

# Internet: a New Medium to Promote Traditional Dances in Indonesia

Maria Satya Rani, Fandy Tjiptono, and Suyoto

**Abstract**—As a multicultural country, Indonesia has many sub-cultures with unique performing arts. Some of them are well-known to international tourists, such as music ensemble (known as *gamelan*) in Bali and Java, shadow puppet play (*wayang*) in Java, and martial arts (known as *pencak silat*) in Sumatra. Some examples of famous traditional dances in Indonesia are Srimpi from Yogyakarta and Solo, Legong from Bali, and Gong dance from Kalimantan. Performing arts show the identity of a nation. However, they are a complex subject, especially when they are addressed to children. The performing arts, e.g. music, dance theatre, and opera are experiential, experimental, and emotionally charged. Therefore, the right strategy and promotion need to be developed to engage children to appreciate and preserve traditional dances. This study aims to explore and identify possibilities of internet usage as a medium to promote traditional dances, especially to children in Indonesia.

**Keywords**—children education, culture preservation in Indonesia, national identity, online promotion

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE performing arts live, enrich, and have power on human's life. It has values and feelings, which enable people to sense and be emotionally involved when the performing arts are performed [1], [2]. As an example, a traditional dance performance featuring a sad story could raise sympathy of the audience. The audience can sense sorrow and sadness of the story. As well as when the dancers move gleefully to express happiness, the audience will be able to feel the atmosphere too. Local cultures, including traditional dances are an important part of community and become an identity of the society. Thus, the society will develop and always try to identify the critical elements of local culture, such as by preserving it [3], [4].

Globally, dances that are performed in life could have fourteen functions. They function as symbol or expression of (1) puberty, (2) initiation, (3) friendship, (4) courtship, (5) wedding, (6) occupation, (7) vegetation, (8) astronomical, (9) hunting, (10), clown, (11) battle mime, (12) cure, (13) death, and (14) aesthetics [3]. Traditional performing arts can give notions on habits and tradition of people in the past. Traditional performing arts are also used as symbol or expression of their social life [5], [6]. Within Indonesian society, traditional dances have three main functions, namely (1) as a medium for rituals or traditional ceremonies, (2) for entertainment purpose and/or expressing friendships, and (3) as a medium for self-actualization [7], [8].

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Parts of human life, such as norms and various experiences (e.g. diligence, loyalty, bravery, struggle, hope, love, sacrifice, despair, cruelty, intrigue, ambition, and tragedy) could be expressed in the dance [9]. One of these or several parts at the same time could be seen on the performances of traditional dances on specific events, such as weddings, birthdays, and harvest times.

Technology has been growing rapidly nowadays. It enables the dissemination of information across countries easier. Development and inventions of technology have strong effect on paradigm and behavior of people all over the globe. This issue has also impacted on children's paradigm and behavior, as well as in Indonesia. However, when being used properly, technology could help children to learn their national cultures easier. This is because people in the past depended greatly upon documentation based on paper, audiocassette, and pictures [8].

In this study, the topic of preservation and promotion of Indonesian traditional dances through the usage of the internet, i.e. website is addressed. Culture is a heritage of the ancestors and shows identity of a nation. Traditional dances are examples of cultural products and performing arts, which should be appreciated, conserved, and preserved by the society itself. Indonesia as a multicultural country and one of the largest archipelago countries in the world has many sub-cultures. Each sub-culture is unique and has its own characteristics. This uniqueness and each characteristics influence how and what did each society created and performed their traditional dances in the past. In this case, effective usage of the internet as a medium to disclose and spread information will help children to realize and understand the importance of preserving traditional dances as a part of their national identity. Parents and teachers play an important role here to assist and communicate the message to the children.

## II. PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL DANCES IN INDONESIA

Indonesia consists of thirty-three provinces, which extend from Sabang (lies in Sumatra) to Merauke (lies in Papua) [5]. Each province is inhabited by certain tribes and enriched with their social life, customs, and performing arts. The tribes reside and are spread throughout all islands in Indonesia, among others: indigineous people of Aceh, Nias, Mentawai, Batak, and Minangkabau (natives of island of Sumatra), Javanese and Sundanese (natives of island of Java), Madurese (native of island of Madura), Balinese (indigenous people of island of Bali), Aceh, Nias, Mentawai, Batak, and Minangkabau (natives of island of Sumatra), Dayak and Banjar (natives of island of Kalimantan), Bugis and Toraja (natives of island of Sulawesi), Asmat and Dani (indigenous people of Papua).

Nowadays, technological developments in information and transportation have enabled natives to migrate to other areas, even to other islands. The Government of Indonesia has been actively trying to promote and motivate the young generation to appreciate and preserve Indonesian traditional dances, both through online and offline media. In the 1950s, under the leadership of President Soekarno (the first president of Republic of Indonesia), several traditional dances were frequently performed at Istana Negara (the official residence of the president and center of state governmental activities) in Jakarta. In the following years until today, folk or traditional dances have been addressed to the national forum periodically, such as performances in National Music and Dance Festival and broadcasting of traditional performing arts on the television [10]. However, these efforts and activities do not always work effectively, particularly for the young people. They tend to appreciate and learn other types of dance (e.g. modern dance, salsa, breakdance) and often forget their cultural root [3], [11]. At primary education level, learning program of traditional dances is offered as extracurricular activity. In Sumatra, Java, and Bali for example, several traditional dances (which are simple and short in duration) are taught at some kindergartens and primary schools. Yet, not all kindergartens and primary schools in those areas provide this extracurricular activity, and not all students are interested to take the program [11], [12].

### III. EDUCATING CHILDREN THROUGH TRADITIONAL DANCES

Primary target audience in this research are children (especially those who at the age of 4–9), parents, and school teachers. Then, the main question asked here will be, “Why educating traditional dances to children is important?” The answer is because young generation is the future of a country [3], [5], [11]. The young generation should love and be proud of their national identities, such as the national languages and other cultural products. They should also be aware that they must preserve cultural products of their country, such as traditional dances and music as one of their duties as citizens of a nation [3], [5]. On the other hand, moving in a certain rhythm to express a desire is one of children’s psychological and physical needs. They also have natural instinct to imitate the behavior of animals or adults as their role models [12]. However, it could not be denied that to become a good and respectable dancer will take a long time – even decades. The process of learning the performing arts, such as playing music and dancing ideally starts at the age of four to eight-years old. This is because the children’s motoric and linguistic capabilities are already developed during these ages. In addition to that, they usually also have a great sense of curiosity, especially on new subject or object [12], [13]. These factors (i.e. their natural needs, psychological and physical development) could be used as the basis and stimulus to engage children to learn traditional dances. In fact, through arts education, children can enhance their non-biased and positive attitude toward the society by acquiring appropriate communication skills [14]. This means that children can improve their interpersonal skills such as teamwork skills, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity in people and ideas,

and effective communication ability. Arts activities not only reduce children’s negative attitudes toward school, but also can help children develop a positive attitude, such as motivation. This is why informing and educating traditional dances to children from early age could be considered as one significant effort, as it may form children’s personality. Furthermore, complete and integrated information about traditional dances of Indonesia could hardly be found on the internet until now. There have been some information about traditional dances uploaded on the internet through websites and blogs. Some examples of the sources are: <http://www.anneahira.com/tarian-tradisional.htm>, <http://id-blog-tutorial.blogspot.com/2011/11/macam2-tarian-tradisional-daerah.html>, and <http://www.azamku.com/macam-macam-tarian-tradisional-indonesia.html>. Some of the information are accompanied with pictures, but some of them are not. One specific example of website which is dedicated for storing and presenting information on cultural products of Indonesia digitally is Perpustakaan Digital Budaya Indonesia (*Digital Library for Indonesian Culture*) can be accessed on <http://budaya-indonesia.org/bwk>, but there are no pictures or video presented in the website, and information available in Indonesian language only. Moreover, although there have been some videos and short information uploaded on the internet (e.g. on YouTube, weblogs), but these could not be seen as disseminating Indonesian traditional dances as a whole and integrally. Based on those reasons, this study is therefore intended to explore possibilities and identify impacts on internet usage as a medium to promote and educate Indonesian traditional dances to children in Indonesia.

### IV. COMMUNICATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND TRADITIONAL DANCES: COULD THEY WORK TOGETHER?

The performing arts are a complex service, experiential, essentially intangible, and emotionally charged [15]. Traditional dances – as a part of the performing arts – are a complex subject and have a complex development. Because of its characteristics, the performing arts also are a difficult subject in research. According to R.M. Soedarsono, one of the experts of performing arts subjects in Indonesia, studying or undertaking a research on the performing arts is different from fine arts [16]. As the performing arts is intangible, because it could only be enjoyed when the art itself being performed or shown, then the performing arts become experiential and a difficult subject to be investigated, such as to trace its history. R. M. Soedarsono illustrated his statement in a clear example: when an artist intends to examine one of famous paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, “Monalisa”, which was made in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, he or she could go to the Louvre Museum in Paris to see and observe the original paintings there. The same procedure could not be applied when an artist intends to see or examine a ballet performance which was produced in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He or she will not be able to see the original show, instead, he or she could only see the reconstruction of the performance – if available [16].

However, researchers could indicated that art and technology have always been intimately linked: indeed in their origins they were almost indistinguishable [17], [18].

A study of traditional performing arts in Indonesia conducted by Santoso, an Indonesian artist in the field of performing arts, in 2003 showed there was alteration on local artists' perception about application of technology on arts [19]. The study presented change of their perception and rise of their awareness on the issue. They found that arts creativity and the performing arts are not a solitary life but it needs technology in their development. Accordingly, it means that they should be balanced with efforts in using inventions and developments of technology. In other words, technology and arts should be placed in a balanced position in accordance with the growing needs for art [16], [17], [19].

Meanwhile, the performing arts have been largely neglected in the mainstream of communication and marketing literature in these days [2]. In fact, the performing arts are a growing subject of concern for both practitioners and academicians. In the past, marketing was traditionally seen as commercial marketing. Marketing was seen as the process of creating, promoting, and delivering or exchanging goods or services, and the seller's motive was to make a profit. In recent years, the scope of marketing and the application of marketing techniques has been broadened. It has been extended into non-profit fields and applied in contexts where no goods have been exchanged [20], [21]. Kotler and Armstrong stated that marketing is a social and managerial process whereby individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and values with others [21].

Nowadays, the existence of digital and interactive devices, personal computers, and internet make information more quickly and easily obtained [22]. The internet provides individual users with convenient and continuous access to information, entertainment, networking, and communication. It enhances societies through more information access and communication globalization [23]. Furthermore, Strauss and Frost added that the internet has unique characteristics, which create opportunities beyond those possible with the other communication or offline media (e.g. television, postal mail, newspapers). Some of these unique characteristics are: (1) the ability to store vast amounts of information that can be searched and disseminated in a cost-effective manner which is accessible by virtually everyone on the internet, (2) ability to provide perceptual experiences that are superior to a printed catalog have been identified, (3) interactivity and the ability to provide information on demand, also (4) the ability to serve as a physical distribution medium for certain goods (e.g. software) [23], [24].

In Indonesia, parents introduce internet to their children usually when they already aged four years old. At kindergarten and primary schools, students aged four to eight years old are compulsory to get lessons in using internet [11]. In this era, children tend to use digital search engine, such as Google, Yahoo, etc. to search information and data for their homeworks.

Therefore, using internet to promote traditional dances of Indonesia could be one effective strategy as to introduce and involve the young generation to their national identity. Use of Information Technology (IT) in communication and marketing has proved to be a major revolution in the traditional system of marketing [25]. There was only one-way interaction possible in the past, but the internet has been enabling multiple interaction and communication in these days. Examples of benefits in using internet to communicate and promote traditional dances are: (1) able to reach global audience, (2) it can lower expenses and resources, and (3) it is highly interactive and can innovative method. Several factors, nevertheless, should be considered in promoting traditional dances through the internet, especially to the children. The forms of information, model of communication and information provision are some of the key to effective promotion. Therefore, in addition to video and audio files, and written forms of information available on the website, adding games will attract the children to be participate in the online communication process. The themes of the games could be puzzle of *wayang*, trivia about traditional dance costumes and *gamelan*, and trivia on national or local famous artists or dancers. Furthermore, there are other factors which also need to be considered when a website – as the medium to communicate with the target audience – will be developed, namely: (1) structure of the medium and information, (2) appearance, (3) time or duration, (4) information, and (5) management system [26].

## V.CONCLUSION

Several potential advantages could be studied through the combination of communication, technology, and arts. The usage of internet as a new medium to promote and educate Indonesian traditional dances to children in fact include advantages for (1) children who have natural talent in dancing and able to dance well, (2) children who love watching dance performances, but are not able (yet) to dance well, as well as (3) consideration for tourism and arts development. The information provided on the internet will become one of the reliable sources and documents for the target audience. Traditional dances and music could be developed into new model of performing arts as they may complement the traditional ones. This is in line with R. M. Soedarsono and Timbul Haryono' point of views; that there could be changes in the presentation, duration, and other attributes of the performing arts.

However, artists should always realize and remember that ethical behavior should be the foundation of their artistic works, especially when collaborating traditional dances and music with the modern dances and music [7], [16].

On the other hand, there are some limitations which could become constrains in the realization of the project. There are two main limitations addressed in this study, namely: limited internet access and knowledge on technology utilization in Indonesia, also lack of physical interactions which could influence the learning process.

Limited internet access and knowledge of people in Indonesia on technology utilization (e.g. usage of internet and website) could lead to interruption or delay of communication and information dissemination process [28]. As shown in Figure 1, the provision and deployment of optical fiber cables provided by several providers (e.g. Telkom, Excelcomindo, Comnet Plus, and SMW-2/3) are not evenly distributed in Indonesia. It could be seen that the provision and deployment of optical fiber cables are mainly provided on the west and central side of the country, such as in island of Sumatra, island of Java, and island of Bali. Meanwhile, the provision and deployment of optical fiber cables in the island of Kalimantan and island of Sulawesi are very limited to one or two providers only. Because of this situation, groups of people – especially those who are in rural areas – could not access the internet and they will not be able to be involved in the online learning process. Another limitation is lack of physical interactions caused by online learning process. Physical interactions with children, particularly for correcting and applying good posture or position in dancing are often necessary to be made. When a dance teacher teaches certain dance, he or she usually approach the students directly, standing in the front, behind, or beside the students to show them how the dance or certain movements should be performed [13].

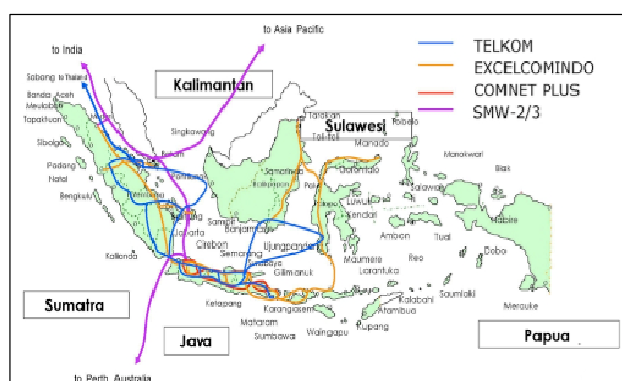


Fig. 1 Provision of fiber optical cables in Indonesia (adopted from "Online Activism: Perlu Terobosan Baru!" by Firdaus Cahyadi [29].)

A further and more specific research on the subject; usage of the internet to promote traditional dances, should be conducted to acquire better and more comprehensive result of study on the subject. Therefore, the study will result a comprehension of the factors that will have positive and negative impacts for the target audience, also suggestions and solutions for the problems or limitations of the study.

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