



KUSTOMFEST 2024: A Curatorial Study Through the Approach of the Creative Economy

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of the creative economy in Indonesia has fostered the emergence of diverse cultural practices that integrate both aesthetic expression and economic potential. Among these, festivals have become strategic arenas for showcasing creative works while simultaneously generating cultural and commercial value. One notable example is Kustomfest, an annual custom automotive festival held in Yogyakarta, which functions not only as an exhibition space but also as a vital node within the local and regional creative economy ecosystem. This study aims to examine the curatorial strategies employed in Kustomfest 2024 and to assess their contribution to value creation in the creative economy sector. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving festival curators, creative practitioners, local business actors, and audiences. The findings reveal that curatorial practices in Kustomfest encompass rigorous selection based on originality, a scrutineering process that ensures functionality and safety, professional documentation for archival and promotional purposes, and independent judging guided by international standards. Furthermore, curators are instrumental in shaping narrative frameworks, enhancing visitor engagement, and connecting creators with market opportunities. Beyond artistic curation, Kustomfest generates significant economic impact, particularly in supporting the growth of MSMEs in the surrounding area. This case illustrates how curatorship can serve as a multidimensional tool for cultural production, audience development, and sustainable economic advancement within Indonesia's creative industries.

Keywords: Kustomfest, curatorial, creative economy, cultural festival, custom automotive.

INTRODUCTION

The development of Indonesia's creative economy has driven the emergence of various cultural expressions that hold not only aesthetic value but also contribute significantly to national economic growth (Bekraf, 2019). Cultural festivals serve as a strategic medium within the creative industry ecosystem as they generate economic value, reinforce cultural identity, and nurture creative communities (Howkins, 2002). Festivals are no longer mere entertainment events; they are critical platforms that strengthen both local culture and the

economy, positioning them as vital instruments in sustainable creative economic development (Getz, 2010).

Kustomfest is one of the largest custom culture-based festivals in Asia, held annually in Yogyakarta. This event merges motorcycle modification art, visual design, music, and creative products into a dynamic cultural ecosystem. Its uniqueness lies in the originality of works, the exploration of local identity in design, and a cross-disciplinary approach involving builders, artists, and creative entrepreneurs (Wahyudi & Dellyana, 2024).

Beyond being a showcase, Kustomfest functions as a collaborative space that strengthens the regional creative industry, making it a significant case for understanding creative festival development in Indonesia.

Despite Kustomfest's prominence and impact, its curatorial practices remain underexplored in terms of their connection to art, culture, and the creative economy. The curator's role extends beyond organizing visual content; they act as agents of cultural and economic value production through the selection of works, narrative construction, and exhibition design (Wiratno, 2025). This curatorial function is crucial in shaping audience experience, enhancing the positioning of creative works, and encouraging broader and more sustainable market engagement. The lack of comprehensive studies on this subject reveals a critical gap that this research aims to fill.

The curatorial approach in Kustomfest goes beyond aesthetics it becomes a key strategy in managing inclusive and competitive cultural-economic values. Support from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy further solidifies the festival's role as a platform that connects local creators with wider markets (Bekraf, 2019). Programs such as Lucky '13' Rollin exemplify how curatorial practices facilitate market access and creative community networks. Emphasis on technical innovation and craftsmanship excellence in the curation process also strengthens Indonesia's image as a regional hub for automotive creativity.

Given the growing importance of festivals in the creative economy, there is an urgent need to examine curatorial practice in this context. Understanding the curator's role as a driver of both cultural and economic value can provide strategic insights for festival organizers, creative industry stakeholders, and policymakers. Therefore, optimizing curatorial practice is essential to ensuring the sustainability and competitiveness of festivals as effective platforms for creative economic growth (Bishop, 2013).

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the curatorial practices implemented in the Kustomfest 2024 festival and their connection to the creative economy ecosystem. The qualitative method is suitable for understanding phenomena that are rich in context and layered in meaning, particularly when examining the role of curators as cultural mediators and economic enablers. According to Creswell (2018), qualitative research allows for deep exploration of meanings, experiences, and interpretations from the perspectives of participants involved in a specific social context.

Research Approach

The case study method, as outlined by Yin (2017), enables an in-depth investigation of contemporary phenomena in real-life settings where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Kustomfest, as a recurring cultural and economic event, offers a dynamic case that integrates art, creative production, market interaction, and audience experience. The curatorial strategies and their effects on cultural and economic outcomes are best explored through this approach, which allows the researcher to analyze multiple aspects including selection mechanisms, presentation formats, audience reception, and economic impact.

Research Location

The research was conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with two primary locations of focus:

1. Retro Classic Cycles Workshop – located at Jalan Melati Wetan, Bacirow, Gondokusuman, this site served as the hub for organizing the festival, hosting curators, builders, and preparatory activities.
2. Jogja Expo Center (JEC) – as the official venue of Kustomfest 2024, JEC became the main arena for exhibition, interaction, and scrutineering processes.

These two locations were selected for their significance in curatorial implementation and direct engagement with stakeholders. As emphasized by Yin (2017), appropriate case selection enhances contextual relevance and enriches the analytical depth of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain comprehensive and reliable data, this study employed a triangulation strategy by combining multiple qualitative data collection methods. These methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document and media analysis, each of which contributed to a richer and more contextual understanding of curatorial practices at Kustomfest 2024.

1. In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants including Lulut Wahyudi—the main initiator and curator of Kustomfest—members of the organizing committee, creative builders and artists, as well as local business owners such as hotel managers and food vendors. Interviews were also carried out with several festival visitors and community members. These conversations yielded insights into the curatorial process, selection criteria, the design of visitor experiences, and the broader economic influence of the festival. Creswell (2018) emphasizes that interviews are essential in qualitative inquiry to

access participants lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes.

2. Participant Observation

Participant observation was undertaken throughout all phases of the festival: the preparation period, the main event, and post-event activities. This allowed direct observation of curatorial meetings, vehicle selection, exhibition layout, thematic organization, and the implementation of scrutineering. It also enabled documentation of audience interactions, as well as commercial engagement between creative actors and the public. Yin (2017) underlines that direct observation enhances contextual understanding by capturing behaviors and interactions in real time within the actual environment.

3. Document and Media Analysis

To support and validate findings from interviews and observations, document and media analysis was also employed. This included examining printed materials (e.g., brochures, catalogs, press releases), audiovisual documentation (photos and videos), and digital content from Kustomfest's official social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. News articles and media reports from external outlets were also reviewed. As Creswell (2018) asserts, document analysis provides rich contextual data and allows researchers to corroborate information across sources, thereby strengthening the overall validity and completeness of qualitative research.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process followed the principles of qualitative content analysis, adapted from Miles Creswell (2018), consisting of:

1. Data Reduction

All collected data were organized and filtered based on relevance to the research focus specifically curatorial strategies, cultural narratives, and economic dimensions. Themes such as originality, audience experience, and market impact were extracted and categorized.

2. Data Display

Reduced data were presented in narrative form and visual diagrams (e.g., conceptual maps) to display relationships between curatorial actions and their resulting value creation.

3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Patterns were interpreted inductively, with findings continuously refined through cross-checking among interview results, field notes, and supporting documents. Recurring concepts such as inclusivity,

innovation, authenticity, and community empowerment emerged as core indicators of curatorial effectiveness.

The combination of these techniques allowed for a robust and contextually grounded analysis of curatorial practices at Kustomfest 2024, highlighting their role not only in artistic curation but also in shaping the festival's identity, economic contribution, and cultural sustainability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Curatorial Strategy and Implementation in Kustomfest 2024

The implementation of curatorial practice in Kustomfest 2024 illustrates a systematic, professional, and multi-layered approach that combines aesthetic



Figure 1. Kustomfest 2024 Press Conference
(Source: Kustomfest Official Documentation)

selection, functional assessment, and cultural storytelling. According to Lulut Wahyudi the founder and lead curator of Kustomfest the curatorial system follows a strict filtering process starting with digital submissions of photos and technical data via an online form. Of the 350 applicants, only 150 works passed the initial selection based on originality, innovation, and craftsmanship. The festival's strategic narrative is typically announced during an official press conference attended by the core team, curators, and partners, as shown in Figure 1.

The scrutineering phase then became the next checkpoint, where each vehicle underwent physical and functional inspection, assessing brake systems, clutch performance, engine condition, and rideability. Vehicles that failed scrutineering were not excluded from exhibition but were marked with a "Did Not Finish" (DNF) status and ineligible for awards. This reflects the dual nature of curation in Kustomfest: not only focusing on artistic merit, but also ensuring technical feasibility and user experience, as emphasized in Susanto (2024: 153-160), concept of "curating space, arranging form." All vehicles must pass a detailed *scrutineering* phase to assess functionality and safety. This phase includes brake tests, clutch inspections, and ignition trials, as illustrated in Figures 2 and 3.



Figure 2. Scrutineering process – mechanical inspection
(Source: @darizt_design)



Figure 3 Scrutineering process – participant queue and verification
(Source: Instagram @kustomfest)



Figure 4 Hundreds of custom motorcycles appear at Kustomfest 2024
(Source: jogja.antaranews.com)



Figure 5 Bike Show and Hot Rod & Kustom Car Show are the main menus at Kustomfest
(Source: Kompas.com)



Figure 6 publication section – roadside billboard
(Source: facebook Kustomfest)

The core curatorial principle of originality was rigorously upheld. The selection team composed of local and international builders, media representatives, and internal committee members actively verified the uniqueness of each submission. Plagiarized or previously showcased works were disqualified. The strict originality policy and the use of an anonymous, rotating international jury reinforced the objectivity and professionalism of the curatorial process, a practice aligned with Wiratno (2025), theory of the curator as a mediator of both artistic and social ethics.

An example of curatorial innovation is seen in the “Lucky '13' Rollin” program, a curated exhibition unit that merges storytelling, market access, and visual identity. This segment combines curated selection with community interaction, bringing together creators, media, and potential clients in one ecosystem. Documentation of the event, another curatorial component, was not merely administrative, but functioned as cultural archiving and international marketing, with curated works being photographed for press kits, social media, and potential global exposure.

Curators as Cultural and Economic Facilitators

Curators in Kustomfest do not function solely as gatekeepers of aesthetics but as strategic facilitators who organize, contextualize, and market creative output. Their role extends from selection and narrative construction to market mediation and cultural branding. The thematic framework applied in 2024 emphasized “rideable creativity,” where works must not only express visual innovation but maintain practical usability a curatorial decision that shaped both audience perception and industry expectations.

According to theories by Wisetrotomo (2020) and Susanto (2024), this model exemplifies a “from

upstream to downstream” curatorship, where curation includes ideation, production guidance, narrative setting, and public engagement. Through this structure, Kustomfest curators acted as cultural producers and economic agents, strengthening the positioning of Indonesian custom culture within the Southeast Asian creative economy.

Moreover, the festival functions as a commercial platform, where curated works are turned into business portfolios. Success is not solely measured by awards, but by commercial leads, collaborations, and post-event orders from collectors and industry players, aligning with Howkins (2002), notion of intellectual property-based creative economics. This redefines the purpose of curation from artistic display to strategic value creation.

Festival as a Creative Economy Catalyst

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, Kustomfest 2024 served as a catalyst for local economic growth, particularly for MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) surrounding the event area. Interviews with hotel and culinary business managers indicated significant increases in occupancy and revenue. For instance:

- Hotel Wijaya Imperial reported an average occupancy surge of 50–60% during the festival.
- Grand Rohan Hotel experienced a spike in out-of-town bookings.
- Food vendors like Warung Sate Pak Jago, Bakso Pak Min, and Jus Buah Ibu Leni noted higher customer volumes, increased product demand, and the need to hire temporary staff.

These findings align with Getz (2010), theory on the role of festivals as economic multipliers. The influx of participants and visitors generated transactional flows, fostered business linkages, and even created temporary employment opportunities for local residents.

Furthermore, interview data show that festival engagement extends beyond monetary gain. Vendors expressed how Kustomfest allowed them to build brand exposure, interact with creative communities, and gain insights from a broader market segment. The result is not only economic stimulus but knowledge transfer and community empowerment, crucial elements of a sustainable creative economy as outlined by (Bekraf, 2019).

Admission Fee as a Social Curation Strategy

Kustomfest 2024 implemented a progressive admission fee model, with ticket prices increasing from Rp25,000 to Rp100,000 over time. Though initially criticized, this policy had positive curatorial implications. The entrance fee served as a social filter, attracting a more dedicated audience base. According to the organizers, paying visitors showed more respect for the works, participated more actively, and demonstrated

higher economic interaction through merchandise purchases and service inquiries.

This approach reveals how economic instruments can also be curatorial tools, shaping audience behavior and optimizing public engagement. In this sense, ticket pricing became part of the broader curatorial logicaligning with the goal of cultivating not just appreciation, but investment in creative culture.

Challenges and Strategic Considerations

Despite its achievements, the curatorial system at Kustomfest 2024 faced several critical challenges:

1. **Operational Complexity:** The international curatorial team required significant coordination, from time zone alignment to digital meetings for standardizing judging criteria.
2. **Transparency vs. Privacy:** While anonymity preserved impartiality, it also limited public recognition of curators, potentially reducing external credibility.
3. **Documentation Limitations:** Professional documentation capacity was constrained, limiting the ability to leverage visual assets for international promotion.
4. **Public Perception:** Resistance to ticket pricing and curatorial selectiveness still exists among certain audience segments, necessitating further public engagement and education.
5. **Vendor Readiness:** Local MSMEs were not always prepared for the surge in demand, indicating the need for better support systems and coordination with festival organizers.

These challenges suggest a need for continuous innovation in festival governance, curatorial training, digital infrastructure, and community outreach. The implementation of a curatorial regeneration system, inclusion of audience feedback in evaluation processes, and expansion of media and archival capabilities would strengthen the festival's future resilience and impact.

Comparative Insight with Other Studies

The practices in Kustomfest 2024 affirm theories by Alexander (2013), on moral and civil responsibilities in curatorial processes. Like European music festivals studied by Haynes, Kustomfest's curators internalize ethical values, cultural representation, and economic mediation although with a stronger focus on creative industry linkages than civil values.

Similarly, Quinn (2005), noted the role of festivals in city branding and cultural identity building. Kustomfest strengthens Yogyakarta's positioning not only as a cultural capital but also a creative economy hub. The city marketing function of the festival becomes an added value, consistent with Quinn's findings on the socio-economic roles of urban festivals.

Finally, drawing from Mulya & Pradita (2018), Kustomfest exhibits the best practices of curatorial work in a non-gallery context. From acquisition to exhibition to documentation, Kustomfest reflects holistic curatorial execution, which can serve as a benchmark for future creative festivals in Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of curatorial practices in Kustomfest 2024 demonstrates the integral role of curators in enhancing both the artistic and economic value of creative festivals. Through a rigorous selection process, strict originality standards, technical *scrutineering*, and narrative construction, curators effectively bridge the gap between creators and the market. Their role extends beyond visual presentation, serving as facilitators of cultural dialogue, quality assurance agents, and strategic enablers in the creative economy ecosystem.

Kustomfest 2024 confirms that festivals are not only cultural events but also economic drivers. The positive economic impact observed in the surrounding businesses such as hotels, culinary vendors, and local SMEs reflects the festival's effectiveness in generating transactional opportunities and employment. Furthermore, the application of curatorial frameworks that integrate storytelling, audience segmentation, and professional documentation proves crucial in building sustainable value chains in the creative sector.

Challenges such as curatorial workload, documentation limitations, and audience perception of pricing indicate the need for adaptive strategies and better public engagement. Nonetheless, the success of Kustomfest highlights the strategic function of curation as a multi-dimensional process that sustains artistic integrity, fosters economic impact, and strengthens local identity.

Moving forward, festival organizers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the creative economy should invest in strengthening curatorial capacity, improving coordination systems, and fostering inclusive participation. By optimizing the curatorial model applied in Kustomfest, similar festivals across Indonesia can serve as sustainable engines for culture-based economic development.

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