

## Gandrung Dance as a Source of Banyuwangi Imaging Ideas

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### ABSTRACT

In an era of heightened global competition for tourism and investment, cultural identity has emerged as a critical component of regional branding strategies. This research investigates the multifaceted role of the Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi, Indonesia, examining its function beyond that of a traditional performance to serve as a symbolic and communicative vehicle for shaping regional identity. Employing a qualitative phenomenological methodology, the study gathered data through extensive interviews, direct observation, thorough document analysis, and critical media reviews. Thematic analysis, informed by the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, was further enhanced by the application of Kavaratzis's city branding framework to delineate Gandrung's influence across primary, secondary, and tertiary communication channels. The findings indicate that Gandrung's efficacy as a branding symbol is rooted in its historical significance, unique visual characteristics, media adaptability, and profound emotional impact. Furthermore, the study elucidates how Gandrung's evolution from a socially marginalised art form to a regional emblem mirrors larger trends in the negotiation of cultural legitimacy, governance, and identity. Although its strategic utilisation has yielded substantial economic and social advantages, ensuring the enduring viability of Gandrung as a cultural symbol necessitates concerted initiatives to uphold authenticity and community empowerment. This study contributes to

the ongoing academic conversation regarding the integration of performing arts in place branding and offers actionable guidance for policymakers, designers, and cultural stakeholders involved in leveraging tradition for contemporary regional development.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalisation, where technological advancements in information and communication have diminished geographical barriers, regions must adopt innovative strategies and perspectives to enhance their competitive edge. This is particularly crucial as numerous Indonesian regions have actively engaged in place branding over the last decade, leveraging their unique resources. This competitive landscape necessitates distinct regional images and characters to attract tourism, investment, new residents, and foster economic growth. A region's image, a composite of perceptions, thoughts, and impressions derived from its products, services, environment, arts, and culture, serves as a powerful asset and a guide for future development (Widayati et al., 2020; Wiryawan, 2009). However, cultivating a deep-rooted image and fostering emotional connections requires sustained, active efforts through planned, integrated, and continuous communication, a process known as imaging. Imaging involves strategic communication practices to shape the perception of a region and its inhabitants (Merrilees et al., 2009). As of 2023, 113 out of 514 Indonesian regencies and cities have undergone imaging, identified by their logos and taglines. The conceptual basis for these efforts stems from local distinctiveness, encompassing arts and culture, natural environments, agricultural and marine resources, flora, endemic fauna, trade and services, architecture, and historical elements. These elements

contribute to territorial marketing and collective branding, distinguishing regions from competitors (Roostika, 2019).

Among the various Indonesian regions engaging in place branding, Banyuwangi Regency in East Java has distinguished itself by effectively employing the Gandrung dance as a central element in its regional imaging strategy. Using Gandrung dance as a source of Banyuwangi imagery ideas is exhilarating and different from premium assets in other forms already known. Dance itself has elements of motion and expression to make it look flexible. Flexibility refers to the norms and principles of arrangement of how to treat art under the rules of the culture in which the art was formed and developed (Kartika, 2016). A planned, integrated, and sustainable visual identity for the art of Gandrung dance in a series of Banyuwangi imaging activities plays an important role in building audience perception. However, perception is related to image formation, so its including how messages are driven. Such as various associations, memories, hopes, and many other feelings that drive people's behaviour (Anholt, 2007). Imaging that refers to the audience's perspective in translating signals sent through a communication process consisting of the sender, message, media channel, and message recipient (Kapferer, 2008).

The incorporation of cultural performances into place branding initiatives is a well-established practice. Examples include Japan's use of Kabuki for heritage tourism, Andalusia's integration of Flamenco into its cultural economy, and

Brazil's adoption of Capoeira to shape its international identity (Boudreau, 2019; Dicks, 2020; Richards, 2011). Nevertheless, Banyuwangi's distinctiveness lies in its comprehensive integration of the Gandrung dance across public infrastructure, educational systems, digital communications, and policy frameworks. Instead of solely commercialising the dance for tourism, the region imbues Gandrung into the daily visual and institutional experiences of its populace.

While traditional performing arts are increasingly recognised in destination marketing, the transformation of a single art form into a comprehensive regional visual identity remains underexplored, particularly within the Southeast Asian context. Existing scholarship often frames traditional performances within heritage preservation (Timothy & Boyd, 2003) or cultural commodification (Shepherd, 2002), rather than as instruments for identity engineering and competitive differentiation. This research seeks to address this gap by analysing the Gandrung dance as both a cultural expression and a strategic visual idiom employed to construct and convey Banyuwangi's regional image. The findings of this research offer valuable insights for urban planners and regional policymakers tasked with constructing regional identities by integrating local distinctiveness, such as dance, into their imaging strategies.

This study's discussion is grounded in theories of identity, the presence of visual assets, and communication activities. The concept of identity serves as the

foundation for image formation and regional differentiation. Identity is not static; it is a construct shaped by history and culture, viewed as both a structure and a dynamic process (Hauge, 2005; Wardhani et al., 2020). It resides within collective memory and physical markers that represent a region (Yananda & Salamah, 2014). Existence refers to the emergence or manifestation of something, characterised by flexibility and potential for development rather than rigidity (Bagus, 1996; Zainal, 2007). Kavaratzis's (2004) theory of image communication, encompassing primary, secondary, and tertiary communication, is also applied.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilised a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology with a phenomenological orientation to investigate the role of the Gandrung dance as a foundation for regional imaging in Banyuwangi. This methodological choice was deemed appropriate for revealing the inherent cultural significance within traditional artistic expressions and examining their strategic deployment in the construction of regional identities (Creswell, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Data acquisition involved multiple methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, archival research, and visual examination. A sample of 15 key informants, deliberately chosen for their direct involvement in the conceptualisation or interpretation of Gandrung's public presence, included government representatives, Gandrung performers,

cultural specialists, graphic designers, and event coordinators. These interviews were conducted from January 2021 to January 2024, with all conversations audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

This study utilised a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach with a phenomenological orientation to explore the function of the Gandrung dance as a basis for regional imaging in Banyuwangi. The research employed thematic analysis, specifically the interactive model by Miles et al. (2014), which encompasses data condensation, presentation, and conclusion verification. Findings were validated through triangulation, cross-referencing interview data with documentary evidence, media coverage, and archival records. Additionally, a visual analysis, guided by Kavaratzis's (2004) city branding framework, was performed to evaluate how cultural identity is constructed and conveyed through primary, secondary, and tertiary communication channels. This framework facilitated an assessment of Gandrung elements' representation across public spaces, institutional media, and digital platforms, offering a comprehensive understanding of its aesthetic and symbolic integration into Banyuwangi's imaging strategy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In an interview conducted on July 20, 2023, Abdullah Fauzi, the cultural guard of the Banyuwangi Tourism and Culture Office, explained that the emergence of Gandrung art is deeply rooted in the historical struggle of

the Blambangan people against VOC troops in 1771. He remarked, "Gandrung emerged from the grassroots, from the people, as a symbol of the struggle to preserve Banyuwangi's identity". Fauzi, emphasising that the guerrilla origins of the dance were an expression of resistance during turbulent times. According to his account, the journey of Gandrung performances began as a guerrilla endeavor—with dancers traveling from village to village, and their poetic songs carrying messages of struggle and serving as a reminder of the cruelty of colonial forces.

Initially, Gandrung performances featured male dancers dressed in women's attire, accompanied by simple musical instruments (Figure 1). This form gradually evolved, marking the end of the "Gandrung Lanang" era with the retirement of Marsan in 1895. As noted by Setianto (2019), "Semi initiated the shift from male to female dancers." Influential figures such as Sumitro Hadi further propelled this transformation by reimagining the dance for younger generations, introducing innovative elements like Jejer, Paju, and Seblang scenes that were absent in the earlier Gandrung Marsan era (Anoegrajeki & Effendy, 2007).

Over time, two distinct variants of Gandrung emerged in the Banyuwangi community: Gandrung Terob, or professional Gandrung performed in a staged arena (usually under a roof or tent), and the Jejer Gandrung dance—a refined composition rooted in the Gandrung Terob style, created in 1974 by Sumitro Hadi. Regent Samsul Hadi later established the Jejer Gandrung



Figure 1. A Group of Gandrung dance performances (Photo by Barry)

dance as the official welcoming performance in Banyuwangi Regency (Anoegrajekti, 2016).

Gandrung's artistic life, deeply embedded in and supported by the community, plays an essential role in the social fabric of Banyuwangi. Its performances attract audiences from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, serving as a vehicle for peaceful and unifying interaction. Moreover, Gandrung art has significantly influenced the broader art scene in Banyuwangi—manifesting in various forms such as dances, songs, and architectural ornaments (Dariharto, 2009).

### **The Basis for Choosing Gandrung Dance as a Source of Banyuwangi Imaging Ideas**

Gandrung is the most famous traditional art in Banyuwangi. Its popularity began in the early 20th century, during what is known as the Gandrung Semi era, and continued to flourish after Indonesia's independence as the dance became intertwined with both cultural and political expressions in the

region. In its early days, Gandrung was performed at various events organised by political organisations and cultural institutions, with strong associations to the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) and frequent appearances at PKI campaigns and Lekra-sponsored events (Raharjo, 2016). However, following the tragic incidents of the September 30 Movement in 1965, a vacuum emerged in its practice. During the New Order era, regional cultural policies revived the dance, and under the leadership of Regent Djoko Supa'at Slamet, Gandrung's popularity soared. As recalled by renowned Gandrung dancer Sumitro Hadi, "Gandrung artists were not only recorded and nurtured, but also given space to perform at regional events and even invited to the State Palace."

In 1974, Sumitro Hadi created the Jejer Gandrung dance composition. Reflecting on this innovative moment, he stated:

In 1974, I attended a young dance choreographer training at TIM, and I wondered why there was no dance from Banyuwangi that was promoted

as outstanding. I chose Gandrung and created an adaptation for students, which was subsequently adopted as the welcoming dance.

Regent Djoko Supa'at Slamet subsequently mandated that the dance be taught in schools as a form of social dance and performed en masse, and since then, the Jejer Gandrung dance has become widely known and accepted (Setianto, 2019). At that time, Gandrung also served as a form of entertainment during political campaigns, effectively conveying messages about development and government programs (Raharjo, 2016).

In the post-reform era, the emphasis of Gandrung shifted towards entertainment and tourism, aligning with the Banyuwangi government's tourist initiatives. Regent Samsul Hadi established Gandrung as the official mascot of Banyuwangi tourism in 2002 and introduced the Jejer Gandrung dance as a welcome performance in 2003, followed by a program requiring all Banyuwangi schools to establish Jejer Gandrung dance groups (Anoegrajekti, 2016). The widespread installation of Gandrung statues across the region further solidified its status as a tourism icon. Under Regent Abdullah Azwar Anas, a mass performance called Gandrung Sewu was launched as a cultural commodification initiative, with every cultural event beginning with a Gandrung dance to greet guests. As Dariharto stated in one interview, "Gandrung has become the icon of Banyuwangi," underscoring the dance's

role in forging a strong local identity and promoting economic development both locally and internationally.

As a traditional dance, Gandrung has become a source of immense pride for the people of Banyuwangi. Its uniqueness lies in the distinctive costumes and traditional songs that accompany the performance. A key element is the headpiece known as Omprog—crafted from cowhide and adorned with motifs resembling the head of Antasena with a snake-like body, accented by a gold tassel and decorative flower strands. In an interview conducted on July 20, 2023, Gandrung dancer Rizka remarked, "That magnificent Omprog is an essential element in the Gandrung dancer's costume. Without Omprog, our appearance feels hollow and lifeless," suggesting a deeper ontology of embodiment in performance. This aligns with Turner's (1982) theory of ritual symbols: performance costumes are not aesthetic choices but carriers of sacred presence. Furthermore, in an interview on January 21, 2024, Dariharto emphasised that Gandrung's classical music is unique and unparalleled, while Abdullah Fauzi noted that the traditional Gandrung poems—expressed in free verse and sung in the distinctive Osing language—vividly capture the struggle of the Blambangan people against colonial invaders (Krisnawanta, 2019).

### **Gandrung: Rooted Traditional Art**

In the 1960s, the association of Gandrung performances with heavy alcohol

consumption led to a significant decline in its dignity and moral standing, so much so that many event organisers no longer wanted to invite the dance (Setiawan, 2019). Sumitro Hadi recalled, “In the past, society regarded Gandrung as a dance lacking dignity; its dancers were often insulted and considered lower-class individuals,” underscoring the widespread negative stigma. Gradually, religious segments branded Gandrung as immoral, relegating it to the margins where it could only flourish among marginalised communities (Setianto, 2019). Reflecting on this period of decline, Sumitro Hadi noted, “Over time, this dance gradually came back to life and was even incorporated into campaign programs, slowly restoring its presence in the public eye.” Gandrung then experienced a revival as it became interwoven with the political struggle; the dance was frequently featured in political events—especially those of the PKI—which led some of its artists to join Lekra (Folks Art Institute). “When we performed in PKI campaigns, we were often directly involved in political activities that led us to the G.30-S incident in 1965.” Sumitro Hadi recalled. Although nearly all elements of art and culture disappeared from the mainstream entertainment scene after that incident, one observer remarked, “Gandrung is like embers still glowing beneath the ash—hidden yet alive in the hearts of the people.” Ultimately, the people of Banyuwangi embraced Gandrung as an integral part of their cultural identity, proving that this art form has deep roots in the collective spirit of the community.

### **Gandrung: Art with High-selling Power**

The dance moves, make-up, costumes, and music in the art of Gandrung embody an extraordinary artistic aesthetic value. Sumitro Hadi once remarked, “It is truly shameful if this extraordinary beauty were to suffer the same fate as other art forms like *Tledak* or *Bumbung* in Bali,” emphasising the need to preserve its unique allure. In response to concerns about its declining status, Hadi took proactive measures by creating the Jejer Gandrung dance composition—a variation deeply rooted in traditional Gandrung (Setianto, 2019). Supported by the Banyuwangi Regional Government, his initiatives have borne fruit, as evidenced by the growing participation of children and students who are gradually enhancing the dance’s artistic image.

Gandrung has evolved into a tourism icon for the government of Banyuwangi, embodying the leading spirit in promoting both the growth of the tourism sector and the region’s authentic identity. Through vibrant performances and festivals, Gandrung—steeped in regional culture—is marketed as a commodity to attract tourists. Its integration into daily life renders the art form both exotic and endearing to outsiders (Anoegrajekti & Effendy, 2007). In addition, Erwin Prastyo, a graphic designer for Banyuwangi’s marketing communication media, remarked in an interview on January 21, 2024, “Gandrung’s visualisation is not only aesthetically pleasing but also highly adaptable as a visual element in print and electronic promotional media.”

Gandrung dance plays a crucial role in enhancing Banyuwangi's tourism appeal. Abdul-lah Azwar Anas, the Regent of Banyuwangi, stated on detik.com that local tourism increased from 500,000 visitors before the imaging plan to 4.3 million today, with international tourists rising from 4,500 to over 100,000. Furthermore, Banyuwangi received the Awards for Excellence and Innovation in Tourism from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) during the 12th UNWTO Awards Forum in Madrid, Spain, in 2016 (Effendi, 2017). The domino effect of Gandrung dance performances and festivals is significant. In an interview conducted on January 21, 2021, Budianto, the initiator of the Gandrung Sewu festival, revealed, "We not only showcase the dance, but also create opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Every edition of the Gandrung Sewu festival has a tangible economic impact on the transportation, culinary, and creative sectors in Banyuwangi." This creative economy, driven by the tourism sector, has propelled Banyuwangi's Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) from IDR 32.4 trillion in 2010 to IDR 60.2 trillion, and the income per capita from IDR 20.8 million to IDR 37.7 million per year—a testament to the power of effective imaging (Setianto, 2019). The latest Gandrung Sewu Festival, revived in 2023 after the pandemic and reimagined with a unique three-day concept, achieved a turnover of more than IDR 7 billion (Werdiono, 2023). This event, now part of the National Event Calendar of Tourism and held from September 14 to 16

at Marina Boom Beach, Kampung Mandar Village, Banyuwangi District, highlights the transformative impact of Gandrung on the regional economy.

### **Constructing Cultural Identity: Gandrung as an Anchoring Symbol**

The research identified four primary themes contributing to the Gandrung dance's selection as the central symbol for Banyuwangi's regional branding efforts: its historical significance, the sense of collective pride it fosters, its unique visual characteristics, and its adaptability across various media platforms. These themes were consistently reinforced through discussions with individuals involved in the arts, government, and design sectors.

Gandrung is not just a performance; it is a living narrative of resistance and community memory. This cultural rootedness strengthens its legitimacy as a symbol. Fauzi, the cultural guard of the Banyuwangi Tourism and Culture Office remarked, "It emerged from the people, not from the elite." Here, Gandrung serves as a bottom-up identity marker, contrasting with top-down branding icons often found in urban reimagining projects (Dicks, 2020).

From a communication perspective, the dance's visual identity—most notably the Omprog headdress—offers semiotic clarity and continuity, allowing it to function across formats: from ritual performance to graphic icon. As graphic designer Erwin Prastyo observed, "Its form is versatile—it can move from stage to signage to screen without losing meaning." This underscores

Gandrung's symbolic economy: its iconicity sustains both emotional resonance and marketing utility.

### **Implementation of Gandrung Dance in Banyuwangi Imaging Communication Activities**

The implementation of Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi's imaging communication activities is the result of a well-planned perceptual engineering strategy that blends traditional methods—such as inscribing local cultural symbols—with modern information technology like WhatsApp status updates and Instagram Stories. This deliberate fusion of old and new facilitates a creative collaboration among various societal stakeholders, including local artists, government agencies, and community members. As one creative team member noted, “We combine traditional methods with digital platforms to ensure that the rich culture of Banyuwangi is conveyed dynamically and vibrantly,” emphasising that every element, from physical artefacts to social media updates, plays a crucial role in shaping the region's unique image.

According to Barry (2024), this collaborative process mirrors that in media and performing arts, where every contributor—from the visionary government planner to the grassroots community—is integral to producing quality work. The resulting image reflects the cultural richness and creativity inherent in Banyuwangi. In one interview, a local artist stated, “Every inscription and every post on

our Instagram Stories tells the story and showcases the beauty of Banyuwangi, bringing the region's image to life in people's minds,” demonstrating how traditional symbols and modern media work hand in hand. Furthermore, physical artefacts such as traditional inscriptions and sculptural representations of Gandrung not only serve as tangible expressions of the region's identity but also enhance the overall impact of the communication strategy. This integrated approach ensures that the visual and cultural narrative of Banyuwangi is both authentic and appealing to diverse audiences.

To investigate the contribution of these integrated strategies to Banyuwangi's regional image construction, Kavaratzis's city branding model provides a valuable analytical framework. This model delineates three interconnected communication channels essential for forging place identity: primary communication, encompassing the tangible aspects of a place such as its physical environment and governance; secondary communication, which involves deliberate promotional activities like marketing and media outreach; and tertiary communication, which captures the public's understanding derived from external sources such as news reports, online discussions, and personal recommendations. Utilising this model facilitates a structured analysis of Gandrung's role, not only as a cultural emblem but as a strategic vehicle for articulating, disseminating, and perceiving Banyuwangi's distinct identity.

### ***Banyuwangi Imaging Primary Communication Activities***

Landscape arrangement, infrastructure development, administrative policy implementation, and event organisation are key primary imaging communication activities that shape Banyuwangi's image as a "Gandrung City." The deliberate development of public spaces and the configuration of the physical environment—infused with Gandrung elements—serve to reinforce this regional identity. As a distinctive artistic expression, the Gandrung dance enhances the visual appeal and ambience of Banyuwangi for both residents and tourists. Key features of this physical transformation include the Sritanjung Park area, the Blambangan Cultural Arts Centre (Gesibu), the Gandrung Terracotta Park, green open spaces (RTH), and a park that divides the main thoroughfare. Figure 2 illustrates the integration of Gandrung dance elements into landscape-related communication strategies.

Infrastructure projects that embody the character of the Gandrung dance include the construction of landmarks featuring Gandrung dancer motifs at strategic locations—such as regional borders, residential gates, crossroads, and tourist destinations. In addition, the artistic influence of Gandrung has been integrated into the architectural aesthetics of various buildings, including sports stadiums, government offices, and transportation hubs. Figure 3 demonstrates how Gandrung dance elements are applied as part of



*Figure 2.* The form of the Gandrung dance is an aesthetic element of green open space (Photo by Paku Kusuma)

primary communication activities within the infrastructure category.

Banyuwangi's local administration has enacted several policies regarding the Gandrung dance. These policies include integrating the dance into extracurricular education, designating it as the official tourism mascot, using it as a welcoming dance, and incorporating it into government office signage. Additionally, employees in the tourism sector and state civil servants are encouraged to wear traditional attire to further promote the region's cultural heritage. Figure 4 illustrates an example of how Gandrung dance elements are employed in key policy-driven communication activities.

The Banyuwangi Regency Government has launched numerous cultural arts-themed events and festivals that prominently feature the Gandrung dance.



Figure 3. The landmark of a Gandrung dancer is located on the shore of Watu Dodol (Photo by Paku Kusuma)



Figure 4. Government office signboard using the dancer figures (Photo by Paku Kusuma)

Among these are the Gandrung Sewu Festival, the Ijen Valley Festival: Meras Gandrung, student art performances, and the use of the Gandrung dance as the opening performance to welcome official guests. These events are directly tied to the rich traditions of Gandrung and serve multiple functions. Not only do they act as tourist attractions that boost local tourism, but festivals like Gandrung Sewu also provide an effective avenue for

community consolidation. This strategy has successfully fostered a deep appreciation for Banyuwangi's native arts and culture among the younger generation. As one event coordinator noted, "Gandrung Sewu unites our community and instills a strong sense of pride in our cultural heritage." Figure 5 illustrates how Gandrung dance elements are incorporated into key communication activities within the event planning category.



Figure 5. Gandrung Sewu Festival 2023 held on Marina Boom beach, image by Public Relations of the Banyuwangi Regency Government

### Banyuwangi Imaging Secondary Communication Activities

Secondary communication activities for shaping Banyuwangi's image are executed through targeted advertisements and promotions aimed at capturing attention and persuading tourists to visit the region. A wide array of print and electronic media channels is employed, ranging from free platforms to paid services. These include posters, banners, billboards, souvenirs, social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), web marketing, Android applications (e.g., "Banyuwangi in Your Hand"), audiovisual media (such as YouTube channels), and public relations campaigns. Figure 6 illustrates how the Gandrung dance is depicted within these secondary communication efforts.

### Banyuwangi Imaging Tertiary Communication Activities

Tertiary communication in Banyuwangi's imaging strategy primarily relies on word-of-mouth interactions. Visitors



Figure 6. Tourist destination promotion billboard, image by Public Relations of the Banyuwangi Regency Government

share their experiences and satisfaction through oral narratives, written reviews, and digital media, rapidly disseminating information that shapes public perceptions of Banyuwangi.

Such communication is further amplified by testimonials from influential figures. For example, notable endorsements from public figures like West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil and renowned artists (e.g., Ayu Ting-ting, Suliyana, Andhika Pratama, Uya Kuya, among others) significantly contribute to promoting a positive image of Banyuwangi. In addition, diverse narratives from community members enrich the overall evaluation. One verified testimony from the Instagram account @Banyuwangi\_Tourism in 2019 states: "Banyuwangi is not merely a tourist destination; it is a living celebration of our rich cultural heritage, where the dynamic movements and profound symbolism of the Gandrung dance continue to inspire both locals and visitors." This transcript, empirically analysed through thematic coding, illustrates how various communication platforms effectively reach a vast audience and influence the public mindset.

Moreover, tertiary communication also occurs via news coverage and programs on

online news portals and national television channels. Journalists are compelled to report on Banyuwangi's abundant art and culture, scenic beauty, and the organisation of numerous unique, high-quality events. Table 1 details the distribution of media reports related to the Gandrung dance in Banyuwangi across selected online outlets.

The extensive circulation of news, reviews, and testimonials via mass media not only fosters positive perceptions and enhances visibility but also stimulates tourism, attracts investment, and promotes socio-economic development across various sectors. Importantly, this comprehensive media coverage contributes to establishing a robust regional image for Banyuwangi with minimal expenditure.

### Visual Symbolism, Legitimacy, and the Politics of Identity

The visual components of the Gandrung dance, including its attire, choreography, and musical style, are imbued with profound symbolic significance that extends beyond

Table 1  
*Media Reports about Gandrung Dance in Banyuwangi*

Year	Detik.com	Kompas.com	CNN Indonesia.com	Jatim.antaranews.com
2023	550	5	8	3
2022	515	11	13	15
2021	379	17	15	14
2020	239	9	14	4
2019	165	7	6	7
2018	117	8	-	7
2017	77	3	-	5
2016	33	6	-	1
2015	22	7	-	-
Total	2,097	73	56	56

mere performance aesthetics. Paramount among these is the Omprog, a distinctive headdress widely recognised as embodying the dancer's core identity. As noted by Gandrung performer Rizka, "Without Omprog, the performance feels hollow," underscoring its function not merely as adornment, but as an embodiment of presence and authority.

Historically, Gandrung faced a period of moral scrutiny in the 1960s, with associations to alcohol and perceived impropriety leading to its social stigmatisation. However, such associations are better understood as part of a broader moral narrative used by certain religious and political groups to marginalise expressions of local culture (Setiawan, 2019). Instead of accepting these assertions as factual historical accounts, it is more accurate to interpret them as manifestations of symbolic marginalisation and cultural repression. Consequently, the subsequent restoration of Gandrung within the public domain—achieved through policy interventions, educational initiatives, and public celebrations—signifies not only a resurgence of its aesthetic appeal but also a renegotiation of its cultural legitimacy under evolving power structures.

The strategic utilisation of Gandrung in regional branding has yielded tangible socio-economic advantages beyond its cultural significance, catalysing Banyuwangi's tourism growth, festival economy, and creative industries. Its inclusion in educational programs and public ceremonies fosters cultural continuity and resilience across generations.

Nevertheless, these positive outcomes prompt crucial considerations regarding sustainability and authenticity, suggesting that Gandrung's value should be preserved as a living cultural heritage rather than solely as a promotional tool. Achieving this equilibrium necessitates deliberate cultural governance that safeguards community participation while engaging external stakeholders, ensuring that the construction of identity remains internally consistent with the values of its people and outward-facing.

## CONCLUSION

The Gandrung dance serves as a crucial cultural vehicle for Banyuwangi, shaping, disseminating, and reinforcing the region's identity. Its efficacy as a symbolic element in regional branding stems from its historical significance, visual distinctiveness, and emotional impact. The Kavaratzis city branding model illuminates Gandrung's successful operation across primary, secondary, and tertiary communication pathways. Furthermore, Gandrung's revival after periods of suppression highlights the fluid negotiation of cultural legitimacy amidst evolving political and moral contexts. While Gandrung's incorporation into education, tourism, and public life has spurred economic growth and cultural resilience, it also poses a risk of commodification if not managed ethically.

Based on these findings, recommendations include the development of a cultural branding framework by regional planners and policymakers that balances promotion with preservation,

ensuring systematic documentation and transmission of Gandrung's artistic heritage. Creative practitioners should be encouraged to innovate within authentic cultural boundaries, producing visually compelling designs rooted in tradition. Educational and cultural institutions are urged to integrate Gandrung as a pedagogical tool for learning local history, language, and values, in addition to performance practice. Future research should focus on cross-cultural comparative studies to understand the global use of traditional performing arts in place branding and community responses to their commodification. Finally, cultural governance must prioritise participatory approaches, centering the local community in decision-making to preserve Gandrung's integrity and sustainability as a living cultural identity.

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