Art performance as a political communication tool in Indonesia: beyond the stage

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Abstract

Purpose – This retrospective phenomenological case study examines the experiences of 18 politicians who participated in a political campaign using performing arts and artists in a regional heads and legislators in Indonesia. Also, the role of Gandrung art as a performing art is becoming a political communication tool for political actors in Indonesia.

Design/methodology/approach – This study employs a retrospective phenomenological case. The informants recruited were 18 politicians who have local, regional and national political levels. The participants were interviewed about their experiences of campaigning using traditional performing arts as a form of political communication. Data collection techniques used in this study include interviews and photo documentation during the campaign process to triangulate findings.

Findings – Based on a case study analysis and through thematic analysis, this research reveals three emerging themes which indicate that performing arts function as political communication tools in three significant ways: (1) as a form of artistic expression for conveying political messages through movement and the use of dancer costumes; (2) as a medium for showcasing cultural identity and representation as a form of concern for the local culture of voters; and (3) as a means to garner mass appeal and propagate political propaganda.

Research limitations/implications – The study has two limitations. First, the study only interviewed a small number of participants. Thus, generalization for wider contexts of politicians is not possible. Second, the study focuses on examining the voice of politicians and analyzing it using thematic analysis.

Originality/value – There is a scarcity of research that specifically focuses on uncovering the perspectives of politicians who employ performing arts as a political communication tool. This study contributes to the understanding that art performance is inherently non-neutral, highlighting how performing arts can actively engage in political communication by conveying messages, shaping cultural identity and influencing public opinion in the context of Indonesia.

Keywords Art performance, Perceptions, Political communication

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Performing art has historically played an important role in political mobilization and resistance movements. From songs of protest during the era of civil rights to songs of solidarity in contemporary social justice movements, music has served as a unifying force for political activism. They do that for the transformative power of music in shaping collective identities and fostering solidarity among marginalized groups. Whether through folk ballads, punk rock songs or rap battles, musicians have used the emotional power of music to strengthen political messages and drive social change. Performing art is another effective medium for expressing ideas that are used by society for various purposes according to the

need to convey provocative messages, oppression, social justice or messages of peace or persuasive messages to influence the audience. The performance process is influenced by a variety of cultural, social and individual factors that they create and are conditioned by various circumstances that include elements ranging from the cultural environment to the physical self. Taking into account the many meanings that emerge, performances can be understood as a communication model in which a series of codified messages are sent or enacted and its meaning accepted or translated (Navickaitè-Martinelli, 2019). Additionally, a study by Ciurlo (2021) for example, in Colombia that art exhibitions are used in the form of reflective communication that can provoke the public to participate in critical and political actions in the context of armed conflict.

In addition, the literature contained in the book was written by Pathak and Perera (2018) which reports on the political relations of communication and culture in contemporary South Asia that explores the language, signs and symbols underlying various representations to express ideas and ideas. In addition, the art exhibitions are also presented in tourist exhibits both carried out in the exhibition in the tourist area and through the art festivals used as an effort to transform the social, cultural, economic, political, educational and tourist environment values for sustainable community development (Jaeni, 2023). They use it to attract attention, public participation in public discussions on issues of acute concern, public discussion to express critical and marginalized opinions in public.

In the context of political participation, art shows can also be used to build a more modern society civilization by embedding a sense of love and peace. Art shows are also often used in a variety of ways, one of which is used during general elections used by politicians to convey information to the public. The use of art in politics is not independent of the function of art as a messenger like the research by Gryglewski et al. (2020). Apart from the political side, the artists also have a desire to contribute to the political world, such as a study by Iannelli and Marelli (2019) that reports that the performing arts also have participatory aspirations as a way to assume a political role in democracy.

Furthermore, performing arts have long played an important role in shaping and reflecting social values, such as the results of a study by Bronfman (2022) that explores the inspiration derived from social movements from artistic practices and the role of art in general as a new form of youth participation and involvement in politics in Chile. Other research reports that we see contemporary artists working in the field of public art participatory as citizens engaged in political issues relevant to urbanity (Mouffe, 2007; Rancière, 1995).

Performing art encompasses a range of diverse creative practices that cross with politics in many ways. Theater, dance and music each offer unique paths for political expression, challenging prevailing ideologies and mobilizing societies towards social transformation. This literary study looks at the relationship between politics and the performing arts, examining how different forms of artistic expression influence and are influenced by the political dynamics used today in Indonesia.

Art performances have played an important role in mediating communication between performers and audiences over the years. Performing arts are not neutral because they provide cultural values and ideologies that are conveyed through art. Powell (2011) emphasizes the role of performing arts as a tool to identify the social identity of a particular society. In the historical context, performing arts are often used as a form of communication for political diplomacy. Starting in the cold war, the US state department sponsored jazz musicians to travel to the Soviet Union in order to promote jazz music and build the image of the United States in the Soviet Union (Davenport, 2009). After World War II, the United States formed "The Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra" formed by composer Samuel Adler and under the supervision of the United States army, this orchestra moved in the European area, especially in Germany (Rolland, 1961).

Furthermore, Baker (2015) revealed that Eurovision is used as a political communication tool in a larger scope involving countries in continental Europe. Eurovision can be considered as an effort of political communication through music since 1956. The purpose of Eurovision itself is to promote unity and cooperation for countries in Europe that have been divided since after World War II. In Asia, the South Korean government since 2010 has been very active in including musicians involved in the K-pop scene to join official events organized by the South Korean government, inviting these musicians to help spread the messages that South Korea wants to convey (Jang and Paik, 2012).

Some of the contexts presented above can be understood from forms of political communication, as stated by McQuail (2009) who states that communication theory applies performing arts to a political context to function as a transmitter of political messages and their impact on public opinion and political behavior. Apart from that, performing arts can also influence attitudes and behavior regarding how the audience interprets and understands political messages conveyed through performing arts.

Although history has shown the dynamics of using performing arts as a tool for political communication and negotiation, research that focuses on revealing the perceptions of politicians who use performing arts as practical political communication is still very limited. Therefore, this retrospective phenomenological research seeks to capture the perceptions of politicians who use performing arts as a tool to campaign for their political ideas in parliamentary elections in Indonesia. This research contributes to translating performing arts as a political communication tool for politicians. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence related to politicians' perceptions in communicating their political ideas through performing arts.

This research looks at and provides a useful foundation for exploring how artistic performance functions as a tool of political communication beyond traditional platforms, in the form of theatre and music, to mobilize communities and convey political messages in Indonesia.

Literature review
Performing arts and political communication
Art performance has been long recognized as an effective political communication tool because it can engage audiences in critical discussion while also delivering political messages. As note by Pauliny (2013) highlights the interconnectedness of politics and play by stating that "it links pleasure with performance and activism with amusement." Thus, art performance can mediate ideological narratives and encourage public discourse about issues that are frequently disregarded or marginalized through artistic expression and performance. Roberts (2018) stipulates that performance is necessary because narratives cannot function without human actors' transmission and interpretation. In response, Opfermann (2020) employed theatre-based research to see how it impacted on migrant youth transformation of ownership, confidence and hope. The propositions suggest that art performance serves as a valuable medium for promoting critical discussion, mediating ideological narratives and encouraging public discourse on sociopolitical issues.

While digital-mediated political communication has been researched globally, non-digital-mediated political communication has also been documented extensively in the past decades. Somdahl-Sands (2008) documented how an urban roadway in San Francisco's Mission District was transformed into a forum for civic engagement and political discourse through an outdoor performance. Furthermore, McNeill (2012) investigated how rural reggae musicians reacted differently toward dynamic political situation in the South Africa. Next, Opfermann (2020) investigated how migrant youth experienced sociopolitical transformation through theatre. These studies demonstrate the

potential of non-digital-mediated political communication, such as performance and music, to foster civic engagement and political discourse. They also highlight the importance of incorporating diverse modes of communication in political processes which are socioculturally embodied.

The role of performing arts in political communication

Performing arts is an effective form of political communication in conveying political messages in society. Generally speaking, effective communication is a crucial element of political processes in a democracy society. In political processes, Kaid *et al.* (1991) categorize elements of political reality into three: (1) objective reality (political events), (2) subjective reality (actors) and (3) constructed reality (media). Thus, the ability of politicians to employ effective communication impacts on the potential of shaping public opinion and decision making through various modes of communication. To supppot this, Lilleker (2014) divides modes of communication into three: (1) people intensive channels (party meetings, local rallies etc.); (2) broadcasting channels/mass media (newspaper, television etc.); and (3) internet channels (party website, social media etc.). It implies that successful political process relies upon the effective communication strategies that are tailored to the various modes of communication available to them. The literature above is supported by the statement of Gonçalves and Majhanovich (2021) which states that art is a complex, diverse and changing human activity which is subject to the context of time, space and place and depends on representation and social values.

Public participation and reaction to political performing arts

In this section, several previous research studies regarding various forms of performing arts as a means of political communication are explained. Research report by Parani *et al.* (2024) presented that performing arts can be used as a medium for conveying social messages in the form of ideas and even social criticism of actual conditions occurring in society.

In the context of contemporary political campaign, the incorporation of digital media has been widely accepted as an essential communication tool. Previous studies showed digital-mediated political communication was selected to shape public opinions. Morse (2017) reported that gesture-based humor was used to counteract reality television's demands for emotionally genuine performances and stereotypical performances the angry black woman. Similarly, Danielson and Rolandsson (2020) revealed that politicians performing on television programs use them as a form of emotionally charged communication that evolved to encourage collective socialization. Additionally, a study by Guan and Hu (2020) found out three key findings: (1) series characters representing in Chinese animation film reflected the discourse of the self and other; (2) they demonstrated nationalist; and (3) they represented official patriotic narratives. The empirical evidence suggest that the use of digital media in political campaigns has not only impacted public opinion but also emphasized the importance of using humor, patriotism and emotionally charged communication to stimulate and affect societal bonding.

One popular traditional dance of this city is called gandrung. It is one of the oldest forms of performing arts in Banyuwangi. Historically speaking, it developed starting from the 1700s. In its early days, Gandrung served as a tool for the Blambangan people to rebel against the colonizers (Srinthil, 2007). Gandrung performances were used as a cover by Blambangan warriors to distribute messages from the Blambangan Regent, namely to propel the fighting spirit to fight and collect logistical equipment. Gandrung's role was to spy on the guerrillas and symbolically spread information in the hinterland that was wasted by the Dutch in the Puputan Bayu war in 1771–1772. Gandrung dance is presented by traveling from one region

to another with a simple musical parade. Gandrung usually dances with a single instrument of angklung, angklung Banyuwangi is used as a substitute for violin (Wolbers, 1986).

Today, Gandrung is included as a new policy for tourism in the government program. For the bureaucracy and local government, the utilization of Gandrung is presented as a unique and exotic object that has political and economic potential. Politically, Gandrung's politicization policy in the context of the use of identity expression includes four power relations, namely, political power bureaucracy, cultural tradition, capital market and religion, especially Islam (Cossu, 2021). Meanwhile, Gandrung is included as a new policy for tourism in the government program. For the bureaucracy and local government, the utilization of Gandrung is presented as a unique and exotic object that has political and economic potential. Meanwhile, Gandrung is used as a tool to promote national and international tourism through festivals which ultimate goal is to legitimize power.

Methods
Design research
The present retrospective phenomenological case study aims to examine the politicians' perceptions who participated in a political campaign and hired performing arts and artists in regional heads and legislators in Indonesia. Methodologically speaking, Creswell (2014) pinpoints that phenomenological case study attempts to explore and interpret participants' lived experience as they encountered a particular phenomenon. Examining how politicians perceive the use of performing arts to promote their political agendas can reveal important insights into the ways ideological narratives are constructed around key sociopolitical issues. Specifically, this research aims to investigate how performing arts and cultural representations are used as political messages to influence voters, and propaganda in campaigns. The experiences of politicians at the legislative and regional executive levels as well as crocodiles were explored verbally to see how they used performing arts during the campaign. To achieve phenomenological commitment and gain insight into the experiences of politicians and cultural figures with events, objects, other people and the world is used (Boden *et al.*, 2019).

To guide the study, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. How is artistic expression used as a political message?

RQ2. How are cultural identities and representations used to influence voters?

RQ3. How to use mass appeal and propaganda in campaigning?

Context and participants
The present study was conducted in Banyuwangi, East Java, Indonesia. This city was selected because it was well known for its diversity of sociocultural background. It is home to people from four major different tribes such as Java, Madura, Osing and Bali. Although it was socio-culturally diverse, the native people speak a distinct indigenous language and have a variety local traditions and dances. In addition, they upheld customs, beliefs and practices stemmed from their ancestors that helps sustain their identity from generation to generation, one thing they believe in is the traditional Gandrung dance as a performing art. This performing art is one of the existing performing arts, but in the context of political campaigns, this gandrung performing art is widely used as a medium for political communication and attracts the masses according to the culture in Banyuwangi Regency.

Participants in this research were politicians who took part in the election process at the regional head and legislative member elections level. Politicians have various party backgrounds and combinations of supporting parties and experiences. Apart from that, the
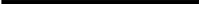
researchers and participants involved were cultural figures who were involved in campaign activities. This research focuses on politicians who use performing arts in their campaign activities. Specifically, there were 10 politicians in the legislative elections, 8 politicians in the regional executive elections and 5 cultural figures who had been involved in campaign activities. These cultural figures were used as additional data and to see the extent to which the campaign involved elements of local community culture. The selection of participants was carried out randomly in an effort to see the suitability of the data. Elections are based on the experience of politicians using performing arts during campaign activities to attract people to attend and at the time of the election they will vote for themselves. The use of performing arts can create an impression of interest and expand the reach of those campaigning.

Furthermore, to enhance the visibility of the recruited participants, specific inclusion parameters were applied as follows: (1) they were member of political party and either former member or currently served as the house member (legislative), politicians in regional executive elections and cultural figures; (2) they experienced of hiring Gandrung as performing arts for their political campaign agendas; and (3) they were willing to participate in the study voluntarily. The details of participants' demographics divided based on the types of politicians participating in the competition, namely regional heads, legislative members and cultural figures, can be seen in the following Table 1.

They are politicians in government legislative bodies who use performing arts during the campaign period. These politicians are tasked with making laws and overseeing the implementation of laws that have been approved. In the Indonesian context, the legislative institutions in Indonesia consist of the People's Representative Council (DPR) and the Regional Representative Council (DPD) which have the functions of Legislation, Budgeting and Supervision (see Table 2).

They are politicians in regional executive institutions who use performing arts during the campaign period. In the Indonesian context, the head of the Regional Government, both in the province and city district, is the executive in the region, while the DPRD, both in the province and city district, is the regional legislative institution that runs the government after winning the general election (see Table 3).

They are cultural figures who have been involved in orchestrating art performances in the campaign. They have cultural knowledge and are involved in the cultural field, so cultural figures often share their ideas, either through art performances or social interactions as a way of interacting with society.

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Educational background	Political party	Experience in politics
Dana	49	Man	Master	A Party	10 years
Anto	55	Man	Bachelor	A Party	12 years
Oke	68	Man	Bachelor	B – A Party	18 years
Mikel	56	Man	Bachelor	C Party	8 years
Rita	47	Woman	Master	D Party	12 years
Arif	40	Woman	Master	E Party	10 years
Kola	45	Man	Master	G Party	25 years
Buki	35	Woman	Master	H Party	23 years
Moda	33	Man	Master	J Party	10 years
Kita	40	Woman	Bachelor	K Party	10 years
Source(s): Authors' own creation/work					

Table 1.
Participants' demographics legislative politician

Data collection and analysis
Informed by qualitative research paradigm, in-depth interview was conducted with the participants. Prior to the interview, a consent letter was distributed detailing the goals of the study, their participation was voluntary, and their identity and information given were kept confidential. Upon receiving their approval of participating in this study, they were invited to meet for interview. Semi-structured interviewed was administered and the questions asked were anchored in the interconnectedness of politics and play through the discourses of pleasure with performance and activism with amusement (Pauliny, 2013). The questions asked to the participants such as (1) what rationales did they consider when choosing the performing arts as a means to get the voters' attention?; (2) what pleasure did they expect from the performance?; (3) what ideological values did they expect to share from the performance?; (4) what actions did they expect to deliver from the performance?; and (5) how did they find the performing arts effective and efficient to influence potential voters? Each question was later on followed by several questions to elicit deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions. During the interview, the participants were encouraged to share their documentary photographs of the objects/events when political campaigns were run for triangulation. The interview lasted between 45 and 60 min and audio recorded.

After the data was collected, the interview recording was transcribed. The verbatim data and digital photography were analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was employed to see the similarities and differences of the participants' reflective writing content (Gibson and Brown, 2009). In this sense, the data was read together by the researchers iteratively and lexical coding was implemented to find similarities and differences of the data set to find emerging themes.

Data analysis
In this phase, we selected data including textual responses, speech, gesture and image and highlighted the interplay between these different types of text and transcribed oral and visual

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Educational background	Association of political parties	Experience in politics
Brow	48	Man	Master	A&B&C Party	12 years
Anu	55	Man	Bachelor	A&C Party	18 years
Ujik	68	Man	Bachelor	B&C&D Party	22 years
Abdul	52	Man	Bachelor	A&C&D Party	19 years
Kupi	48	Woman	Master	A&B Party	14 years
Moko	45	Woman	Master	A&D Party	16 years
Bem	46	Woman	Bachelor	D&E Party	18 years
Yupi	52	Man	Master	A&B&C&E&F	26 years
Source(s): Authors' own creation/work					

Table 2.
Participants'
demographics regional
executive politician

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Sex	Educational background	Community name	Experience in culture
Temau	70	Man	Bachelor	LLB	39 years
Bani	55	Man	Bachelor	PM	26 years
Hanif	66	Woman	Senior High School	CH	26 years
Yusta	32	Woman	Senior High School	DAP	14 years
Oka	50	Man	Bachelor	AKY	34 years
Source(s): Authors' own creation/work					

Table 3.
Participants'
demographics cultural
elements

text into written description. To analyze the transcribed data, we employed thematic analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006) according to the following steps. The first step is familiarization of the data. In this step, we re-read the data set to understand the participants' responses based on their context and experience of teaching with information and communication technology. This activity formed the basis for our next step of coding. In this step, we focused on and highlighted developing broad codes which created a pattern. The third step was searching for themes among the broad codes. In this step, we examined the highlighted data to interpret patterns within the data.

Then, the next process was reviewing themes. We critically reviewed the coded themes across the data set to see whether the themes were significantly reflected or represented in the data set and compatible with the research questions. To address the issue of possible coder bias, the researchers independently coded the data and then compared results. The researcher had not been present during the data collection phase and she served as an independent reviewer of the coding and discussed contextual issues with the other two researchers to come to a consensus. We took these steps, as recommended by Nowell *et al.* (2017), to ensure an auditable decision trail and enhance the trustworthiness of our thematic analysis in this qualitative study that parallels the criteria of validity and reliability in quantitative research. Finally, we unpacked the themes by defining and naming the coded themes as demonstrated in the research findings and discussion section below can be seen in the following Table 4.

Based on the data obtained from interviews, observations and visual data, a thorough examination and interpretation were conducted. The data were then subjected to lexical coding, and themes were generated based on the identified codes.

Based on the analysis what's done, this study yielded three main findings, each with its own sub-findings. The first finding pertains to artistic expression as political messaging. The second finding focuses on cultural identity and representation. And the third finding is mass appeal and propaganda politics.

Findings

The present study has uncovered three important findings regarding the role of art performance as a crucial communication tool in politics. It was found that art performance plays a role as a tool in (1) artistic expression as political messaging; (2) cultural identity and representation; and (3) mass appeal and propaganda.

Data Type	Example	Data Identity	Interpretation
Interview	How you use the art exhibition community to get a vote in the elections so that the public is attracted to you	Oke, first interview, March 23rd, 2023	A politician is present in the community to attract the public's attention to elect him.
Picture	figure 1. Politician Oke photo with the dance community Gandrung	(Photo taken from researcher's personal documentation, 23 March 2023)	Politicians give the impression of preserving cultural sustainability as a form of concern in the culture of local

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Artistic expression as political messaging

The study attempts to elucidate politician participants' lived experience and perceptions in using art performance to communicate their political ideology and agenda. The study found out that they made use of *Gandrung* dance to embrace art into their ideological and political agendas. They believed that *Gandrung* was an effective communication tool to increase their influence to the targeted audience. As evident, Dana shared his thoughts (see Plate 1).

> My party is a party with a populist jargon, so we use the performing arts in the community to always use in the campaign. We get involved in every dance performed by the dancers. We do this to attract the attention of the people and i'm always get more votes by using performing arts in campaign activities. (Dana, first interview, March 20th, 2023)

The interview data shows that Gandrung art performance was used as a propaganda tool by various political parties, particularly the Indonesian Communist Party and Lekra during 1950s and 1960s. It was instrumental to convey the political messages of the political parties in Indonesia. Furthermore, Anto shared his thoughts of how Gandrung was effectively used to share political agenda during the political campaign (see Plate 2).

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Plate 1.
IDPA politician Dana and colleagues dance together for the 2019 legislative elections

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Plate 2.
Gandrung art show appearance in front of the voters

In my view, in my experience of using performing arts as part of a campaign program, I observed that the attendance of the public was much higher and enthusiastic when using performing arts than when I did not use performing arts in the local area. (Anto, first interview, March 24th, 2023)

Anto believed that as an art performance, Gandrung was potential as a tool for communication because it was packed with engaging artistic and visual elements to influence the community and share the political ideology. Similarly, Oke also found his experience of inviting Gandrung to perform in his political campaign through which he contended that Gandrung held a strong bond with the community in his electoral region (see Plate 3).

I have been using the Gandrung performing arts as a political tool since 1996, first in Party A and now in Party B, to gain the support and votes of the community. By appreciating and supporting this art that the people of Banyuwangi cherish, we aim to build a strong relationship with the community. When they feel valued for their cultural heritage, they will respect us more as politicians and vote for us as their representatives in the DPR. (Oke, first interview, March 23rd, 2023)

Meanwhile, Mike put emphasis on symbolism and visual representation. He believed that symbol and visual representation were effective to align the performance with his political party. By instructing every performance to incorporate the color blue, which represents their political party, they aim to establish a strong connection between Gandrung and their political affiliation (see Plate 4). The fact that the artists involved willingly participate

Plate 3.
Politician Oke photo with the dance community Gandrung

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Plate 4.
The appearance of the Gandrung Show uses the symbol of the political party's color "blue"

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

suggests a shared understanding or a willingness to cooperate, although it is likely driven by the financial incentive of receiving an honorarium.

> I have instructed every Gandrung performance to incorporate the color blue, which represents our political party. We have procured Gandrung clothes and provided them to the studio, ensuring that the dance costumes used in every event align with our party's preference. The artists involved are willing participants as they can still perform and receive an honorarium from us. (Mikel, first interview, March 23rd, 2023)

In other activities, politicians also consider the religious aspect as their identity. Through the integration of political elements into Gandrung performances, the interviewee seeks to merge art and politics, utilizing this cultural platform to promote and reinforce their party's image and values. Arif, whose political background was a religious party, used Gandrung by modifying the appearance (see Plate 5). He shared his experience.

> In order to uphold our cultural tradition while respecting religious beliefs regarding modesty, we have kindly asked Gandrung performers to wear stockings on areas that may be exposed during their performances. This approach allows us to maintain the essence of the tradition while ensuring compliance with religious guidelines regarding the concept of "aurat". (Arif, first interview, March 25th, 2023).

At the show, the dancers dressed in more decent clothes. The data suggests that the interviewee is committed to preserving cultural traditions while also being mindful of religious considerations, particularly regarding the concept of modesty. By requesting Gandrung performers to wear stockings on exposed areas, they aim to strike a balance between upholding tradition and respecting religious beliefs.

Other politicians, Kola, Buki, Moda, during the registration of candidates for legislative members, took advantage of the community's arrival by presenting gandrung dances because this culture is a local culture that is highly preserved (see Plate 6). Kola shared his experience.

> The cultural symbolism in the Gandrung dance also creates a sense of pride and identification with local culture. This strengthens the political identity of politicians as defenders of local culture and traditions, this opinion is also agreed with by Buki and Moda. (Kola, participant interview, March 27th, 2023).

Apart from that, Buki also added about Gandrung as a symbol:

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Plate 5.
At the show, a band of dancers in closer clothes

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

> Gandrung performing arts have an important role in creating political symbols for political actors. First of all, gandrung is often used in political events and official welcoming dances of local governments as part of local culture. This provides a strong identity to political actors who want to connect with the cultural roots and values of society. (Interview participant Buki, March 27th, 2023).

Politician Kita, who was also present at the event, added about the attractiveness of politicians and increasing public trust by giving Gandrung dance performances:

> When politicians engage in Gandrung dance performances, it sends a message that they have a deep interest in local culture and traditions. "This can increase trust in local culture and traditions so that it can increase people's trust in politicians because they feel that politicians respect and support their cultural values" (Interview participant Kita, March 27th, 2023).

Cultural identity and representation
The utilization of Gandrung as a means of political communication also serves to assert cultural identity of both politicians and political parties. From the perspective of participating politicians, Gandrung symbolizes their indigenous cultural background, thereby reinforcing their cultural identity. Furthermore, political party uses Gandrung to represent their advocacy towards cultural heritage preservation.

> The poem lyrics of the song "*Podo Nonton*" of Gandrung encapsulate significant historical values of struggle and reflect the authentic identity of the Banyuwangi people. These artistic expressions serve as a means to disseminate our political message, urging the native population of Banyuwangi to support and vote for politicians who have deep roots in the region. (Oke, first interview, March 23rd, 2023)

The data suggests that the politician views Gandrung as a symbol of the authentic identity of the Banyuwangi people, with the poem lyrics celebrating and conveying the cultural and traditional aspects of the community through artistic expression. As a result, there is a strong desire among the people to prioritize political candidates who not only represent the locals but also have deep roots in the community. Similarly, Rita used Gandrung to represent her cultural identity through which she shared her programs during the campaign.

> I express my cultural identity by translating it into a personal program as a politician who values and preserves the arts. To me, Gandrung serves as the ideal catalyst to implement both the party's goals/ programs and my own program as a political figure. (Rita, first interview, March 23rd, 2023)

The interview excerpt reveals Rita's strong belief in cultural identity as a driving force in her political endeavors. She actively integrated the arts into her political programs, recognizing their immense power and influence. Additionally, several politicians from the participating party argued that their agenda strongly aligned with the preservation of cultural heritage programs. As a result, they strategically chose to employ Gandrung as a means of effectively communicating their political message. For example, Mikel highlights the ideology of his party who claims to struggle for local culture preservation.

> As a nationalist party, we place a significant emphasis on cultural matters. We firmly believe that performing arts, being an integral part of cultural expression, possess immense potential as a campaign medium for our political programs. (Mikel, second interview, March 26th, 2023)

In other words, he emphasizes his party as a nationalist party that considers cultural matters as a significant aspect of their ideological and political agenda. It can also imply that the party acknowledges the value of performing arts, such as Gandrung, as a part of cultural identity and representation. In a similar vein, Arif maintains that, as a religious party, his party attempts to establish religious and cultural identity in harmony.

> By accommodating Gandrung performances to religious standards, my party aims to represent it as one that respects and embraces both religious values and local cultural traditions, highlighting the harmony between the two aspects of identity. (Arif, second interview, March 30th, 2023)

The information shows that the party is actively constructing its reputation as a fair and diverse political force. It shows a dedication to accepting Gandrung as an essential component of regional cultural identity while guaranteeing its conformity with religious principles. In essence, the party emphasizes the compatibility of cultural traditions and religious ideals while fostering inclusion.

Apart from legislative politicians, this performing art is also used by executive politicians to convey the message that to become regional head you need to preserve local culture (see Plate 7). As revealed in an interview with Brow, who shared his experience:

> I see the use of traditional art in politics as an interesting strategy, and it is valid as a government program, because the government's job is to look after art, including popular art. Moreover, infatuation has a strong magical attraction and can create emotional closeness with society. "Events like this were also attended by national figures, and they were fascinated by Gandrung Sewu's stunning performance" (interview participant Brow, April 6th 2023).

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

A politician who once contested the regional executive election, Anu also revealed that this dance has a magical element that can influence feelings and emotions, which on several occasions also danced during the performance. Politician Ani shares her experiences.

"Gandrung" dance and music have a strong emotional appeal, native Banyuwangi people certainly believe that this art is a magical element that influences the feelings and emotions of the audience very strongly. I organize special events featuring Gandrung performances as part of political campaigns, this provides an opportunity to speak directly to voters and at some political campaigns, politicians become dancers in Gandrung performances, this is a way to get closer to the people, showing their involvement in local culture, and of course win support. (interview participant Anu, May 6th, 2023).

Apart from that, politicians also use performing arts as part of their work programs. This is done to attract support from the community who are actively involved as local cultural preservers. Ujik, one of the regional executive politicians, shared his experience.

I present this performing art as a form of appreciation for the preservation of local culture so that local arts activists will support me in regional elections. Apart from that, the performing arts that I do also have a good social impact through promotion and preservation activities for Gandrung art as part of and effort to preserve Banyuwangi culture. and advancing tourism (interview participant Ujik, May 6th, 2023).

Politicians Abdul and Kupi also used performing arts as a campaign tool in the 2019 Regent election (see Plate 8). Politician Abdul shares his experiences.

One of the efforts to preserve culture is by organizing performing arts, this is part of promoting culture so that it is maintained (interview participant Abdul, May 6th, 2023).

Apart from that, there are many ways to use the performing arts "Gandrung", one of which is dancing with dancers. Politicians do this to show they are serious about preserving local culture. Moko and Bem share their experiences when they are suddenly invited to dance together (see Plate 9). They share experiences.

"I was invited to dance together, I did that to show concern that cultural identity and representation must continue to be preserved as many foreign cultures enter Indonesia, we must maintain and preserve this." Bem also agreed with this opinion, Bem added that "local culture is a cultural heritage that must continue to be preserved and can also be collaborated with other cultures". (interview participant Moko, May 8th, 2023)."

Plate 8.
Photo with art workers and politicians at the end of the event

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

Plate 9.
Dancing with cultural
actors and arts workers

Mass appeal and propaganda

During the political campaign, most participating politicians reported that they did their campaign and organized the art performance of Gandrung in open fields so that they could bring in large numbers of people. While the Gandrung dances were performing, they usually were told to promote the politician candidates to the spectators. This was done by Oke as shown in the following interview excerpt.

> During their performances, they often incorporate political messages to inform the audience. For instance, I ask them to convey the party number and candidate number in the midst of the show so that people can remember me and vote for me. (Oke, second interview, March 26th, 2023)

The data indicates that Gandrung, a traditional Indonesian dance form, serves as a means of propaganda. On one hand, it entertains the audience; while on the other hand, it promotes a political agenda. It is evident that both politicians and performers aim to inform the audience about political affiliations and candidates in order to raise awareness and encourage support for specific candidates or parties. Similarly, Dana emphasized the pivotal role of performers in effectively conveying messages to the audience through their artistic elements in their performances.

> Art becomes associated with propaganda when artists express their political alignments by strategically incorporating artistic elements such as acting, directing, music, dance, and visuals to effectively convey their message. (Dana, second interview, March 24th, 2023)

From the data, this suggests that Dana recognized the power and influence of performers in conveying messages and engaging the audience through artistic skills such as acting, music, dance and speech. Engaging audience through joyful politics is also addressed by Anto.

> I believe that by incorporating joyful politics through performing arts, people will be more receptive to political messages and more likely to vote for those of us who prioritize and support the arts. This enables us to fight for their aspirations and achieve the political propaganda we aim for, namely to cultivate a loyal voter base for our party. (Anto, second interview, March 27th, 2023)

Anto emphasized that Gandrung served as a delightful medium for political communication that captivated those who witnessed it (see Plate 10). He believed that when people enjoyed the way he conveyed his agenda through Gandrung, they were more likely to become his supporters. Consequently, this could help establish a loyal voter base for the party. In addition to using Gandrung as a means to gather people, the performers also had many friends who could be approached and encouraged to join the voter base. This is supported by Rita's experience as follows:

Plate 10.
Gandrung performed
on a political event
hosted by
political party

Source(s): Authors' own creation/work

> Performance artists often have extensive networks of friendships, and by influencing these artists, their friends can also be influenced to vote for the same candidate or politician. They can expand the spaces for discussions within their friendship circles to foster support for a particular candidate. (Rita, second interview, March 28th, 2023).

The data suggests that performance artists possess the ability to widen the spaces for discussion within their friendship circles, providing an opportunity to promote and gain support for a specific party or candidate. This approach aligns with the effectiveness of Gandrung, which has become a compelling tool for mass appeal and political propaganda among politicians. Arif asserted that his party successfully attracted several politicians to join their ranks due to their commitment in merging culture and religion.

> Our approach of blending religion and culture proved to be highly effective, as we never feared losing voters. Instead, we gained new supporters from the nationalist group. Several Nationalist party members even shifted their allegiance to our party, thanks to our strong political sympathizers and a significant voter base. (Arif, second interview, March 30th, 2023)

The use of performing arts in political campaigns has an impact in attracting people to attend. Apart from getting information about the work program that will be carried out, they also get entertainment from the performing arts being held. Yupi regional executive politician shares experiences.

> I have carried out campaigns with and without performing arts, the difference felt when I carried out a political campaign and presented performing arts, more people attended compared to not using performing arts, the large number of people who attended increased my optimism in being able to be elected as regional head. (interview participant Yupi, May 30, 2023)

Based on the interview excerpt, it is evident that Gandrung, as a cultural product, was effective in persuading not only grassroots individuals but also members of the prominent nationalist party. The commitment of the religious party to prioritize the preservation of local cultural traditions as part of their political agenda successfully tapped into their potential to attract voters who had nationalist sympathies.

Apart from politicians' perspectives on the election of regional legislative and executive members, researchers also collected data from cultural figures involved during the campaign. Below are excerpts from interviews with cultural figures who have been involved in campaign activities.

Temau and Bani cultural figures share experiences. Temau and Bani are performing arts actors in one community. Temau cultural figures share their experiences.

> The Gandrung dance is one of the strongest symbols of Banyuwangi's cultural identity. It's not just about beautiful dance moves and sweet song melodies. It's about depicting the people's struggle. Gandrung reflects the identity and values of Banyuwangi society. This is a powerful way to remind ourselves of our rich cultural roots and honor the struggles of our ancestors (interview of participants Temau and Bani, May 9, 2023).

Another cultural actor, Hanif, shared his thoughts.

> In looking at this phenomenon, I see two sides that need to be considered carefully. First of all, I recognize that in politics, communication and visual strategies are very important to attract mass attention and gain support. The use of beautiful young women in political campaigns, including the Banyuwangi gandrung, may be part of this strategy. However, I think that we have to question the true purpose of this use (participant interview Hanif, May 9, 2023).

Another cultural actor Yusta added, Yusta shared his experience.

> The Gandrung performance art or opening dance is a symbol that the performance is about to begin, and this can be the right moment to convey a political message to the public. Through the movements and expressions made by the dancers, political messages can be conveyed in an interesting way and attract attention. (interview participant Yusta, May 10, 2023).

The views of another cultural observer, Oka, also shared his experiences.

> In my opinion, compulsive movements and dances do have great potential as a medium for political communication. Political messages can be conveyed through the expressions and movements made by the dancers. It is an art form that is not only entertaining, but also capable of conveying a powerful message to society. (participant interview Oka, May 11, 2023).

Based on the interview excerpt, it can be seen that cultural figures as artists who grew up in society provide their experiences when involved in political party campaign activities. This cultural interview data is presented to provide additional information and balance data between the parties involved in campaign activities and the benefits obtained from the use of performing arts in political communication during the election period.

Discussion

The present retrospective phenomenological study attempts to examine the participating politicians' lived experience and perceptions of using Gandrung, an art performance, to mediate political communication. From the interview and photographs analysis, the study found three important finding themes that Gandrung serves as (1) artistic expression as political messaging; (2) cultural identity and representation; and (3) mass appeal and propaganda in political communication contexts. First, the study found out that Gandrung has been used as a means for political communication because it deploys artistic expressions (music, dance, songs and visuals) which attract wider audience. It is effective because artistic expression and practice can maintain social relations (de Ruiter, 2015). The finding is congruent with the study by Iannelli and Marelli (2019) which reported that artistic expression was used to communicate their needs and interests in regard to urban issues in contemporary democracy. In addition, the use of performing arts as a political message can also increase political mediation to seek public recognition and support and build public appeal through public appearances (Alexander, 2011;

Craig, 2016). Thus, through artistic expression, politicians in this study have used Gandrung to effectively convey the political messages such as ideological struggle, political agenda and political image. A research report by Praditsilp and Pongsakornrungsilp (2024) reports that the use of Thai culture by the palace and royal government as a communication strategy and strategic design as diplomatic effectiveness.

Next, the study reported that Gandrung was utilized by the participating politicians for their political communication tool because it represented local cultural identity. Gandrung represents local culture tradition through symbols, poem lyrics and music of the indigenous communities. A research report by Van Zoonen (2014) reports that popular culture is becoming increasingly important for political communication and political understanding which is used as a political stage for political actors. Rooted in the product of cultural identity, Lengel *et al.* (2022) found out that the performances at Dance Carthage explored how artistic expression may challenge hegemony, engage in resistance and exert agency within established systems of power. In other words, politicians using Gandrung as a means for their political communication not only acknowledge its ability to connect with the local community and represent their cultural identity, but also recognize the profound impact of cultural identity and representation on their political ideology and agenda. Meanwhile, the findings of the present study revealed the integration of Gandrung, with its cultural dimensions, into the religious beliefs of the participating politician. This integration aimed to cultivate an image of the party, rooted in religion, that genuinely values and prioritizes culture. The finding of this study is supported by Ishiguro (2019) who observed the role of performing arts in reflecting the cultural identity of Acehnese people, the rise of sanggar as well as the influence of evolving religious dynamics on women's participation in performing arts. Apart from that, the research report reported by Kodavath (2015) states that oral traditions and performing arts have emerged as the main communication media used for moral, religious and socio-political purposes in India since ancient times. Additionally, performing arts is a form of freedom to represent cultural identity, as in the research report by Carlsson and Weibull (2018) which states that freedom of expression is basic for democracy as a guardian of freedom.

Finally, the study reveals that Gandrung was effective in mobilizing a large audience due to its entertaining nature. The participants perceived Gandrung as a joyful form of political communication that not only conveyed political messages but also aimed to entertain the audience. While Danielson and Rolandsson (2020) argue that entertainment performances like singing, dancing and comedy carry diverse cultural meanings and interpretations, Gandrung mainly served as a cultural symbol and source of communal celebration, fostering a sense of unity and cultural pride. Furthermore, with performing arts, Pauliny (2013) believes that "political conversations are expanded into recreational spaces and opportunities are created for wider audiences to hear, see and be engaged with political work." Beyond the stage, the participating politicians asserted that they could influence a larger number of potential voters by persuading the Gandrung performers, leveraging their friendship networks, and other politicians to garner support for their election campaigns. Blaikie (2018) postulates that in the contexts where specific social, visual and cultural identities are formed and expressed, remaining neutral in art performance is not possible. Apart from what is explained, performing arts in political communication have benefits for the development of a region, as reported by Mutanda (2023) reports that performing arts as political communication is an important driving force in supporting and strengthening interventions to achieve peace and development in a country.

Limitations
From theoretical lens, the study underscores how art performance can convey political messages and shape political narratives. Meanwhile, from a practical perspective, it

suggests that politicians can build positive image of themselves and their party through art performance. This research has added to the study of how performing arts are used in political communication in a democracy, however it addresses two limitations. First, the limited number of participants involved in this study may limit generalizability. In addition, participant selection was based on voluntary participation, which may have introduced bias in the sample. Future research should involve larger and more diverse participants to provide a more comprehensive understanding of politicians' experiences of using performing arts for political communication and influencing voters. Thus, generalization for wider contexts of politicians is not possible. The second limitation relates to the reliability of the report data provided by politicians, this is related to the retention that politicians have due to the long duration of their experience as noted by Stough (2006) which states participants may have limited memories which can affect the validity of the findings. Future research is suggested to elaborate the voice from critical discourse analysis, for example, to gain deeper understanding on how art performance is used in political communication sphere.

Conclusion

The present retrospective case study reveals that performing art used by politicians as a means of political communication contribute to the understanding of its potential as a form of artistic expression for conveying political messages. The performing art becomes an effective medium to communicate political ideology and agenda of the politicians. Additionally, art performance can mediate politicians to build cultural identity and representation of their political party. It builds positive image of the party as a site of struggle for cultural heritage preservation through joyful politic. Finally, art performance can serve as a means for the politicians to bring mass appeal and propaganda. They can build loyal mass database as potential voters by influencing the art performers, friendship networks and other nationalist politicians.

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