

**BRIDGING THE “PHYGITAL” GAP: REGIONAL MUSEUM  
ADAPTATION STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING GENERATION ALPHA  
IN THE POST-DIGITAL ERA (CASE STUDY: BALAPUTRA DEWA  
MUSEUM**

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**ABSTRACT**

Museums in developing countries face a double challenge: limited digital infrastructure and the demand to remain relevant to the newest demographic cohort, Generation Alpha (born after 2010), who have high expectations for interactivity and technology integration. This study aims to analyze the strategies of the Balaputra Dewa Museum in Palembang in bridging the gap between traditional physical collections and the “phygital” (physical-digital) learning mode inherent to Generation Alpha. Using a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with curators, educators, and child visitors (n=15) over four months. Thematic analysis revealed three main findings: (1) There is a “digital dissonance” where the museum's digitization efforts often fail to meet the UX/UI standards expected by digital natives; (2) Alpha visitors view museums as a “content backdrop” for digital identity formation, not merely a repository of knowledge; and (3) The most effective programs are not the most technologically advanced, but those that offer participatory and tactile experiences. This study recommends a paradigm shift from mere “technology adoption” to “content co-creation,” in which museums facilitate children to become active narrators of cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Post-digital Museum, Generation Alpha, Phygital Engagement, New Museology, Indonesian Cultural Heritage.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The global museum landscape is currently undergoing a fundamental paradigm shift, moving from the era of “digitization” to a “post-digital” condition. In this paradigm, technology is no longer merely a tool or a separate department, but rather an inherent element in every aspect of the

visitor experience, from collection management to exhibition interpretation. For large museums in the West, this transition may already be the norm. However, for regional museums in the “Global South,” such as Indonesia, this challenge is much more complex due to disparities in infrastructure and resources.

This challenge culminates when museums encounter Generation Alpha, a demographic cohort born entirely in the 21st century (after 2010). This generation grew up in an ecosystem where the boundaries between the physical and virtual have blurred, a reality often referred to as phygital. Unlike their predecessors, Generation Z, Generation Alpha has higher expectations for instant interactivity and gamification. They don't just consume information; they expect to be able to manipulate content at will, as they do on platforms such as Roblox or Minecraft.

The Balaputra Dewa Museum in Palembang, as an institution that preserves the memory of the Sriwijaya Kingdom and the culture of South Sumatra, is at a critical juncture. With its collection of static artifacts and traditional architecture such as the Rumah Limas, this museum risks becoming obsolete if it fails to translate its historical narrative into the cognitive “language” of Generation Alpha. Previous research has often focused solely on the digitization of collections, but few have critically examined how regional museum communication strategies interact with the unique psychographics of Generation Alpha.

This article aims to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of engagement strategies at the Balaputra Dewa Museum. Through the lens of Ross Parry's Post-Digital Museum theory and Henry Jenkins' concept of Participatory Culture, this study poses a critical question: How can traditional museums transform themselves into spaces that are relevant to children living in the age of algorithms, without losing the authenticity of their cultural heritage.

#### a. Post-Digital Museum and the Phygital Experience

The concept of the Post-Digital Museum does not mean “after” digital in the sense of abandoning technology, but rather a phase in which digital technology has become normative and invisible, integrated into museum operations. In this context, the dichotomy between ‘online’ and “offline”

becomes irrelevant. The visitor experience is phygital—a hybridity in which physical interaction with artifacts is enriched, not replaced, by a digital layer. This requires the design of museum experiences that seamlessly integrate physical and digital dimensions to create culturally sensitive activations.

b. Psychographics of Generation Alpha: Creators, not Consumers

Generation Alpha has distinct learning characteristics, often referred to as the most technologically literate generation in history. Studies show that they have a strong preference for learning that is visual, interactive, and provides instant feedback. More importantly, raised in a participatory culture, they have an intrinsic drive for co-creation. They are not satisfied with just looking at artifacts behind glass; they want to “remix,” share, and comment on cultural heritage, making participation the key to their engagement. Museums' failure to provide these channels for participation is often interpreted by children as a boring experience.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, which was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of unique phenomena in one specific location. The research was conducted at the Balaputra Dewa Museum in Palembang over a period of four months. This location was chosen because it represents the dynamics of provincial museums in Indonesia that are trying to modernize themselves despite their limitations. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide the richest insights into the phenomenon being studied. Participants consisted of two main groups: the management group, consisting of curators, education staff, and museum guides, to understand institutional strategies; and the Alpha Visitor group, consisting of children aged 8-12 years who visited either through school groups or with their families. This age range was chosen based on their cognitive ability to articulate reflective experiences.

Data was obtained through the standard Informed Consent & Assent ethical protocol, whereby written permission was obtained from parents/guardians or accompanying teachers. In addition, verbal consent

(assent) was requested directly from the children using simple language, ensuring they were aware that they could refuse or stop at any time without consequences. Data collection techniques included non-participatory observation, observing children's interactions with exhibits, and semi-structured post-visit interviews. The questions were designed to prompt children to recount their experiences at the museum. The interview transcripts and field notes were then analyzed using Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step procedure. This process involved inductive coding to identify recurring patterns of meaning related to engagement, boredom, and technological interaction, which were then grouped into main themes.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Data analysis yielded three main themes that describe the dynamics of Generation Alpha's interaction with the Balaputra Dewa Museum.

#### **a. Digital Dissonance**

Although the museum has attempted to integrate technology such as virtual tours and QR codes, field findings show a gap between the museum's intentions and Generation Alpha's acceptance. Many child informants expressed disappointment with the museum's digital elements, which they considered less responsive than their personal devices. This indicates digital dissonance; when the technology adopted by an institution lags behind the standards of its native visitors, it becomes a distraction. Museums seem to be stuck in a phase of superficial digitization, not yet achieving the deep integration that characterizes post-digital museums.

#### **b. Museums as "Content Stages"**

For Generation Alpha, visits to museums are inseparable from self-documentation activities. Observations show that the most popular areas are those with high visual value or Instagrammable, such as Rumah Limas. Interviews reveal that for these children, creating short video

content is not just narcissism, but a way for them to validate their experiences and build their digital identity narratives. This phenomenon confirms that for Gen Alpha, social media platforms serve as an extension of their physical experiences.

c. Longing for Tactility and Participation

An interesting finding is that amid digital sophistication, Generation Alpha children show the highest enthusiasm for physical and tactile activities, such as cultural workshops. This is in line with the theory that physical experiences have become a valuable commodity in a screen-saturated world. Children want a balanced phygital experience: they want to use technology to facilitate real-world interactions, not replace them. Active participation in cultural activities provides a greater sense of ownership than passive interaction with information screens.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the Balaputra Dewa Museum has great potential to become an educational icon for Generation Alpha, but is currently hampered by a one-way digital strategy. “Digital” should not be interpreted merely as the procurement of tools, but as a change in mindset towards a participatory culture.

Practical Implications:

1. Redesign Digital Strategy: The museum needs to shift from procuring expensive hardware to developing activities that encourage co-creation, such as educational social media challenges that utilize visitors' own devices (Bring Your Own Device).
2. Facilitate Educational “Instagrammability”: Recognize the behavior of documenting oneself as a gateway to education by providing spots that encourage historical storytelling.
3. Humanize Technology: Technology should be used to spark human interaction and emotional connection with the collection, not isolate children with screens.

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