

# Public History and Performing Arts in Indonesia

Een Herdiani<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Mughni Munggaran<sup>2</sup>, Nur Rochmat<sup>3</sup>  
{een\_herdiani@isbi.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, mughniiboo12@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>, n.rochmat@yahoo.com<sup>3</sup>}

Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

**Abstract.** Public history is a movement of practitioners who love history and historians to make it easier for the public to access information. The goal is to build a collective memory with the community. Public history in the performing arts is not widely known although artists have done it. Many art communities present information about historical events packaged in the form of art. Whether it's through performance arts, fine arts, recording media arts, or recitation arts. Artists interpret historical events that are published for the public. Consciously or not, the activities of artists become agents of public history built to uncover and convey a historical event. Technological developments with the presence of social media, the existence of performing arts, and public history are getting stronger. The results obtained from the observation show that performing arts can be a strategic medium for strengthening public history.

**Keywords:** public history; collective memory; performing arts; social media.

## 1. Introduction

Public history is a movement, methodology, and approach that encourages collaborative study and practicality on history to be easily accessible and used by the wider community [1]. Public history is history as it is seen, heard, read, and interpreted by the general public [2],[3]. Public history is one approach to communicating history to audiences outside the academic realm [4]. With the presence of public history, people can understand various historical events easily. The goal is to build a collective memory with the community. Today many historians and history lovers are trying to make various collective memories and the journey of their community life can be presented to the historical stage, from public to public. In the context of historical science, public history is a subset of applied history that directs its attention to audiences that are outside the scope of academic history. Therefore, anyone can become a public historian [5].

Historical awareness in the public sphere has begun to increase amid the incessant advancement of all-digital technology. There are many activities of various community groups that show interest in history. These various historical activities include historical public discussions, scientific and popular history publications, to the emergence and formation of historical and cultural activist communities [6]. Public history is rooted in local problems [7]. From here the community can directly learn history. Learning history aims to form a character that can sort out good and bad amid advances in the flow of information technology that sticks to the nation's character through the nation's cultural history [8].

The concept of public history in Indonesia has taken place in space and practice, through museums, film, social media [9], and art. Many history-loving communities have been

actively digging into history and publishing the results of their activities so that people can find out easily and interestingly. This is evidence of the increasing public interest in history [10]. Included in the field of art. In practice, many artists have used the media of dance, music, theater, and recitation art to convey historical events, but it has not been realized that these practices can be categorized as performing public history.

Discussion on the public history of performing arts is rare among art history writers and researchers in Indonesia. There is limited literature on art history, particularly on public history in the arts. Performing arts use various media, such as dance, music, and theater, to convey moral and other messages to audiences [11]. These arts are ephemeral, enjoyed in the moment, and limited by space and time. They offer life lessons and historical insights through artistic expression. Indonesian performing arts, shaped by a long historical development, reflect a blend of diverse cultural elements, creating a rich and unique cultural identity. This highlights the deep historical connection between performing arts and public history.

## **2. Method**

This research employs the historical method which involves several systematic steps in collecting and analyzing historical data [12], [13]. The first step is heuristic or data collection, conducted by searching written sources from various books and national and international journal articles, as well as video sources obtained from various YouTube channels. The collected data is then critically analyzed to assess its validity, relevance, and reliability. The next step is interpretation, where the critically analyzed data is integrated to understand the broader implications and relationships between public history and performing arts. Finally, the interpreted results are organized and presented in writing following the principles of historiography, forming an accurate narrative of historical events and practices related to public history and performing arts in Indonesia.

## **3. Discussion**

### **Social Media, Performing Arts, and Public History**

In line with the times, the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. keep going. At this time the problem of literacy continues to grow. Literacy no longer discusses the problem of literacy, but there is the new literacy, namely data literacy, technological literacy, and human literacy that develops with digital data. Through big data or digital data, humans get many lessons including about new literacy. New literacy has penetrated various scientific fields, as well as historical science. Digital media and social media are now widely used to convey past events to the public [14]. The use of digital media in providing historical information, especially related to performing arts, is a learning tool for the wider community. The use of digital media in the era of globalization is an opportunity to communicate about historical events so that the wider community knows historical events easily. In conducting public history communication, especially in the era of globalization that utilizes New Media, print, to electronics, it provides easy access to the wider community, especially the millennial generation to understand events in the past related to the public history paradigm [15].

A form of performing art that is easily understood by the public in presenting historical events is drama or theater art. Traditional theater arts that often feature historical stories include

*Ludruk, Sandiwara, Lenong Betawi, Ketoprak*, and others. Theater art in it contains complex arts such as stories, music, literature, dance, as well as fine arts. The presentation of theater arts whose content is about History is easier for the public to understand when compared to dance or music. Dance and music performances contain symbols that need to be reinterpreted according to the experience of the audience. In contrast to theater art where the audience can directly capture the message conveyed.

Similarly, many performing arts actors use social media to publish their works. Various forms of performance art are published through Instagram (IG), Facebook (FB), and YouTube channels. IG and FB are promotional events or trailers while the complete work is broadcast on the YouTube Channel. Social media platforms, at first, were not widely used by artists because they generally felt more expressive if the performance artwork was presented directly on performance stages. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, the new media, namely social media, became an interesting vehicle and became a mainstay for artists to show their artworks. During this pandemic, there was a virtual performance revolution [16]. People can easily use social media to present works of performance art, including those related to historical stories. Publications on the history of performing arts can be packaged in the form of performances, talk shows, or podcasts.

In West Java, pantun art, a traditional form of Sundanese performing arts, embodies historical values through storytelling. The juru pantun, or pantun storyteller, performs tales from the Pajajaran Kingdom, such as the life of Prabu Siliwangi, accompanied by a lute [17]. These stories, which include elements from the Siksakandang Karesian manuscript, are presented through a blend of song and narration. Although this form of recitation art is not widely recognized, it remains a vital cultural practice. One of the few remaining pantun artists, Mang Ayi from Subang Regency, performs at various community events like village clean-ups and harvest festivals. His performances, delivered in Sundanese, educate audiences about the exemplary leadership of Prabu Siliwangi, showcasing how public history is conveyed through performing arts.

Public history in the performing arts generally tells the stories of local history in which the arts lived and flourished. For example, plays that live in the Cirebon and Indramayu areas. One of them is a show entitled "Geger Indramayu" which tells about the struggle for boundaries between the Indramayu region and Sumedang.

In Central Java, the Wayang Topeng group, a folk performance art, evolved alongside Wayang Wong from the Keraton. In the 1930s, palace artists revived Wayang Topeng by incorporating stories of Ken Arok, Ken Dedes, and the kings of Mataram and Singosari, focusing on historical narratives from the Hindu-Buddhist period rather than the traditional Ramayana and Mahabharata tales. This illustrates how historical stories are preserved by regional art groups. Additionally, Ludruk's art recounts the story of Ken Arok, and Ketoprak Mataram depicts the tale of Mahesa Jenar from the Demak Kingdom. These examples, highlighted by YouTube channels, demonstrate the longstanding tradition of public history in performing arts.

YouTube is a new media tool that is easily accessible anytime and anywhere, facilitating complete information exchange and enabling creative participation from various parties. Several YouTube channels present artworks related to history, such as the Indonesia Kaya channel, which features a monologue by Happy Salma titled "Inggit." This show tells the story of Inggit, who supported Sukarno in his fight for independence, offering viewers insight into important historical figures. Another channel, "Pusbitari Talk," is run by the Dance Development Center in Bandung and uses social media to discuss the history of dance in West Java. It features episodes on figures like R. Tjetje Somantri, Abah Kayat, and R. Oemay

Martakusumah, and covers various dance histories, including Kukupu Dance and Peacock Dance.

Additionally, the Jugala Jaipongan Official YouTube channel uses social media to narrate the history of Jaipongan dance in detailed talk shows and podcasts. This channel is managed by young history enthusiasts who use credible documents to share the origins and development of Jaipongan, highlighting its creator, Gugum Gumbira, and others involved in its creation. Their engaging content makes them inadvertent agents of public history, effectively revealing and conveying how Jaipongan was born and evolved.

#### 4. Conclusion

Performing arts in Indonesia have long contributed to public history, presenting historical events through various media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital media became a crucial platform for continuing art presentations, fostering the growth of public history in performing arts. This transition to new media offers opportunities to share historical events in innovative formats, making public history an engaging part of performing arts for the public. The use of social media has expanded the reach of performing arts, enabling a global audience to access and appreciate historical narratives. As digital literacy continues to evolve, the role of performing arts in public history is likely to grow, providing new avenues for historical engagement and education. Furthermore, the integration of performing arts with digital platforms encourages interactive and participatory experiences for audiences. This evolution not only preserves traditional art forms but also enhances their relevance in the contemporary digital age. Ultimately, the synergy between performing arts and digital media can lead to a richer, more inclusive understanding of history for diverse audiences.

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