

## **THE VAST DISSEMINATION OF GENERATION TRANSCENDING ART: DANGDUT MUSIC THROUGH TIKTOK**

**Haura Khalisha**

*Faculty of Arts and Design, Jakarta Institute of the Arts*

e-mail: Khalishahaura@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

*Since the viral phone application Tiktok has taken over the Indonesian archipelago, it has become a source and a melting pot where culture is created. Although often overlooked by the general public, a massive spontaneous and participatory creative outpouring of individuals and groups are publishing their local genius through the Tiktok platform and sharing it with the rest of the world. One of these cultural heritages being spread upon the Tiktok sphere is the Indonesian music genre of "Dangdut". With music being a universal language, is Dangdut Indonesia's pop culture breakthrough in a global context? Combined with the fact that the use of Tiktok as a platform of disseminating culture is not taught in school, this paper argues that these participatory online performances with an access to a limitless audience is a great example of local self-reliance of communities in indonesia and is an opportunity for the younger generation to participate in sharing Indonesian culture in a global context.*

**Keywords :** *Dissemination, Tiktok, Dangdut, Local genius, Cultural heritage*

## Introduction

Despite sometimes being looked down upon, Dangdut music and its rise hold significant potential in disseminating Indonesian cultural heritage both nationally and internationally. At present day we need to look into the fact that the technological apparatus available in store for us and what it means to our existing culture. But how did this form of culture-originated music enter the world of Tiktok and what does it mean to us Tiktok using generation of Indonesians? The answer to this question offers a pragmatic understanding of the reasons as to why the expansion of this video sharing application has been so widespread. Dangdut too, generation after generation it has been passed down.

When embarking on this journey of first playing around and creating a Tiktok profile to see what all the fuss was about, I thought it would just be dancing videos and videos of people lip syncing to funny viral audios, surprisingly I found that this platform was all but marginal in the context to the spread of culture. Thus, one should not underestimate the effects of this use of Dangdut music as a heritage tool of dissemination. What I have found in observing the content of videos and audios on this platform is that art and aesthetics seem to be a marginal issue, whereas other values seem to be much more relevant, like entertainment and what the audience deems as trendy. So for instance if a group of people who don't use Tiktok, who value "substance" (such as educational purposes) in the content they consume, seem to be disinterested in a cultural happening, the online Tiktok audience would think otherwise.

An example of this phenomenon is Tiktok user "Alif\_cepmeK" gaining popularity after a video of himself answering a comment from his viewers asking about his hairstyle that has created the viral phrase "*kamu nanya?*" ("you're asking?"), earned him 18.3 million views as of November 2022, 1,8 million followers, a total of 26.7 million views on his Tiktok profile, hundreds of imitations, TV appearances, and even brand deals. When the audience of Tiktok deems a phenomenon to be "trendy", that song, audio, video, phrase, or even person will gain cultural notoriety, so how can we see this as an opportunity to spread cultural heritage internationally? This is the topic of the following paper.

## Dangdut Music and Its Origin Story

From its etymology, it can be seen that dangdut music is a fusion of Malay music and Indian music that produced a new sound, namely dangdut. According to Suseno, the term Dangdut appeared and became widely known in the 1970s when Billi Silabumi (a singer and guitarist from Bandung) mocked the new genre with the word Dangdut in mass media. As a result, the media had a sizable contribution in naming this new genre of music. The term "Dangdut" itself stems from the sound "dang" and "dut" that a *tabla* or a *kendang* makes in

said genre of music that has become its core identity. The drum sound makes this genre have a unique and precise beat. Starting from its etymology, the word Dangdut is actually intended as a word of ridicule or ridicule for Hindustani-style Malay orchestras that follow the sound of tabla by making certain sounds so that they sound "dangduut".<sup>1</sup>

William H Frederick explained in his writing "Rhoma Irama and the Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesia Popular Culture" that the style of Dangdut music has had its enormous influence in the years of 1975-1981. It was aimed at youth, pulsated by dance rhythm, and birthed Indonesia's first true entertainment superstars. Those superstars played large roles in creating a market in mass media in Indonesia (cassette tapes, radio, movies, and even television), made marks in cultural activity, heated debates about the state of Indonesian culture, and gave Indonesia a new public identity.<sup>2</sup>

And while Dangdut has been criticized on various grounds, it is notable for the sheer amount of fans and devotion of its fans in cities and villages all throughout the archipelago. This phenomenon remains unexplored, in modern Indonesian culture where the general public and even academics are generally incredulous, tending to look on Dangdut as merely faddish, going as far as calling it cheap.

### **Music as a Universal Language**

There is no doubt that music is internationally enjoyed, even with little to no formal education to undergird the culture-specific meanings that music can encompass, anyone can enjoy a tune on the radio that originates from anywhere in the world, or dance to a song with foreign lyrics on Tiktok. It is a language that is expressed through audible sounds and when shared can be used as a tool to share culture with the rest of the world which requires no translation.

This "language" of Dangdut serves an exciting purpose to move a large audience, cutting across class lines, appealing to the sensibilities of Indonesians of all sorts. Unmistakably Indonesian and pumped full of rhythm, this genre of music can be experienced in the most visceral way, delivering messages received by masses. Dangdut poses not only as a part of contemporary Indonesian culture (as opposed to mirroring Western styles of music) but is a useful insight to Indonesia as a society. It was never designed to cater to the upper-class society though, the Melayu sound satisfies the needs of being "Merakyat" (populist appealing to the everyday person who feels they're disregarded by the established elite groups).

### **Tiktok and Its Limitless Audience**

TikTok, known as Douyin in its home market, was launched in China in September 2016. It quickly started to gain traction in China and parent company ByteDance launched an

international version the following year. TikTok snowballed into the most popular app in 2019 and 2020. It was downloaded 693 million times in 2019 and 850 million times in 2020. Based on Business of Apps data, there are 1.53 billion monthly active TikTok users in the world as of the third quarter of 2022. The majority of the 313 million TikTok users originate from the Asia Pacific region (excluding China and India) in 2021.<sup>3</sup>

The existence of a platform such as TikTok for sharing media is not new at all, despite the implications and relevance of TikTok, but there still hasn't been a narration of cultural dissemination. Such discourse would be important in itself, as dissemination strategies are relevant in history; it is even more relevant in this digital era. Day to day in the TikTok sphere, users exchange opinions and in a lot of cases get informed about issues and topics. In this sense, this short video app has the power to set an agenda, decide what users deem as relevant and what is not. By taking advantage of this existing mechanism, we can explore different strategies that we can adopt to increase affinity with masses and become successful in imposing ideas (e.g. a genre of music).

### **The Local Genius That Became a Viral Sensation**

Local genius refers to what humans know, how they behave and what strategies they develop to sustain their existence where they live. The knowledge they have, the way in which they behave and the strategies they develop to sustain themselves imply the local genius of the area where they live.<sup>4</sup> A lot of the "trendy" music created that are used on TikTok are created by local self-taught musicians and mainly DJs. Locally, in the recent November of 2022 the song "Runtah" or "Rubbish" by Sundanese singer Doel Sumbang was covered by Javanese Dangdut singer Azmy Z and "Koplo" remixed by local DJ, DJ Manikci gained 2.1 Million audio reposts on TikTok in the span of 4 months since its release in July 2022, in comparison to the original version of the song released 27 years ago with not nearly as much views on the same application. Though the original version of the song was widely listened to, this occurrence only proves the quantity of reach Dangdut music or remixes has on the platform in such a short amount of time and how it can revive any form of older released music.

A lot of the content on TikTok in the form of viral audios gaining millions of views and comments are "Koplo", a subgenre of Dangdut characterized by its fast traditional drum sound. An example for said content is in the year 2020, when the song "Bagaikan Langit" composed by Indonesian singer Melly Goeslaw got covered by Latin American singers, Maria Isabel and Juan Magan with the title "Esa Carita". The song gained its popularity through TikTok in Latin America and Internationally, partly because Jennifer Lopez also took part in the TikTok trend using said song. The song was created in the Pop genre but then got remixed into its more viral version which is in the genre of Koplo. This phenomenon gaining

international popularity on the Tiktok platform opens a possibility for other Indonesian songwriters and producers to take the stage. These types of community activities are what happen in the Tiktok sphere.

The exchange of cultures such as music that occur can be very beneficial for the vast dissemination of heritage.

A more recent tendency on the Tiktok application is where Indonesian Tiktok users give a platform or stage to foreigners who like Dangdut music or even any Indonesian culture. From foreigners who speak Indonesian to foreigners who lip sync to Dangdut music, these users have massive followings and audiences in the Indonesian Tiktok "For you" page. When this occurrence happens most of Indonesian Tiktok users' reactions are in surprise as to why foreigners can receive and enjoy such a segmented genre of music, when we ourselves have been sheepish about it and even thought it to be cheap. But when foreigners deem it to be enjoyable, somehow the general audience sees it as something to take pride in. The goal is in the question "How can we switch this phenomenon around to our advantage?" An instance of internationally outside of Indonesia, foreign audiences welcome Indonesian culture to their For You pages.

### **Pride in Cultural Heritage**

Cultural heritage is the heritage of tangible and intangible heritage assets of a group or society that is inherited from past generations. Not all heritages of past generations are "heritage"; rather, heritage is a product of selection by society.<sup>5</sup> On the side of "Intangible cultural heritages", they consist of the non-physical aspects of a particular culture. Usually these "Intangible cultural heritages" include folklore, oral history, and even language preservation. And naturally, music is one of these cultural heritages that do not have a physical object that we can preserve when it isn't the musical instrument itself. Music can include social values and traditions, spiritual beliefs, artistic expression, language and other aspects of a community. But in this day and age preserving said intangible cultural heritage is more possible than ever, with the existence of platforms like Tiktok and the ever-evolving digital space where we can immortalize anything.

### **Conclusion**

Despite on occasion being looked down upon, Dangdut music and its rise hold significant potential in disseminating Indonesian cultural heritage both nationally and internationally. This genre of music has been passed down generation after generation and is notable for the sheer amount of impact all throughout the archipelago. With music being a universal language, the "language" of Dangdut serves an exciting purpose to move a large audience,

cutting across class lines, appealing to the sensibilities of audiences of all sorts, with lots of examples of the power of its ability to become “Viral”.

Unmistakably Indonesian, Dangdut poses as a part of contemporary Indonesian culture and is a useful insight to Indonesia as a society, delivering messages received by masses. With Tiktok being a video sharing application used by millions today, there still hasn't been a narration of cultural dissemination. In the Tiktok sphere, users exchange music and topics in large quantities. In this sense, this short video app has the power to set an agenda, decide what users deem as relevant and what is not. Such discourse about culture dissemination would be important in itself, and even more relevant in this digital era. By taking advantage of this existing mechanism, we can explore different strategies that we can adopt to increase affinity with masses and become successful by taking pride in local culture and disseminating it all throughout the globe. Thus, to disseminate culture, one should not underestimate the power of the generation transcending the heritage tool of Dangdut.

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