

NITIK BATIK PRODUCTION AND MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 has given a huge impact to many sectors of human life around the world, including Indonesia (Yunus et al. 2023). Financially, some sectors gained positive impacts, and some others experienced negative impacts. The healthcare production sector, for example, gained more positive impact because most people gave priority to keeping health by consuming more vitamins, food supplements and minerals (Kamarli Altun et al. 2021), this resulted in increased sales of the health products. Fashion industry sector, considered as not urgent for humans during COVID-19 pandemic, can decrease or increase their sales of products. Those which apply online marketing may increase the sales but those which apply traditional marketing ways decrease the sales (Pang et al., 2022).

Nitik batik production in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta (Figure 1) is one of the fashion industries in Indonesia that was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. If we follow the classification of craft production stated by Fanoro et.al (2021), *nitik batik* production in Trimulyo Village is considered carried out in the traditional way, where no machinery equipment is used and applied labor intensive production instead. In Trimulyo Village, the management from the production to the marketing are carried out at home, or at least in one production center, which is also a house, not a factory in the village.

Changing of times is considered as a challenge for the sustainability of cultural heritage, including *nitik batik* but the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Indonesia starting in 2020, had some potential to disturb the sustainability of its production. One of the reasons is that for some people, *nitik batik* is considered a tertiary need. During COVID-19 pandemic the priority to buy expensive cloth such

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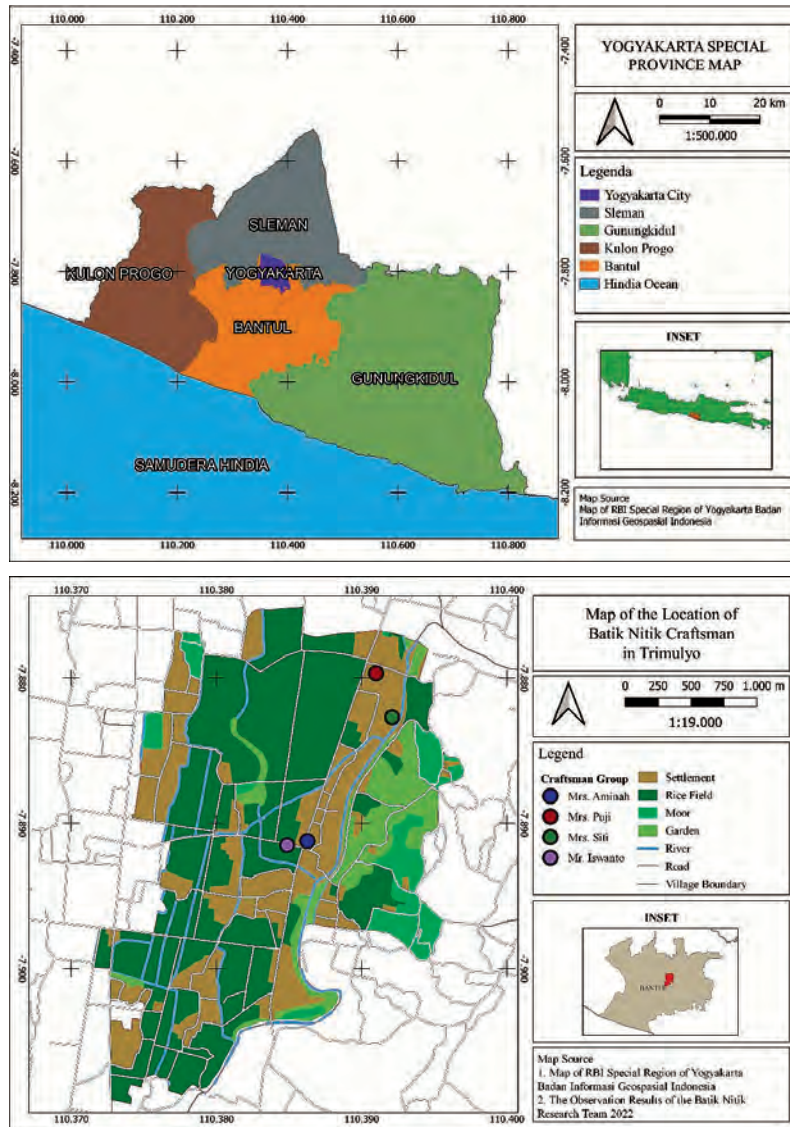


Figure 1. Top: map of Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Province. Trimulyo Village is located in Bantul Regency. Bottom: map of the location of secretariat or center of nitik batik maker groups in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. (Source: Research Team, 2023)

as hand-drawn *nitik batik* has been shifted to buy clothes with reasonable price (Istiqomah et al., 2022; Surodjo, Astuty, and Lukman, 2022). Several strategies have been tried by batik makers and also government and private sectors to sustain *nitik batik* during COVID-19 pandemic.

This article describes the condition of *nitik batik* production and marketing during COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this article focuses on some strategies to sustain *nitik batik* during COVID-19 pandemic and discusses the effectiveness.



Figure 2. Left: *canthing* pen with special tip, made for *nitik batik* production. Right: Copper stamp with *nitik* pattern design for stamped *nitik batik* from Afif Syakur's gallery. (Source: Research Team, 2022).

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data collection was conducted using the in depth interview method combined with focus group discussion and confirmation via phone calls and messages. In depth interviews were conducted in person and via phone calls for confirmation. There are four groups of batik makers in Trimulyo Village, Bantul Regency. Representatives from each group were interviewed, and once focus group discussion was managed to be carried out during the research period. Interviews were also conducted with stakeholders such as the government represented by staff from the Creative Economy Development Division of Office of Tourism Bantul Regency and Village Secretary of Office of Trimulyo Village. Non-governmental parties were represented by several members of the *Paguyuban Pecinta Batik Indonesia Sekar Jagad* (Sekar Jagad Indonesian Batik Lovers Association), batik dyer and Afif Syakur as a head of Batik Sekar Jagad association.

Analysis was carried out qualitatively by exploring, examining, describing and grouping the collected data in its natural settings by the participant's point of view and interpreting the result following Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2001).

NITIK BATIK CHARACTERISTIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

According to the description in the geographical indication, the characteristic of *nitik batik* is a hand-drawn batik cloth produced with a *canthing* pen that has split ends (Figure 2). *Nitik canthing* is made by splitting the ends of the *canthing* into two perpendicularly, then the split ends are bent outwards, to create wax strokes in the form of rectangular dots (Melati et al., 2021:1). *Nitik* motifs in

Trimulyo Village are arranged by square outlines, resulting in geometric motifs (Melati et al., 2021:1–2).

Oral history suggests that *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village developed earlier than those among noblemen in Yogyakarta Sultanate. In Trimulyo Village, *nitik batik* was initiated by Kyai Cokro Kembang, an Islamic leader living in Kembangsono, Trimulyo Village, Bantul during the 18 century. His cemetery is located in Dusun Kembangsono, Trimulyo Village (Rusli, pers communication). However, the first production of *nitik batik* in Trimulyo could be earlier, around the end of 17th century, if we interpret the first production of it as contemporary with the date of Mataram Sultanate reaction in boycotting the sales of Indian textile (Laarhoven, 2012). Among the Indian textiles monopolized by Dutch East India Company is patola, from which some scholars believe that geometric *nitik batik* arrangement motif is inspired. As a reaction, the local community then developed *nitik batik* with geometric patterns by adapting and enriching the patola motifs (Laarhoven, 2012; Melati et al., 2021: 4). Over time, *nitik batik* makers add more motifs inspired by the surrounding environment, the makers or wearers identity and some symbols. In other areas in Java, i.e. in the Pekalongan area, *nitik batik* has a popular name as *jlamprang batik* (Maziyah and Alamsyah, 2021; Melati et al., 2021), but the color of it is more vibrant. The historic connection between *nitik batik* Pekalongan (*jlamprang batik*) and in Yogyakarta has not been confirmed, probably the *Jlamprang batik* from the coastal area of Java is older as the northern coast of Java has experienced earlier contact with Indian traders and its commodities.

First indication that *nitik batik* was developed among Sultanate family is in the 19th century BRAY Brongtodiningrat, a daughter of Hamengku Buwana IV. She developed 56 *nitik batik* configurations among aristocrats in Kasultanan Yogyakarta. There is also a *nitik batik* configuration that developed among nobles in Puro Pakualaman Yogyakarta named *Wilaya Kusumajaya nitik* (Melati et al., 2021). The popularity of Yogyakarta *nitik batik* in national and international markets is increasing only in the past 16 years compared to those of other batik regional styles.

Nitik batik is one of Yogyakarta's cultural assets that needs to be preserved. Area of Trimulyo Village in Yogyakarta has been designated as a Geographical Indication of *Nitik Batik Tulis* as of November 2019. Granting of this status is one of the government's efforts to take responsibility for preserving *nitik batik*, with the request of the *Paguyuban Batik Nitik Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta Nitik Batik Association) and related stakeholders.

PRODUCTION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As other batik production, the batik production generally requires materials such as pencils, rulers, drawing tables, cloth, wax, *nitik canthing*, and stove. Materials such as water, large pot, stove, bucket, and dyes are required for dyeing (Figure

3). The equipment is usually prepared independently (self-subsistent) by each group, but sometimes provided by the government or the private sector especially during training activities.

Nowadays, after being introduced through training, women in the *nitik batik* groups have started to dye their batik with synthetic and natural dyes. However, dyeing is still frequently done in Giriloyo Village to maintain product quality. In addition, the whole dyeing process is too exhausting for the members who are women and dominated by older people. The choice of using synthetic or natural dyes also depends on the buyer's order, because the duration process and the material will affect the price. Most buyers still choose *nitik batik* cloth with synthetic dyes because of the cheaper price.

Several types of natural dyes that are often used and best selling in traditional markets are natural dyes derived from *jalawe* fruit peel (*Terminalia bellirica*), tingi wood (*Ceriops tagal*), and indigo leaves (*Indigofera* sp.). *Jalawe* fruit peel is used to produce a yellow dye, tingi wood produces a brown dye, and indigo produces a blue dye. Another natural dye is noni (*Morinda citrifolia*) root and mahogany fruit peels, producing a brownish red dye. But this natural color material is rarely used in Trimulyo. Fixation process will 'lock' the color and create a preferred color density. For natural dyes, *tunjung* is used to produce darker colors and chalk is used to produce fairer colors. These materials are still easy to obtain in Yogyakarta, especially in traditional markets. In the Beringharjo Market in Yogyakarta, these natural dyes are sold in the same section as spices. The batik makers in Trimulyo usually buy the coloring material from Ngasem Market and a shop in Parangtritis Street in Yogyakarta or from *koperasi* in Bantul.

During the pandemic, governments are involved in supporting traditional batik makers to keep producing *nitik batik* by giving the production materials.



Figure 3. Variety of plants for natural dye, left to right: Secang wood (*Biancaea sappan*, red dye), indigo (*Indigofera* sp, blue dye), and tingi wood (*Ceriops tagal*, brown dye). (Source: Bapak Widodo and Research Team, 2023)

SUSTAINABILITY OF BATIK MAKERS

During COVID-19 pandemic 2020-2021, it is known that there are four groups of batik makers in Trimulyo. Each of these groups has one coordinator: 1) Ibu Puji (Batik Nitik Trimulyo) (Figure 4), 2) Ibu Siti (Batik Nitik Blawong), 3) Ibu Aminah (Sekar Nitik) and 4) Bapak Iswanto (Trimulyo Batik). Each group usually has around 20-35 female members. Group members are usually residents of the surrounding environment in accordance with the residency area. However, not all group members actively make batik every day. Producing batik has been the primary source of income for some members and for some other member only as a side source of income.

At the end of December 2022, a new group was created under the coordination of Bapak Iswanto. This group consists of about 20 women with a relatively younger age of under 45 years old. This group was formed to receive upcoming batik production training and as an effort to regenerate batik maker in Trimulyo, gathering members belonging to the productive age category. A younger generation of women joined the group because some of them had to quit their previous job and had nothing to do. In the same line, the government offered for all of the materials needed for making batik including the free cost training.

It is likely that the enthusiasm to join a group of batik makers during COVID-19 pandemic is influenced by the availability of government support either in materials, training or funding availability. There is funding around IDR 26,000,000.00 from *Lembaga Amal Zakat*⁵ to develop their production. They managed to absorb the funding to create a showroom and buy tools and materials for the group. Ibu Siti mentioned that establishment of Geographical Indication helped the batik makers to be more visible to the public and gained such assistance from institutions.



Figure 4. Doing hand-drawing (*canthing* process) in group session at Ibu Siti's house in Dusun Blawong, Trimulyo Village. (Source: Research Team, 2023)

⁵ Institution which collect zakat, infaq/shadaqah and other social funds (CSR) for poverty alleviation

Supporting the Geographical Indication of Trimulyo as a center for *nitik batik* in Yogyakarta, the government and private sectors often hold training for the batik makers. The office of Cooperatives and Industry of Bantul Regency has held batik dyeing training using natural dyes, while Sekar Jagad Association has held dyeing training using synthetic dyes. These training covers whole batik production process, starts from providing instructors and materials, designing motifs, applying wax, dyeing, *pelorodan*,⁶ until the batik products are finished and ready for sale. Finished batik products belong to the batik maker for sale or for keeping. Several training sessions of processing of natural color application, fixation and the wax resist removal using cassava porridge that are safer for the environment were also held.

THE VARIETY OF BATIK PRODUCT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Based on the existing documentation, there are 79 known motifs of *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village (Syakur, personal comm., January 2023). According to one of the batik makers, animal body parts and various plants became the inspiration for most of these motifs. The source of inspiration is distilled and stylized, creating decorative and abstractive motifs. The *Sekar Kenthang* (potato flower) motif is known to be one of the hardest motifs to make. Batik lovers often ordered classic *nitik batik*, such as *Cakar Ayam* and *Nagasari* motifs with *sogan*⁷ colors for occasion purposes and the aesthetically elegant impression.

Apart from producing typical classic *nitik batik* as above examples (Figure 5), during COVID-19 pandemic, batik makers also produced products that are cheaper so that more people can buy the product. One strategy to produce cheaper *nitik batik* product is to make *selendhang*. One piece of *selendhang* scarf (Figure 6) with synthetic color is sold between IDR 150,000.00 to IDR 250,000.00, and IDR 300,000.00 for the *selendhang* with natural color. The *selendhang* is cheaper than the ordinary size cloth because the size is smaller.

Another strategy to reduce the price is by making the motif larger. To produce larger *nitik* motif arrangements, they make the guiding square outline larger to speed up the chanting process. If the standard guiding square outline is 4x4 cm, they make it up to 6x6 cm. This can reduce the time to paint wax with a *canthing* pen, thus speed up the process to produce, and reduce the price. This type of strategy is also applied for stamped *nitik batik*. Because batik makers in Trimulyo only newly adopt stamp technique, although *nitik* stamp has been produced elsewhere, they choose to produce larger motifs to minimize block of wax accidents because the dot element is too close or too dense. This stamped *nitik batik* (Figure 7), which is quickly made, is sold cheaper. Motif variations printed on stamped *nitik batik* are not as many as hand-drawn *nitik batik*

⁶ Removing wax from batik cloth.

⁷ Classic brown color in batik.

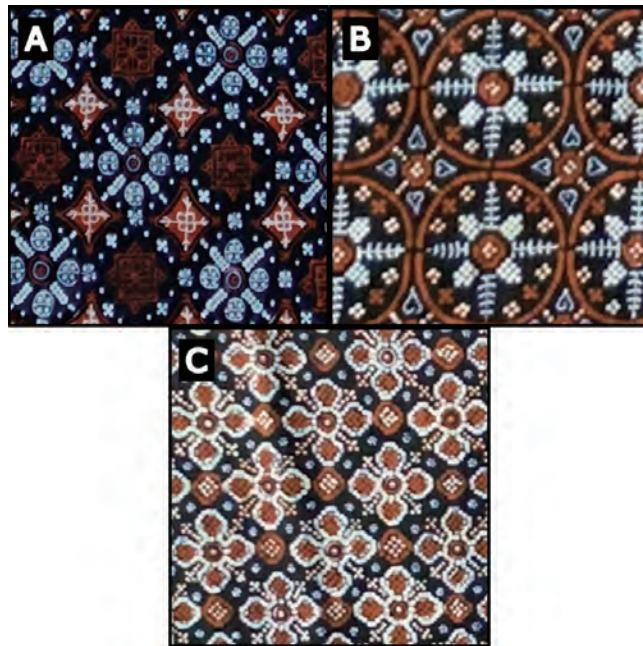


Figure 5. Classic nitik motifs. A: *nagasari* motif, B: *cakar ayam* motif, C: *sekar kenthang* motif. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



Figure 6. Long scarf (*selendhang*) sold by Ibu Aminah's group in an expo in Yogyakarta. (Source: Research Team, 2022)

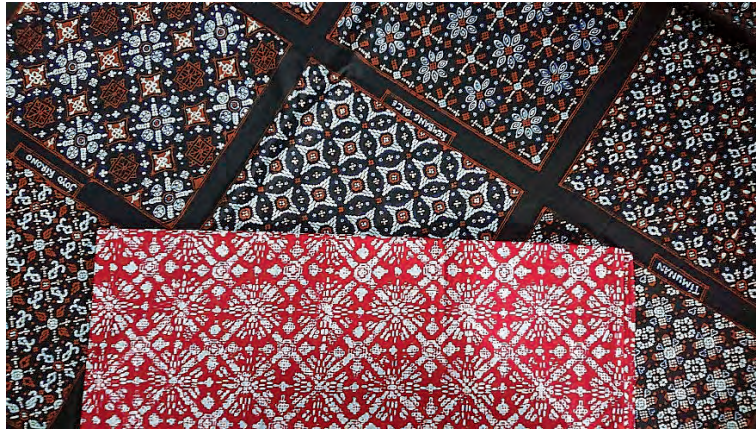


Figure 7. Hand-drawn (background) and stamped (red cloth) *nitik batik* from Ibu Siti's group. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



Figure 8. *Nitik* motif in combination with line motifs made in 2021. (Source: Research Team, 2022)



Figure 9. Semi-finished of Afif Syakur's innovative design introduced in Trimulyo, showing combination pattern between *nitik batik* and line motifs. (Source: Research Team, 2022)

because of the limited copper stamps owned by each batik maker, caused by the expensive cost of producing copper stamps.

The third strategy to reduce price is by reducing details or reducing the density of the dots per motif and combining with line motifs to reduce the time of production. Currently, there are no standard rules on the proportion or percentage of combinations between *nitik* and non-*nitik* motifs to be considered as *nitik batik*. Batik cloth that has a combination of *nitik* motif (Figure 8 and 9) and non-*nitik* motifs will be called '*nitik batik*' and other motifs', referring to the motif's name used in the combination. The absence of definite rules creates a freedom of creativity with the batik modification they made. According to Bapak Iswanto, one of the group's coordinators, at least 30% of *nitik* motifs must be present in combination batik as a representation of *nitik* motifs in the batik cloth. While Sektiadi and Nugrahani, batik experts affiliated in Sekar Jagad Association, expressed the opinion that *nitik batik* is batik that contains only *nitik* motifs on the entire surface of the cloth, which then can be called classic *nitik batik*.



Figure 10. New modified *nitik* motifs, created by batik maker in Trimulyo during COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: Research Team, 2022)

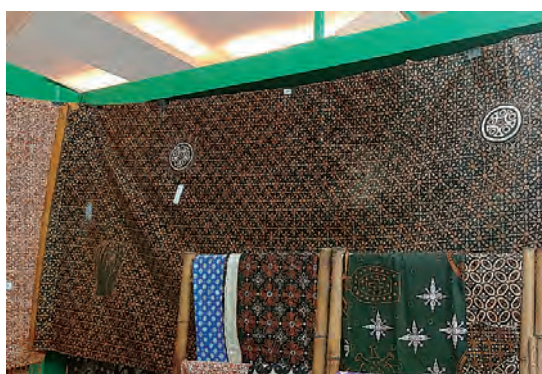


Figure 11. Left: *Nitik batik* with *ceplok* corona motif, created by Ibu Siti's group. *Ceplok* motif means center of interest motif placed sporadically between background *nitik* motif arrangement. Right: *Nitik batik* with corona-themed motifs from Ibu Puji's group. Both created for "Membatik at Home" event during the early COVID-19 pandemic. (Source: Research Team, 2022, 2023)

The fourth strategy they applied is by making a completely new simpler motif. The motif has not been named yet, but the configuration of dots was also constructed by dot elements. Above are two examples of new motifs (Figure 10). This strategy is only applied by Ibu Siti's group members.

Another motif applied is the coronavirus motif (Figure 11). But this modification is initiated by the facilitator with a hope that people will attract to buy this coronavirus *nitik batik*. The facilitators introduced and encouraged batik makers to combine COVID-19 themes as an inspiration for the *nitik batik* motif. New designs were then created, with arrangements such as virus shapes, mask, and hand sanitizer bottles as center of interest among *nitik* geometrical structure motifs. They produced around 10-12 pieces of corona-themed batik, which six to eight clothes were sold via auction conducted by *Sekar Jagad*.

There are many reasons why batik makers and the instructor try some innovations. For one, to reduce the production time, resulting in cheaper selling price. For others it is to create something new, add a new design variation that is hopefully more beautiful and marketable, or just to express their crafting ability. The occurrence of new design in *nitik batik* can be triggered by customer order or training introduction. However, new modified *nitik batik* are sometimes less marketable in general, hence less produced without special order.

MARKETING

Groups of *nitik batik* makers in Trimulyo have started exploring social media (Figure 12) to further introduce their products. Social media that have been used by the batik maker in Trimulyo are Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. Each group has an Instagram account managed by the coordinator, and most have been quite active introducing *nitik batik* products and their activity as batik makers. Some of the members also have their own individual Instagram accounts. Promotions through Instagram carried out per group have not had much of an impact. However, Instagram makes *nitik batik* known by more people. But promotion via Instagram is also important to increase brand awareness.

Online marketing is also carried out through Facebook and WhatsApp. On Facebook, batik makers individually offer batik to groups they joined on Facebook. WhatsApp is used individually by batik makers to market batik and communicate with potential buyers, especially those who are not located in the Yogyakarta area. WhatsApp features such as stories are used to share photos of the batik cloth offered, and the video call and media sharing features (photos and videos) are used by batik makers and customers to help determine the size and motif of the batik order. Transactions for customers located in Yogyakarta and its vicinity are usually made at Trimulyo, where the customer will take orders and make payments directly to the batik maker. For customers who are not located in Yogyakarta and its vicinity, transactions usually made through bank transfer and batik orders will be sent to the desired destination by post.

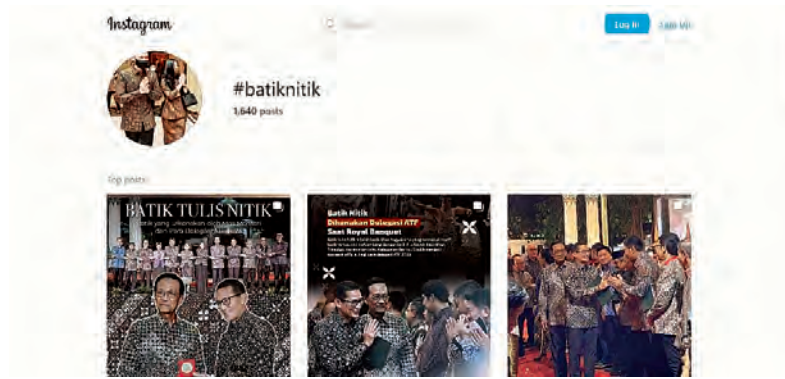


Figure 12. Photos of public participation in wearing *nitik batik*, found through hashtag #batiknitik in Instagram social media. (Source: Instagram, accessed on 13 February 2023)

During the pandemic, the batik maker relied a lot on their loyal customers and networks to continue producing *nitik batik*. An example is training assistance from Sekar Jagad Association, which is equipped with batik production ingredients and materials. Sales during the pandemic certainly decreased, but the production is still flowing, though not as busy as before the pandemic outbreak. At the start of the pandemic, there were no major changes in production. It is because batik orders that have been listed since before the pandemic occurred were still in production.

Since the establishment of *nitik batik* Geographical Indication, *batik* makers have participated in exhibitions or expos more frequently. Unfortunately, implementation of physical distancing and eventually lockdown during COVID-19 jeopardized not only the production but also events supporting the *batik* makers, leading to reduction or postponing of events (Hashim and Saruddin, 2023). As the condition of the community gets stable, more exhibitions will then be held. Participation at exhibitions usually by invitation or direct registration for each group of *batik* makers. The participation of batik maker groups in various exhibitions was also facilitated by the government at the village and district levels. Office of Trimulyo Village often provides facilities such as assistance with registration fees, meals, and accommodation for exhibitions held in Yogyakarta and its vicinity. If the Office of Trimulyo Village cannot facilitate, they will provide assistance by submitting assistance requests to the Office of Bantul Regency. This applied when representatives from Trimulyo were going to participate in the Dubai Expo 2022.

In addition to training in the production stage, online marketing training has also been held by the Small and Medium Enterprise forum in Trimulyo. As forum members, *nitik batik* makers also receive online marketing training for product advertisement. The office of Trimulyo Village is planning to facilitate and support online marketing and training in general by installing Wi-Fi at the village hall of the Trimulyo Village.

DISCUSSION

Hand-drawn *nitik batik* is made one by one through a complex and lengthy process, combined with personal characteristics of each maker, resulting in each cloth having unique characteristics (Mahesti, Sugiarto, and Nugrahani, 2023). Considering the production time, labor work, materials, complexity of motifs, meticulous craftsmanship and cultural relevance, it is logical that hand-drawn batik are expensive (Lusianti and Rani, 2012; Mandegani et al., 2018; Sulistianingsih and Pujiono, 2018; Fontaine, 2023; Mahesti, Sugiarto, and Nugrahani, 2023). Moreover, complicated design required more eye work, thus increasing the labor price (Haron and Abd Mutalib, 2013; Hashim and Saruddin, 2023).

To sell those high quality batik products is challenging, moreover in a difficult economic condition during COVID-19 pandemic. Although some scholars argue that some creative economy sectors did not experience recession, the observation in the field found that the creative economy sector in fashion had been influenced by this pandemic. To increase *batik* sales and compete in the market, batik makers in Trimulyo mainly tried to reduce product price. It is quite difficult for them because they have to strategize to produce batik within the targeted price range by adjusting the costs of materials, production labor, and possible profits (Hansen and Mowen, 2006; Rimawati and Auliyah, 2019). Moreover, people that have known *nitik batik* before the pandemic, they already have certain quality expectations in their mind, so that the batik makers have to adjust to the standard qualification and the selling price if they would like the batik product to sell well. Research by Nurfikriyadi (2016) showed that several factors affect customer's preference in purchasing batik, and product quality (material) is considered along with price and design or pattern.

We observed that they produced small size batik cloth, innovated with stamp technique, made the motif larger, combined line and dots motif and made simple dot arrangements with the purpose to speed up the process of production and thus can reduce the price. This is carried out because during the COVID-19, purchasing high quality batik is not a priority for most people. Among the strategies, it seems that keeping the quality but reducing the sizes of the cloth is the most effective strategy to attract new customers especially for souvenir. During national and international expo in Indonesia and abroad, *selendhang* scarf is the most sell well batik. This *nitik batik* expos and fashion show which is also carried out and initiated by government and private sectors following the establishment of Geographical Indication of *nitik batik*, quite effective introducing *nitik batik* to batik lovers, although rarely the transaction took place directly during the expo. The villager said that after the expo, they came directly to the village if they are interested in purchasing batik and made some orders.

Other strategies to reduce the price such as creating simpler arrangements or configurations of dots elements seems only preferred by batik lovers. For

example, *nitik batik* motifs that have reduced details or have larger motifs. Some batik lovers still bought regular size cloth (2.25m long) of *nitik batik* with these modifications, but none of the younger generations bought regular size hand-drawn *nitik batik* during the pandemic. The young generation prefer to buy stamped *nitik batik* or if they bought the hand-drawn one, they prefer to buy *selendhang*. The price of IDR. 650,000.00 for one regular size cloth that has been the reduced price because of the COVID-19 pandemic, is still considered too expensive for young generations.

Online marketing strategy that has become one of solutions to bridge limiting physical access problems during COVID-19 pandemic also only give little impact for *nitik batik* Trimulyo Village. Governments have helped them with digital marketing training, but all of the batik's groups only use Instagram as a promotion gallery, and follow-up via WhatsApp. This type of marketing makes *nitik batik* hopefully resulting in more visible nitik batik to the public and hopefully increase hype, visits, requests, and sales.

Batik makers said that word of mouth marketing in the form of recommendations from old customers to potentially new customers felt to be more influential in increasing batik sales. For batik makers in Trimulyo, online marketing through Instagram felt to be less influential to increase buyers of nitik batik, although digital and online platforms closely become part of people's life, including shifting the purchasing patterns lately (Ithurbide and Singh, 2022; Surodjo, Astuty, and Lukman, 2022). Probably because Instagram belonged to the younger generation who favor ready to wear cloth.

We understand that *nitik batik* makers are able to produce but experienced difficulty to market their product during the COVID-19 pandemic. From this experience, we learn that to widen marketing segments, batik makers can create hand-drawn *nitik batik* that has larger motifs or make the motifs simpler to speed up the process thus reducing the price. Another strategy is by creating a combination of *nitik* and non-*nitik batik*. This can result in batik that are more beautiful but also can result in a disharmonious design. Not all batik makers in Trimulyo Village adapted to combine *nitik* and non-*nitik* motifs owing to their preference to produce a classic *nitik batik*.

CONCLUSION

The research on *nitik batik* in Trimulyo Village in COVID-19 pandemic context has resulted in several results: Firstly, during COVID-19 pandemic batik makers in Trimulyo Village produce classic hand-drawn *nitik batik* either long sheet cloth or *selendhang* (long scarf), but most batik makers, especially the newcomers prefer to produce *selendhang*. Secondly, during the COVID-19 pandemic several facilitators and supervisors both initiated by government and private sectors had facilitated batik makers to keep producing and helped them to sell the product via auction and exhibition. This is considered as the most effective marketing tool.

Many people came to the village after they saw the exhibition, for example an exhibition in a hotel or other expo event in Yogyakarta. Thirdly, social media is also effective in introducing *nitik batik* to the public, but rather as a gallery. People do not purchase directly via online. They prefer to come directly to the village. Fourthly, during the training they introduce the corona motifs to be applied in the batik design. However, these motifs most batik lovers do not favor. These corona themes do not have symbolic meaning and look disharmonious with *nitik batik* as its background. The batik makers have not made the corona motif harmonious with a variety of *nitik* motifs. Other objects in relation with corona such as masks and bottles are considered strange for cloth. For the time being, batik makers will only produce corona batik by purchase order.

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