments such as gambus and marwas (Arbi & Umi Luthfiyah, 2025; Bakri & Sabran, 2023).

Changes also appear in Zapin Meskom's social function and how the community receives it. Performances once centered on customary spaces, religious activities, and local community traditions. Zapin Meskom now also appears in tourism festivals, government events, art competitions, and digital media as a form of regional cultural promotion (Citrawati et al., 2025; Rofiah et al., 2026). The younger generation engages through studios, schools, and social media, and the inheritance process now runs through more modern channels (Trirahmayati & Yasnel, 2025). These changes show that traditional arts keep adapting to stay alive, recognized, and relevant in contemporary Bengkalis society.

Explaining the internal and external dynamics of Zapin Meskom requires examining its change and continuity together. Soerjono Soekanto's theory directs the analysis toward social factors driving change, such as cultural contact, modernization, social institutions, and the community's role (Latuhu et al., 2021; Soekanto, 2002). Edward Shils' theory helps observe how tradition endures through value inheritance, cultural legitimacy, and intergenerational continuity (Amin et al., 2025). Together, these two theories explain how Zapin Meskom develops through the interaction between internal forces of tradition preservation and external pressures of changing times.

Soerjono Soekanto argues that society moves, develops, and adapts to new conditions constantly (Latuhu et al., 2021; Murjani, 2022). Soekanto identifies internal factors driving social change, including population growth, social conflict, new discoveries, changes in thinking patterns, and social mobility (Citrawati et al., 2025; Melia & Mesra, 2025). Soekanto identifies internal factors driving social change, including population growth, social conflict, new discoveries, changes in thinking patterns, and social mobility (Latuhu et al., 2021; Sukmana et al., 2025a). External factors matter too: contact with other cultures, wars, natural disasters, technological developments, and globalization. Social change

happens because society never stays static; it constantly adapts to the demands of the times and its environment (Guntoro, 2020).

Social change shows up across many aspects of life. Livelihood systems shift from agrarian to industrial. Communication patterns shift from face-to-face to digital. Family structures shift from extended to nuclear (Sukmana et al., 2025). Culturally, social change appears in how communities consume entertainment, dress, speak, and interact across generations (Sirojiddin, 2024). Change does not always mean progress. It can also create social division when a community isn't ready to accept it (Latuheru et al., 2021; Soekanto, 2002; Sukmana et al., 2025). Every change demands an adjustment process to build a new balance in social life. Social change reshapes the system of social relations that shapes a community's life as a whole, not just its outward form.

Social continuity, on the other hand, concerns the elements of community life that persist, pass down, and stay maintained despite change. Continuity shows in the ongoing presence of cultural values, customary norms, social institutions, traditions, language, and group identity preserved across generations (Heywood & Yarrow, 2025). A society may change in certain aspects while still holding onto specific elements as the foundation of social stability. Continuity maintains order, solidarity, and a shared sense of belonging within the community (Hartati, 2019; Azizah et al., 2023). Without continuity in values and norms, a society loses its guidance and social identity. Change and continuity coexist: some elements evolve with the times, while others stay preserved as social heritage.

Edward Shils explains that tradition passes from the past to the next generation and stays maintained because the community considers it valuable (Amin et al., 2025; Saifuddin et al., 2025). It encompasses values, beliefs, norms, knowledge, habits, symbols, and social practices that live in the community's daily life (Agustianto, 2011; Sudarsih et al., 2019). Tradition endures because it holds social meaning for the group that inherits it, not merely because it is old. Tradition connects the past to the present, giving a community identity, moral direction, and awareness of its history. Through tradition, a community understands who it is, where it comes from, and which values it needs to preserve. Tradition can undergo reinterpretation, adaptation, and even renewal to meet the needs of the times while keeping its core values (Hassan, 2022). Traditional ceremonies may change in how communities carry them out. Traditional arts can use digital media. Regional languages can spread through modern platforms. Tradition stays alive as long as its fundamental meaning stays recognized and passed down. This matters because it shows that modern societies don't need to abandon tradition to progress. Tradition can instead become a source of legitimacy, social solidarity, and cultural strength in facing change.

Edward Shils also explains that modernity describes a society characterized by rationality, differentiated social institutions, developing science and technology, bureaucracy, urbanization, and a drive toward progress (Makka, 2025; Pokol, 2004). Modernity brings a way of thinking that favors efficiency, openness to innovation, and both individual and collective achievement. Shils' theory applies strongly to contemporary culture, especially traditional arts such as Zapin (Jailani et al., 2023; Rofiah et al., 2026). Zapin Meskom maintains Malay values, patterns of inheritance, and local identity as elements of tradition, while embracing modern elements such as stage arrangements, social media promotion, cultural festivals, and younger generations' involvement through arts education. The continuity of tradition often depends on this ability to adapt to modernity without losing its core meaning. Through Shils' perspective, tradition and modernity work as two forces that shape the dynamics of modern society together, not as opposing poles.

Researchers have studied zapin extensively across the Malay region. Most of these studies, however, focus separately on describing form, function, analysing change or preservation, or examining other zapin types (Jailani et al., 2023; Nadilah et al., 2023; Nora & Efi, 2022; Rofiah et al., 2026; Yulinis & Widyarto, 2023). Few studies examine continuity and transformation together in Zapin Meskom music in Bengkalis Regency, Riau, integrating Soerjono Soekanto's framework of social change and continuity with Edward Shils' framework of tradition and modernity. This study fills that gap through a comprehensive analysis of Zapin Meskom's internal and external dynamics.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach, aimed at deeply understanding social and cultural phenomena through words, behaviors, documents, and field observation, rather than statistical numbers (Pahleviannur et al., 2022; Sugiyono., 2019). The descriptive approach systematically and factually describes the research object, while the analytical approach interprets the meaning, relationships, and factors shaping the phenomenon based on relevant theories. This method lets the researcher explain the actual conditions while analysing the dynamics at play comprehensively and in depth.

The research took place in Meskom Village, Bengkalis District, Bengkalis Regency, Riau Province, from October 1, 2024, to the end of January 2026. We chose this location because Meskom Village stands as one of the centers for Zapin Meskom's development, remaining alive and well-known in the local community's cultural life (Jailani et al., 2023). The research subjects included key Zapin Meskom performers, namely musicians, dancers, and vocalists. We selected them for their direct involvement in the performance process and their understanding of playing techniques, dance movement patterns, song lyrics, and the art form's development over time. Their information explains the performance form, rehearsal process, presentation changes, and preservation efforts.

The research subjects also included traditional leaders, local cultural experts, and the community that supports Zapin Meskom. Traditional leaders explained the values, norms, and cultural functions inherent in Zapin. Local cultural experts offered historical perspectives and insight into the art's development within the community. We chose the supporting community to understand their level of acceptance, participation, and the meaning Zapin Meskom holds in local social life. We collected data through participatory observation, involving ourselves directly in the research environment to observe performances, rehearsal processes, and social activities related to Zapin Meskom (Ma' Ruf, 2025; Romdona et al., 2025). This technique let us gather concrete data on the performance form, interactions among artists, the process of cultural transmission, and Zapin Meskom's role in community life in depth. To maintain objectivity and reduce potential bias, we systematically recorded data, distinguished between field facts and personal interpretations, and verified findings by comparing observation results with interviews and documentation.

We conducted in-depth interviews with key informants: artists, traditional leaders, and cultural experts who hold knowledge and direct experience related to Zapin Meskom (Romdona et al., 2025). This technique explored detailed information on the history, cultural values, development, performance changes, and preservation efforts of Zapin Meskom. It let informants explain their experiences, perspectives, and subjective meanings directly, helping us understand the reasons, values, and meanings behind Zapin Meskom's existence and change that observation alone could not reveal. We also drew on documentation of written and visual sources, such as archives, news articles, audiovisual recordings, and old and new photographs related to Zapin Meskom. This technique gathered supporting data on the

history, development, performance changes, and preservation processes more accurately, complementing the observations and interviews (Ma' Ruf, 2025).

We analysed data using the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, covering three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024; Saleh, 2017). Data reduction selects, focuses, and simplifies important data. Data display presents findings as narratives, matrices, or tables to aid understanding. Conclusion drawing interprets findings through continuous verification. These three stages interconnect and repeat throughout the research process, keeping the analysis systematic, in-depth, and continuously refined until it yields valid, accurate conclusions. We also applied data triangulation, comparing data from informants, documents, and observation results, and across interviews, observations, and documentation studies (Romdona et al., 2025). We confirmed interview data through field observations and strengthened it with archives, photos, or documents related to Zapin Meskom. Norman K. Denzin argues that triangulation tests the consistency of data across perspectives. This technique strengthens the validity and reliability of the findings, making the research results more accurate, consistent, and trustworthy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Continuity of Zapin Meskom in Preserving Malay Identity

Zapin Meskom's continuity rests primarily on cultural transmission mechanisms, not simply on performances taking place. Amid modernity's pressures, digital entertainment, changing youth tastes, and weakening traditional interaction spaces, the tradition endures because key agents actively sustain it: senior artists, dance instructors, traditional musicians, customary leaders, families, educational institutions, art studios, and local government. They guard collective memory, transmitting knowledge, affirming norms, and keeping Zapin Meskom relevant in Bengkalis Regency's social life. Transmission works differently across each element of the art form. In music, senior gambus and marwas players teach rhythmic patterns through imitation and repetition rather than formal notation, treating musical skill as rooted in emotional closeness to the community. In dance, instructors and senior dancers pass down movements through collective training that instills discipline, cohesion, and etiquette, countering modern pressure toward freer, more sensational dance by affirming that Zapin's beauty lies in orderliness. In lyrics and language, senior vocalists and elders introduce pantun and moral meanings through memorization and repeated performance, keeping Malay language alive even among younger generations who don't use it daily. In social function, the tradition holds its place through presence at weddings, religious festivities, circumcision ceremonies, and regional festivals, with traditional leaders guarding its legitimacy by keeping it tied to sacred, significant moments rather than treating it as an optional spectacle.

Zapin Meskom's success in staying relevant lies in shifting from a heritage of the past into a living, contemporary practice. It survives because the community continuously practices, teaches, and reinterprets it, not merely because it gets preserved. Cultural agents bridge past and future, ensuring modernity changes how transmission happens without breaking the chain of inheritance. This continuity depends on a broader preservation system built on three interconnected elements. Intergenerational inheritance matters most: the older generation transfers knowledge and values through informal training and mentoring, instilling not just technique but a sense of belonging, since movements or music learned without cultural meaning cause the tradition to lose its soul. Community support provides

the social space where the art lives, since traditional arts cannot survive on individual artists alone, they need audiences, organizers, and a community that still values them. Customary values, including politeness, respect for elders, togetherness, and deliberation, root the tradition in Malay ethics beyond mere performance. These three elements depend on each other: losing the next generation costs practitioners, losing the community costs social space, and losing customary values costs meaning itself.

Beyond structure, Zapin Meskom's continuity rests on the symbolic and philosophical values it still carries for the Meskom community. Symbolically, it represents Malay identity, each performance stirring a shared sense of belonging and cultural pride amid globalization's pull toward outside identities. Philosophically, it teaches togetherness and social harmony through dance patterns that demand cohesion and reward no individual display; it embodies manners and politeness through measured, decorous movement and advice-laden verses; and it demonstrates cultural resilience, showing that embracing modernity doesn't require severing ties to ancestral roots. These meanings explain why the community would struggle to abandon the tradition: as long as Zapin Meskom keeps working as a symbol of identity, a vehicle for ethical education, and a space that unites people, it holds its place, not just through its artists, but through the meaning that lives on in the community's collective consciousness.

The Transformation of Zapin Meskom in Adapting to the Tides of Modernity

Zapin Meskom's performance has evolved in response to social, cultural, and technological change, along with shifting audience preferences. This section draws on field observations of performances and rehearsals, in-depth interviews with artists, musicians, dance coaches, and community leaders, and documentation including photos, videos, and archives from Bengkalis Regency. This change does not signal a loss of authenticity. It often works as an adaptive strategy that keeps tradition relevant amid the dominance of popular entertainment and digital media. The shift became more pronounced from the mid-2010s onward, coinciding with increased regional festival programming, tourism promotion, and social media exposure. As one artist explained (15/10/2025), "If the traditional form is performed intact, young audiences sometimes lack patience, so it must be made more engaging without losing Zapin's essence." Transformation, in other words, responds to a need for relevance rather than a chase after trends.

1. Changes in performance form

Four changes stand out in the performance itself, *Duration*. Zapin Meskom performances, once lengthy during community celebrations, now typically run 10 to 20 minutes at festivals and government events, condensing the opening, core movements, and closing into a tighter sequence. This reflects a shift from a flexible communal performance toward a modern stage show that demands scheduling precision. The main rhythm and characteristic movement patterns stay intact despite the shorter runtime. *Instrumentation*. Some art groups keep the gambus and marwas at the core of their music while adding keyboards or modern audio equipment for larger stages. A senior musician noted (28/11/2025), "*It's fine to use new instruments, but the marwas must not be abandoned, because it is the breath of Zapin.*" The artistic community accepts technical innovation while holding firm symbolic boundaries, balancing modern performance demands against the preservation of traditional sound. *Choreography*. Dance formations now shift more rapidly and feature larger group compositions and more dynamic visual arrangements, while the basic steps of Zapin remain preserved. A dance coach explained, "*young people like fast-*

moving things, so variations are made in the formations, not in the basic steps." Innovation targets visual packaging; the core movements stay untouched. *Costumes.* Performances now favor brighter colors, more lustrous materials, and neater uniform designs suited for stage and digital media. Traditional leaders confirm that modesty, tidiness, and appropriateness, the fundamental aspects of Malay attire, must still hold. Costume changes work at the level of external aesthetics without discarding the cultural values they embody.

The transformation of performance formats also follows a broader shift in social function. Zapin Meskom once centered on customary spaces and community celebrations. It now appears in tourism festivals, government agendas, school promotions, and social media content. As the audience widens from internal community to the general public, performances trend shorter, neater, more communicative, and more visually appealing. Modernity reshapes not just the art's form, but the social landscape in which people perform and evaluate it. This adaptation carries risk in both directions. Unchecked innovation, excessive electronic music, overly liberal choreography, or costumes chasing visual effect, risks letting commercial entertainment overshadow tradition. Overly restricted change risks making Zapin feel unappealing and disconnected to younger generations. Preservation, then, requires defining the boundary between innovation that strengthens tradition and innovation that obscures its identity. The Meskom community navigates this through selective adaptation rather than rejecting change or surrendering to market logic. Duration shortens, costumes get embellished, stage design modernizes, yet the basic rhythm, Malay identity, poetic language, and values of propriety hold. A strong tradition isn't frozen; it evolves without losing its core. Changes in duration, instrumentation, choreography, and costumes represent socio-cultural negotiation between past and present. Transformation signals that Zapin Meskom stays alive, debated, and valued, not that it faces an automatic threat. The challenge lies not in stopping change but in guiding it so modernization strengthens Bengkalis Malay cultural identity.

2. External drivers of transformation

Soerjono Soekanto's framework explains this transformation through the interaction between external factors and a community's capacity to preserve core cultural elements. Change here means gradual adaptation to social pressure, not the elimination of tradition. Four external factors drive Zapin Meskom's transformation directly: mass media, the tourism industry, cultural policy, and globalization. *Mass media.* Platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have become primary spaces for documenting and spreading Zapin Meskom. Video uploads on the Riau cultural community channel tend to feature only the core performance, averaging 10–15 minutes, driving condensed openings and faster dance transitions. An art instructor explained (12/10/2025), *"Now when we perform, we already think about the camera. The opening must be immediately engaging because in a video, people can just skip it."* Digital media logic reshapes how performances get structured, not just how they get published. *Tourism.* Events like the Bengkalis Malay Cultural Festival, official government receptions, and Tourism Office calendar performances position Zapin Meskom as a representation of regional identity, not just a traditional art form. This has driven more uniform, eye-catching costumes and a shortened opening ritual for easier audience understanding. A cultural figure noted (02/01/2026), *"For out-of-town guests, we make it more concise so that the cultural message gets across."* Tourism transforms Zapin from communal ritual into communicative cultural attraction.

Cultural policy. Formal regulations, including the Bengkalis Regency Student Arts Festival, regency-level traditional dance competitions, and arts studio development

programs, shape performances through rules like the 7–10 minute time limit and competition scoring systems. The traditionally lengthy musical introduction, for instance, often gets shortened or merged with the main section. A local cultural figure stated (15/01/2026), *"In competitions, we have to adjust the timing. Not all parts can be presented in full."* Cultural policy shapes performance format directly, beyond simply creating space for preservation. *Globalization.* The younger generation's access to platforms like Instagram, YouTube Shorts, and international dance videos shows up in dance studio groups through more dynamic movements, varied floor patterns, and more professional stage lighting, without eliminating Zapin's fundamental structure. A young dancer explained (23/01/2026), *"We see modern dance on the internet, so we want to perform with more energy, but the Zapin steps remain the same."* Globalization inspires technique; it doesn't replace cultural identity. These four factors interact rather than operate separately. At the Bengkalis Cultural Festival, for instance, Zapin Meskom must meet policy demands (competition duration and format), tourism demands (cultural attraction), digital media demands (camera visuals), and globalization's aesthetic pull, all at once, forcing careful negotiation of every performance element. Shortened duration, simplified ritual structure, and enhanced stage visuals emerge directly from this convergence of external pressures.

The community doesn't simply absorb these pressures passively. The Meskom community practices cultural selection: preserving core elements such as the marwas rhythm pattern, basic Zapin steps, and values of polite movement, while treating duration, costumes, and stage design as flexible. Social change here isn't driven solely by external factors. The community's capacity to filter and direct change, keeping it within the boundaries of their cultural identity, balances that pressure.

3. Function shift adaptation and commodification

Two concepts explain the shift in Zapin Meskom's function: cultural adaptation and commodification. Cultural adaptation frames the shift from ritual to entertainment as an adjustment that ensures the art form's survival amid social change. Commodification captures how Zapin Meskom now works as a cultural product packaged for festivals, tourism, and digital media, alongside its role in traditional ceremonies, making its value subject to public consumption interests and economic factors. Several actors drive this process: artists, traditional elders, government officials (particularly from culture and tourism departments), and event or festival organizers, each holding different interests in shaping the performance. Traditional elders tend to preserve the full structure, 30 to 45 minutes, particularly the opening tribute segment, for traditional ceremonies. Festival organizers and the tourism office, at events like the Bengkalis Malay Cultural Festival, prioritize time efficiency, condensing performances to roughly 10 to 15 minutes. A musician noted (20/01/2026), *"We follow the event's rules, but we still maintain the steps and etiquette of Zapin."* A traditional elder emphasized that *"what's important is that the essence isn't lost, even if the form is adapted."* The government and festival organizers hold significant influence, controlling the performance space, duration, and evaluation criteria, which indirectly shapes the performance's final form. This dynamic reveals unequal power in the negotiation of values. Government and tourism industry actors hold a structurally stronger position, controlling space and resources, while artists and traditional elders guard traditional values and adapt to the rules set for them. The community isn't entirely passive, though it continues exercising cultural selection, preserving basic movement patterns, the marwas rhythm, and performance etiquette. The shift in Zapin Meskom's function reflects complex interaction among actors with differing interests and power, collectively shaping the

direction of this traditional art's transformation.

Does Transformation Ensure Continuity?

Zapin Meskom exists in a continuous negotiation between continuity and transformation. In Soerjono Soekanto's framework, social change always involves two forces simultaneously: external pressures for change, and the elements the community chooses to preserve. Zapin Meskom is never completely fixed or completely changed. It exists "in between," where old and new elements engage in constant dialogue. This indicates the continuity maintained by the Meskom Community.

The Meskom Community preserves core elements: basic movement patterns, marwas rhythms, Malay poetic structures, and performance ethics. These remain stable across traditional and modern contexts. As one local artist succinctly put it (Meskom, 2025): "The stage setting may change, but the Zapin steps must not disappear." Continuity here operates through cultural selection: the community maintains what it deems valuable even as the surrounding social structure shifts.

Adaptations emerge in response to digital media, tourism, and cultural policies: performance durations have been shortened from around 30–45 minutes to 10–15 minutes, stage designs have become more visually appealing, and opening rituals have been simplified. Modernity changes the way traditions are presented, not the traditions themselves. Soekanto frames this as social adaptation: changes that enable social systems to continue functioning under new conditions.

Continuity and transformation operate side by side. Traditional ceremonies still feature Zapin Meskom in its entirety. Festivals and tourism promotions tend toward transformation, simplified structures, and adjusted visuals. Even there, the opening ritual is shortened. The core movements and music remain intact. Negotiation does not mean choosing one over the other; it means blending the two in proportions appropriate to the context. Different actors pull in different directions. The government and the tourism industry tend to drive transformation through performance standards and promotional needs. Traditional leaders emphasize continuity of values. Artists stand in the middle, mediating between the two in their practice. Soekanto's framework suggests that the strength of culture lies in its ability to survive and change, allowing Zapin Meskom to survive in changing social contexts without losing its core identity.

The Meskom community sustains Zapin Meskom through four concrete strategies, combining innovation with the preservation of core identity. *Dual performance system.* Traditional performances retain their full 30–45 minute structure, including the ritualistic opening and tribute segment. Festival performances, such as at the Bengkalis Malay Cultural Festival, condense to 1015 minutes. Field observations found that roughly 70% of Meskom Zapin performances at formal public events now use this condensed format (studio observations, 2025). Presentation innovates. Foundational movement patterns and marwas rhythms stay unaltered. *Preservation of core elements.* Instructors at studios like Sanggar Seni Warisan Meskom insist changes apply only to duration and stage layout, never to basic movement structure. Interviews with instructors (2025) found that most studio members, including younger dancers, still maintain 80-90% of traditional movement patterns even in modern formats. Innovation here strengthens tradition's resilience rather than undermining it. *Digital media.* Platforms like YouTube and TikTok, including the "Zapin Meskom Official" channel, show short-form videos (5-10 minutes) drawing higher audience engagement than longer versions (2025 content analysis). The community still maintains a complete archive of full performances. Digital content works as a gateway to broader

appreciation, not a replacement for the traditional form.

Regeneration through studios. Studios such as the Meskom Zapin Studio (interview, 26/01/2026) anchor cultural transmission for younger generations. Youth participation in regular practice has grown, particularly since Zapin began appearing in more dynamic festival and digital formats. Popular culture still pulls some young people away. Instructors blend traditional methods with creative approaches to keep learning engaging without compromising Zapin's core values. Together, these strategies show that Zapin Meskom's sustainability depends on both innovation and the discipline to preserve identity boundaries. Shortened duration, digitization, and updated training methods expand accessibility and public appreciation. Preserved core elements keep Zapin's identity intact. The Meskom community has struck this balance, keeping Zapin alive, relevant, and recognized as a distinctive Malay cultural identity.

Continuity and transformation reinforce each other while also creating tension in shaping Meskom's cultural identity. Continuity anchors the authenticity of cultural values. Transformation opens space for the tradition to stay relevant amid social change. Within Soekanto's framework, this shows that cultural identity isn't static. Communities continuously negotiate it through the interaction between tradition and modernity. Meskom's cultural identity stays strong on the continuity side through preserved core elements basic movement patterns, marwas rhythm, Malay poetry, and performance courtesy. These elements mark Meskom Zapin as distinct from other Zapin variants and reinforce the community's sense of belonging to the tradition, treating Zapin as part of social and cultural life rather than mere performance. On the transformation side, digital media, tourism, and cultural policy have broadened Zapin Meskom's meaning. It now functions as entertainment, a cultural commodity, and a representation of regional identity, beyond ritual space alone. This openness brings a real risk cultural simplification as Zapin appears more often in stage or digital formats. It has also produced a dual identity: sacred and symbolic in traditional contexts, communicative and aesthetic in modern ones. The community has adapted tradition to the times without erasing its roots.

This transformation has also raised cultural awareness. Festivals, social media, and studio programs have made younger generations more familiar with Zapin Meskom, even in adapted form. This broader appreciation still needs oversight from traditional leaders and artists to keep core values intact. Meskom's cultural identity proves dynamic, adaptive, and selective: continuity keeps tradition's roots alive, transformation ensures its survival in a modern context. Within Soekanto's framework, social change doesn't erase cultural identity. It reshapes cultural identity through continuous adaptation, keeping Zapin Meskom alive as an evolving cultural symbol within the community.

CONCLUSIONS

This study finds that Zapin Meskom shows strong characteristics across continuity, transformation, and the dialectic between tradition and modernity. On continuity, Zapin Meskom preserves core elements: basic movement patterns, marwas rhythm, Malay poetry, and performance courtesy. Traditional leaders, artists, and the system of transmission through art studios and intergenerational learning support this continuity, keeping fundamental cultural values intact as the primary identity of the Meskom community. On transformation, the study observes changes in the form and function of performances: shorter durations, more modern stage arrangements, and a shift from ritual toward entertainment, competition, and cultural promotion. Digital media, the tourism industry, cultural policy, and globalization drive this transformation, pushing performing arts toward greater adaptability, communicativeness, and appeal to a broader public. Zapin Meskom demonstrates a dialectic between tradition and modernity. Tradition anchors the authenticity of cultural values. Modernity opens space for innovation and adaptation of form. Their interaction produces a dynamic cultural identity, one where Zapin Meskom keeps its traditional roots while staying open to change. Zapin Meskom endures as a living, adaptive, relevant cultural heritage within contemporary society.

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