

Visual Strategy of Commercial Photography in the Promotion and Cultural Preservation of Koto Gadang Silver Heritage “Silver Work Leo”

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ABSTRACT

Silver craftsmanship of koto gadang is a minangkabau cultural heritage with high aesthetic, historical, and cultural value, developing since the nineteenth century through the distinctive filigree technique. Silver work leo, established in 1986, plays a role in maintaining the continuity of this silver craft tradition. After the covid-19 pandemic, reputation and sales declined due to decreased tourist visits and insufficient visual promotion strategies. This condition indicates the need to renew promotional media through a more professional visual approach. This creation-based research aims to produce commercial photography that visualizes silver work leo silver products in an informative, aesthetic, and marketable manner. The creation process involved outdoor photoshoots using models wearing silver work leo jewelry and baju kuruang to represent koto gadang cultural identity. Commercial photography functions as a medium to image through composition and lighting, supporting promotion and preservation.

Keywords: *Commercial Photography, Koto Gadang Silver, Silver Work Leo, Filigree, Cultural Heritage*

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INTRODUCTION

West Sumatra is known as one of the regions in Indonesia that possesses a rich tradition of handicrafts with high aesthetic, historical, and cultural value. Various forms of craftsmanship, such as embroidery, weaving, basketry, and silverwork, have developed alongside the historical journey of Minangkabau society and have become an integral part of local cultural identity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). These handicrafts function not only as cultural products but also hold significant economic potential when properly managed and promoted.

One of the prominent traditional crafts in West Sumatra is Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship, which is located in Kecamatan IV Koto, Kabupaten Agam. . This craft has developed since the 19th century during the Dutch colonial period, when silverworking techniques were first introduced to the local community. Since then, Koto Gadang has been recognized as a silver craft center producing jewelry and decorative objects of high quality with a strong and distinctive character (Iskandar, 2017).

The main characteristic of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship lies in the use of the filigree technique, which involves shaping fine silver wires into intricate and precise arrangements to form decorative motifs of high artistic value. The filigree technique is widely applied to various products, such as rings, necklaces, bracelets, brooches, earrings, as well as miniatures of Minangkabau traditional houses and the Jam Gadang clock tower (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The fineness of workmanship and the richness of motifs make Koto Gadang silver not only functional but also a representation of local cultural identity. However, the sustainability of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship currently faces several challenges. The number of active artisans has continued to decline, leaving only a few craftsmen, including Silver Welisiar, Amai Setia, and Silver Work Leo. Amid these conditions, Silver Work Leo remains one of the surviving artisans by developing silver firing techniques and combining ethnic design elements with filigree in a more innovative manner (Zulkirwan, personal communication, 2023).

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, the tourism sector experienced a significant decline that directly affected the existence of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship. Travel restrictions and the decrease in tourist numbers led to reduced sales and weakened promotion of silver products. In addition, the promotional media used remain limited, and the visual quality of the products tends to be merely documentary in nature, making it less effective in attracting a broader market, particularly the younger generation (Putri & Handayani, 2022).

Several previous studies indicate that product visualization plays an important role in building brand image and increasing the selling value of handicraft products. Commercial photography functions not only as a documentation tool but also as a medium of visual communication capable of conveying the aesthetic value, function, and identity of a product to consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of culture-based products, strong visuals can reinforce cultural narratives and enhance market appeal. Nugroho (2021) explains that commercial photography requires a well-conceptualized visual creation process, encompassing object selection, lighting, composition, and visual style tailored to promotional objectives. Commercial photography tends to create imagery rather than merely record reality, thus possessing great potential in supporting marketing strategies for creative products.

Meanwhile, studies related to Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship have predominantly focused on historical aspects, techniques, and cultural values, while research that links this craft to visual promotion strategies based on commercial photography remains limited. This gap indicates the need for a visual approach capable of bridging traditional values with contemporary promotional demands, particularly in addressing competition in the global market (Sari, 2020).

Based on these issues, this creation-based research aims to produce commercial photography works that are able to visualize Silver Work Leo's silver products in an informative, aesthetic, and marketable manner. This study focuses on designing a visual concept that integrates silver products, models, traditional Baju Kuruang attire, and outdoor photography as a representation of Koto Gadang's cultural identity. Furthermore,

this research seeks to explore the role of commercial photography as a strategic medium in building the image of culture-based handicraft products, enabling them to reach a wider audience, particularly the younger generation who are increasingly unfamiliar with the values and beauty of traditional silver craftsmanship (Nugroho, 2021).

The contribution of this research lies in the development of a commercial photography visual approach that is oriented not only toward promotional aspects but also toward the preservation of cultural values. The resulting photographic works are expected to function as effective promotional media as well as a means of visual education regarding the heritage of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship. Academically, this study contributes to the fields of photographic art and visual communication design, particularly within the context of commercial photography based on local culture. Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for artisans and creative industry practitioners in optimizing promotional strategies for traditional handicraft products in order to remain relevant and competitive in the modern era.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a practice-based research method. This method places the process of creating commercial photography works as the main focus of the research, in which artistic practice is utilized to respond to issues related to the promotion and visualization of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship. This approach is chosen because it is appropriate for examining visual, aesthetic, and cultural meaning aspects that cannot be measured quantitatively.

The subject of this research is Silver Work Leo silver craftsmanship located in Nagari Koto Gadang, Kecamatan IV Koto, Kabupaten Agam, Sumatera Barat. The research objects include silver products such as rings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, brooches, miniature Rumah Gadang, miniature Jam Gadang, and kurambik (traditional knife). The main informant is the owner and artisan of Silver Work Leo, Mr. Zulkirwan. In addition, models wearing Silver Work Leo silver jewelry and traditional Baju Kuruang attire are used as visual subjects in the photographic process.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was carried out to understand the production process, the visual characteristics of the products, and the promotional conditions of Silver Work Leo. Interviews were conducted directly with the owner to obtain information regarding the business history, production techniques, design concepts, and promotional constraints. Documentation was carried out through an outdoor commercial photography process with planned visual concepts, model styling, the use of retro makeup, selection of traditional attire, as well as the arrangement of lighting and composition.

Data analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach by examining the results of observations, interviews, and the photographic works produced. Visual analysis focused on aspects of composition, lighting, photographic style, and the suitability of the visuals with Koto Gadang's cultural identity. The results of the analysis were used to

assess the effectiveness of commercial photography as a promotional medium and as a means of preserving the heritage of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT



Figure 1: Rumah Adat Minang

The results of this creation-based research consist of a series of commercial photographic works featuring Silver Work Leo silver products, showcasing various types of jewelry, including rings, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, brooches, miniatures, and kurambik (traditional knives). The photographs were produced through outdoor photo sessions involving models wearing traditional Baju Kuruang attire and Silver Work Leo silver jewelry. Each image presents the products clearly, with emphasis on filigree details, form, and the luster of the silver material. Lighting was employed to enhance the texture and dimensionality of the products, while composition was carefully arranged to ensure that visual focus remained on the jewelry worn by the models.



Figure 2: Karih Minangkabau

The visual data in this study are presented in the form of commercial photography works. Each photograph displays variations in shooting angles, camera distance (close-up

and medium shots), as well as different model poses. Some works emphasize detailed views of the jewelry, while others highlight the relationship between the product, the model, and traditional attire. This visualization documents the application of visual concepts, lighting, and photographic styles that were designed during the planning stage.



Figure 3: Maniak Rambai Batu Alam Merah

All photographic works produced demonstrate consistent use of Koto Gadang cultural elements through the Baju Kuruang attire, the selection of outdoor locations, and the use of Silver Work Leo silver attributes. The data are presented in the form of visual outcomes without interpretative meaning, instead displaying factual information regarding product forms, filigree techniques, photographic styles, and the final visual appearance of the commercial photography produced.



Figure 4: Bunga Mekar Bertingkat



Figure 5: Anting Rangkang



Figure 6: Galang Melati



Figure 7: Cincin Batu Alam Hijau

DISCUSSION

The results of the commercial photography creation indicate that a well-planned visual approach is able to present Silver Work Leo's silver products in a clearer, more aesthetic, and more communicative manner. The use of directed lighting successfully highlights the details of the filigree technique, surface textures, and the luster of the silver material. The selection of models wearing Baju Kuruang and the use of outdoor photography strengthen the cultural identity of Koto Gadang, so that the products are presented not merely as commodities but also as representations of cultural heritage. These findings are important as they demonstrate that photographic visuals play a significant role in building the image of traditional handicraft products.

The results of this study are in line with Nugroho's (2021) view that commercial photography does not merely record objects, but rather creates concept-driven visuals that can enhance a product's selling value and appeal. Furthermore, these findings support studies on Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship that emphasize the importance of preserving the filigree technique as a marker of local cultural identity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). The distinction of this research lies in its focus on positioning commercial photography as a strategic promotional medium, rather than solely as cultural documentation. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations, particularly in terms of its scope, which focuses on only one artisan, namely Silver Work Leo. In addition, this research does not quantitatively measure the impact of photographic visuals on sales increases or market reach. Subjectivity in the assessment of visual aesthetics is also an unavoidable limitation in practice-based research.

The implications of this study indicate that commercial photography can be optimally utilized as a promotional medium for traditional silver craftsmanship, especially in reaching younger generations. Future research may expand this approach by involving more artisans, integrating digital media platforms, and applying quantitative analyses to measure promotional effectiveness. Practically, the resulting works may serve as visual references for artisans in developing sustainable promotional strategies without abandoning local cultural values.

CONCLUSION

This creation-based research concludes that commercial photography can serve as a strategic medium for visualizing and promoting Silver Work Leo's silver craftsmanship in an aesthetic, informative, and marketable manner. Through the careful design of visual concepts, the use of directed lighting, and compositional arrangements that emphasize the details of the filigree technique, the resulting photographic works are able to present the distinctive characteristics of Koto Gadang silver products clearly and attractively. The use of models wearing traditional Baju Kuruang attire and outdoor photography has proven effective in strengthening Koto Gadang's cultural identity within the product visuals, positioning silver jewelry not merely as a commodity but also as a representation of Minangkabau cultural heritage. This approach demonstrates that the integration of local cultural elements with commercial photography visual strategies can serve as a relevant promotional alternative in response to contemporary needs. Overall, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for silver artisans and creative industry practitioners in developing visual-based promotional strategies, while also contributing to the preservation of Koto Gadang silver craftsmanship so that it remains recognized and appreciated by younger generations and the wider public.

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