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EDITORIAL
Current Trends in Southeast Asian Media Studies

Welcome to SEAMSJ issue 5.1, titled "Current Trends in Southeast Asian Media Studies," edited by yours truly. With this issue, the flagship publication of the Southeast Asian Media Studies Association has entered its fifth year of existence. It will soon be followed by issue 5.2, "Political Communication in Southeast Asia," guest-edited by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jose Carlo G. de Pano of the University of the Philippines Diliman and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Orville B. Tatcho of The University of the Philippines Baguio.

This issue is densely packed with an eclectic collection of six research articles that deal with current trends and developments in the study of mass media across Southeast Asia. More specifically, the articles presented here are useful to scholars interested in the studies of film festivals and higher education, rap music and popular culture, journalism and heritage reporting, social media and enmeshment aesthetics, emerging media platforms and citizenry, as well as urban studies and mimetic art theory – whereby all of these are located in current Southeast Asian contexts.

In their article "Higher Education Film Festivals as Industry Nodes in Brunei Darussalam," authors Dr. Yong Liu (Universiti Brunei Darussalam) and Dr. Alexander Fischer (Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia, Brunei) examine the qualities and purposes of the two institution-based higher education film festivals Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival. The authors are particularly interested in the synergies between higher education institutions and film festivals, the impact of higher education film festivals on the education and professional development of media studies students, and the importance of such public film events in the present and future Bruneian film and screen industry.

Christine Joy A. Magpayo (University of the Philippines Diliman) is the author of "Rapping and Mapping Women's (Dis)Empowerment in the Songs of Pinoy Hip-Hop Artist Andrew E." In it, she analyzes and contextualizes the lyrics of the prominent rapper Andrew Ford Valentino Espiritu, a.k.a. Andrew E., on the one hand focusing on the commercialization of popular culture to serve the preservation of current socio-political power structures, and on the other hand investigating the construction of narratives that oscillate between the objectification and the empowerment of women.

"Understanding the Practices of Cultural Heritage Reporters" by Dr. Bryan R. Realgo (Mariano Marcos State University, Philippines) explores the contexts, practices, and processes of cultural heritage reporting. The article advocates the reporting of cultural heritage as an important means to disseminate information, raises awareness of the importance of cultural heritage preservation, educates the public about cultural diversity, history, and heritage, and motivates each citizen to be an engaged member of society.

"Enmeshment Aesthetics: Social Media, Mobility, and Materiality in Chiang Mai, Thailand" by PhD candidate Kasidit Phikrohkit (University of California at Irvine) understands and analyzes Thailand's northern city of Chiang Mai as a provider of urban spaces where international and domestic tourists alike may participate in an ostensibly delicate yet potent consumer culture of café-hopping, self-imagination and self-performance, and enmeshment aesthetics. The author contends that social media are instrumental in the performance and reaffirmation of the social media users' sense of identity locally and globally.

In their article "Mediating the Pandemic in Jakarta: New Digital Platforms in a Time of Crisis," Dr. Andy Fuller (Utrecht University, the Netherlands) and Zaki Arrobi (Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia), a PhD candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, are interested in Indonesia during the post-COVID-19 pandemic period as they investigate the two developing media platforms *Project Multatuli* and *LaporCovid-19*. During the post-COVID-19 period and through these platforms, Indonesians have been exploring and expressing pluralism and democracy in their country.

"Capturing and Interpreting Mediated Learning Spaces" is an engaging research paper by Dr. Maria Gwenetha Y. Pusta (Far Eastern University, Philippines). In it, she presents an exploratory study of communication studies students' perceptions and inferences of meanings of particular visual stimuli. Drawing from urban studies and mimetic art theory, the author investigates how students respond to particular learning spaces on a specific university campus in the Philippines, particularly how the sights of pictures of these spaces trigger certain feelings and memories of lived experiences.

Our readers may be pleased to learn that SEAMSJ has expanded and further internationalized its editorial board. Dr. Arnoud Arps (University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Prof. Dr. Bradley C. Freeman (Sunway University, Malaysia), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jonalou S. Labor (University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines), and former SEAMSJ guest editors Assoc. Prof. Dr. John Charles Ryan (Southern Cross University, Australia), and Assoc. Prof. Dr. William F. Smith (Canadian University of Dubai, United Arab Emirates) have accepted our invitation to join the international advisory board. The team of assistant editors includes five new members, namely Assoc. Prof. Dr. Normahfuzah Ahmad (Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia), Dr. Ernesto C. Collo, Jr. (Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Philippines), Dr. Wai Yan Phyo Naing (Raks Thai Foundation, Thailand), Asst. Prof. Dr. Jenny Ortuoste

(University of Santo Tomas, Philippines), and Sara Mae San Juan-Robin (Far Eastern University, Philippines).

I would like to thank the following individuals for providing their expert reviews and impartial verdicts of submitted manuscripts: Dr. Swati Jaywant Rao Bute (Jagran Lakecity University, India), Herwin B. Cabasal (Far Eastern University, Philippines), Dr. Feorillo A. Demeterio III (De La Salle University, Philippines), Dr. Belinda F. Espiritu (University of the Philippines Cebu), Dr. Muthukumaran Kanasan (Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia), Martin Lukanov (Sofia University, Bulgaria), Dr. Mary Anne DC Mallari (University of Santo Tomas, Philippines), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maria Gwenetha Y. Pusta (Far Eastern University, Philippines), Dr. Ratchaneekorn Ratchatakorntrakoon (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand), Dr. Rommel B. Rodriguez (University of the Philippines Diliman), Assoc. Prof. Dr. Syamsul Zahri Subir (Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, Malaysia), Asst. Prof. Jason Paolo Telles (University of the Philippines Baguio and Monash University, Australia), and Dr. Henrikus Joko Yulianto (Semarang State University).

Please visit **https://seamsa.org/journal-issues** for free access to all published SEAMSA issues and keep an eye out for the publication of SEAMSJ issue 5.2 on Political Communication and for the call-for-papers for the upcoming 2024-issues 6.1 and 6.2.

All editorial board members and I wish you much joy and academic inspiration and motivation with this new collection of research texts on current trends in Southeast Asian media studies.

Alexander J. Klemm
Managing Editor-in-Chief
eic.seamsj@gmail.com
Bangkok, October 2023

ORIGINAL CALL FOR PAPERS

ISSUE 5.1
CURRENT TRENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN MEDIA STUDIES

The theme for Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal regular issue 5.1 is **Current Trends in Southeast Asian Media Studies**. Submissions should address questions about current trends and directions in national and international media industries in the Southeast Asian region. Papers about specific media works, genres, companies, and artists are also welcome.

Areas of interest include but are not limited to the following:

- ✓ Digital Culture
- ✓ Environment, Risk and Sustainability
- ✓ Health Communication
- ✓ Media and Democracy
- ✓ Media Industries and Cultural Production
- ✓ Media Literacy Education
- ✓ Popular Culture
- ✓ Southeast Asian Cinemas

INITIAL PROCESS

Interested authors **submit a 500-word abstract** with 5 keywords, a list of 5 main references, and a short bionote of up to 50 words. **Deadline: 15 December 2022**

TARGET DATES

Publication of Call for Extended Abstracts: 1 November 2022
Deadline for abstract submission: 15 December 2022
Notification of accepted abstracts: 1 January 2023
Deadline for full paper (approx. 6000-7000 words) submission: 1 February 2023

Double-blind peer review process: February – April 2023
Revised paper due: May – June 2023
Target publication date: September 2023

SUBMISSIONS & INQUIRIES

Submit abstracts and review proposals and direct all inquiries to the Editor-in-Chief:

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Higher Education Film Festivals as Industry Nodes in Brunei Darussalam

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ABSTRACT

Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are two institution-based higher education film festivals in Brunei. Their initial purpose was to showcase film production-centric media studies students' coursework in an effort to help recent graduates gain employment in the local film industry. Over time, this purpose expanded and both events transformed into "an industry node" (Iordanova, 2015). As industry nodes, these events provide guidance to the burgeoning Bruneian content creation sector and often influence a range of issues from localized distribution to governmental policy and initiatives. The main discussions unfold around four signposts: 1. Addressing the recognized gaps of a screen-based media education; 2. a summary of key isomorphic indicators; 3. higher education film festivals as industry nodes in the Brunei context; and 4. potential influence of future governmental policies regarding a future Bruneian film and screen industry. Drawing on the discussion above, this paper suggests that the higher education film festivals may be utilized as a catalyst, or industry node, for Media Study and Screen Production faculties in higher education institutions to build up close connectivity with the local screen and media industry, promoting student enrollment in related programs and graduate employment in creative sectors. For a long-term perspective, with their potential influence on governmental policymaking and incentive steering, such higher education film festivals may grow into and form diverse and effective mechanisms that facilitate to galvanize and inform the incipient film and screen industry in Brunei Darussalam.

Keywords: Brunei Film Blitz, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, higher education film festivals

INTRODUCTION

There are nine Brunei higher education institutions which offer media studies or a related discipline, such as communication, advertising, and broadcast or multimedia design. Roughly a third of these institutions facilitate an annual public exhibition of student-produced screen-based content. These exhibitions often coincide with the conclusion of a semester or term and function as a showcase/film festival.

This paper examines how two of these festivals, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival organized by Universiti Brunei Darussalam and the Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia co-facilitated Brunei Film Blitz, utilize these exhibition events to increase the likelihood of collaboration with and employment for students and recent graduates in the Bruneian screen industry (Wasil 2019). This topic is particularly intriguing given that Brunei has a developing film industry (Fischer & Liu 2021; Liu 2021), which means traditional, established career pathways for media students into the sector do not exist. It is understood that this situation is unique to Brunei as the majority of its Southeast Asian neighbors have well-established film industries. For example, in 2018, local Indonesian productions accounted for 30% of the theatrical market share in the country, while the Philippines celebrated 100 years of national cinema in 2019.

It can be argued that these national film industries, and others found in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam provide internships, mentorship and entry-level jobs to new graduates as a means of entry. By contrast, Brunei is primarily dominated by small private-sector production companies composed of three or fewer permanent employees and "gig-lancers" – individuals who have full-time jobs outside of the film industry but offer content creation services as a side-income or hobby.

The two higher education film festivals discussed in this paper are strategic and correspond to the immediate, job-related demands of those media studies graduates who have a specialization in screen-based content creation. This specialization includes, but is not limited to, video production and filmmaking and sub-specialized positions such as directing, cinematography, sound design, and post-production. It is important to note that these film festivals are not part of the core teaching curriculum. Rather, they began as what Iordanova terms "clusters of creativity" (2015, 7), i.e., events completely dependent upon the final productions of individual screen media courses. Over the years, these clusters of creativity have transformed into authoritative nodes, transforming their role as an aggregate of assignments and assessment projects and becoming annual events that inform and influence the direction of the Bruneian film industry.

The paper is structured in a traditional, linear fashion so as to avoid alienating media studies educators

unfamiliar with the production of screen-based content. Similarly, jargon is purposely minimized so that situations and concepts may be more broadly understood.

Four main points are featured as discussion signposts: 1. Addressing the recognized gaps of a screen-based media education; 2. a summary of key isomorphic indicators; 3. higher education film festivals as industry nodes; and 4. potential influence of future governmental policies regarding a future Bruneian film and screen industry. Each of these discussion points contains examples from Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, both of which are current to the 2022 film festival editions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering a "film festival as an industry node," Iordanova (2015) stressed: "Some festivals have created their own distribution labels, while others have teamed up with TV channels or with specific streaming platforms." According to Iordanova, these developments have turned film festivals from mainly exhibition operations into key players in the film industry and society at large with multiple functions such as production financing, networking, and distribution (8). This paper uses the plural form of Iordanava's term – industry nodes – to specify the unique status of higher education film festivals in Brunei that connects not only the differing sectors inside the screen industry but also those beyond it, such as educational organizations, other related economic sectors, and governmental agencies.

Stevens (2018) also noted the complexity of film festivals and emphasized the interdisciplinary principle of film festival studies: "The complex nature of film festivals as events that move across and between established conceptual frameworks – of nation, texts, industry – conditions in their study a commitment to interdisciplinarity. Film festival studies routinely borrow from a range of other disciplines" (55). Likewise, Iordanova (2016) noted that "it is the dominance of textual analysis, national frameworks, and industry studies that has significantly delayed a turning of attention to the film festival as a phenomenon that best reveals film culture's transnational essence" (xii). In addition to such a transnational infrastructure, Stevens (2018) contested the "transmedia experiences" updated in film festivals: "What the critical conception of film festivals as transmedia experiences offers, then, is a way to understand the inter-relation of the social and cultural as inherent and important qualities in the encounter with films that festivals provide" (55). Their transmedia experiences bring film festivals into the foreground as a primary sociocultural platform. It is noticeable that the value of a film festival should not be limited to financial gains, since "simply stating that a film festival is not a success because it is unable to generate a net profit may mean that the successful function of the event as a cultural platform has been overlooked … In fact, the majority of film festivals do not make money and the idea that a film festival is a profit-making venture is fundamentally flawed" (Fischer 2013, 40). While both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are academic undertakings, their ability

to influence and shape cultural and educational discussions due to their position as industry nodes within the Bruneian film industry is worth investigating.

Addressing the successful collaboration between universities and industries, Edmondson et al. (in Awasthy et al., 2020) observed: "Individuals with an understanding of both academic and business worlds are considered the driving force behind successful partnerships" (51). Universities must involve people with networking and managerial skills to attract industry partners. At the same time, academics with an industry background are an additional advantage as they tend to be more willing to cross boundaries to work with people in other areas of expertise. Therefore, according to Edmondson et al. (in Awasthy et al., 2020), universities need to redefine their mission, including collaboration with the industry as an important diagram for research universities. Grincheva (2021) also affirmed that "industry engagement has long been recognized in higher education as an effective tool to facilitate learning while leading to a successful post-graduation employment" (3). Furthermore, work-integrated learning delivered through course design better prepares students to enter the workforce and meet demands of employers (Ferns et al. 2016, 3). The important collaboration between higher education and related industry prompts us to carry out this empirical investigation of how the two higher education film festivals in Brunei benefit from the interactive cooperation with the Bruneian screen industry and other stakeholders such as government agencies and related economic sectors.

Film festival studies have rarely reached their connection to higher education so far; however, Seery's (2015) comprehensive discussion about the trend of implementing flipped learning approaches in higher education chemistry as a specific reference to the sciences may analogize a similarly rightful rationale for implementing film festivals into higher education film studies and curricula. In addition, NMC Horizon Report (Becker et al., 2017) summarized 18 topical trends and technology developments that will very likely drive educational change in higher education institutions. Among the 18 topics, the six key trends, in particular Blended Learning Design, Collaborative Learning, Growing Focus on Measuring Learning, Redesigning Learning Spaces, Advancing Cultures of Innovation, and Deeper Learning Approaches, provide a forward-looking and innovative overview for integrating film festivals into higher education pedagogy and research.

Seaman (1999) suggested a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for empirical studies of software engineering because of the "blend of technical and human behavioral aspects" (557) in such studies. She also emphasized the importance of qualitative data collection as an essential means to gather useful information in software engineering studies. Such a blended methodology should also be applicable to the present empirical study on higher education film festivals, which are quite distinctive in nature from most other types of film festivals. The emphasis on university-industry collaboration in higher education film festivals requires even more vigorous interdisciplinary commitment to look into both the technical side of operating film festivals by comparison of numbers

with infographics and the complexities of human behaviors (e.g., motivation, communication, and understanding) during the operational process. Liu et al. (2023) made an initial attempt to conduct a comprehensive study about higher-institution-based film festivals and their function of forming university-industry connections with a focus on the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival.

THE ACKNOWLEDGED GAPS OF A SCREEN-BASED MEDIA EDUCATION

There is a certain mystique about film schools regarding their overall effectiveness in preparing students for careers in the film industry. Traditionally, those skeptical of the value of a film education have referred to successful Hollywood A-list filmmakers such as Quentin Tarantino, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, Ava DuVernay, and Miranda July as argumentative evidence. Similarly, anti-film school digital sources such as Nofilmschool.com (web) and @filmschoolsucks (Instagram) offer their own pedagogical approaches to establishing a lucrative career. For example, the founder of Filmskills.com announced that "[f]ilm professors do not teach the real world," instead offering his own alternative film industry-based education that enabled him to advance from "a film school dropout to a Hollywood director and cinematographer earning a $10,000 [USD] day rate" (Tomaric 2022).

The existence of the anti-film school ideology is, naturally, potentially problematic for film schools. Unlike regulated industries such as accounting, medicine or law, those working in film and television are not necessarily required to have official academic qualifications to be recognized as professionals. Rather, mentorships, practical experience, and membership in guilds, union associations or societies are often a prerequisite for a career.

Methods used by film schools to align themselves closer to the industry include the employment of working professionals to teach classes and the establishment of an oversight committee of established film practitioners who provide input regarding curricula, internships, or graduate job opportunities. Such involvement raises the credibility of the educational institution and can be seen as a 'seal of approval' from the film industry.

This paper argues that the implementation of film festivals by higher education institutions also serves as evidence of an effective film education when it involves the participation of film industry professionals. This participation generally manifests itself as audience attendance, membership on a judging panel, or guest of honor. However, participation is not as simple as an 'if-you-build-it-they-will-come' scenario. Rather, the higher education film festival organizers must communicate the validity of their event through industry isomorphism; that is, the film festival must display some degree of being an industry-styled event. If such isomorphism does not exist, the organizers risk having their event seen as amateurish, unprofessional, or academic, and therefore not worth attending.

KEY ISOMORPHIC INDICATORS

Isomorphic indicators commonly exist among fundamentally similar organizations. These indicators are typically the result of two possible factors: first, that organizations become "matched with their environments by technical and exchange interdependencies" (Meyer & Rowan 1983, 28). Thus, the majority of film festivals have the same basic needs for operation – a projector, a venue, a film acquisition system – means that will be very similar in form. Second and alternatively, organizations are observed to "structurally reflect socially constructed reality" (8).

The isomorphic indicators evident in Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival are both physically observable and socially manufactured. They are essential for the ensured participation of the local film industry and much care is taken to clearly communicate these indicators to necessary stakeholders. The following discussion examines three key isomorphic indicators: programming, industry involvement, and professional proficiency.

Programming

Film festivals are typically valued according to their programming. It is for this reason that premiere status is a commodity by which filmmakers must decide which event best benefits the acceptance and longevity of their film. Top-tier film festivals such as Cannes or Sundance routinely have international or world premieres simply because the filmmaker, distributor, or sales agent understands the positive outcomes that typically follow a screening. The same applies to higher education film festival organizers. Premieres are not as important due to the status of the filmmakers; instead, the quality of the film both creatively and technically is scrutinized by film industry professionals.

Higher education film festival organizers should ensure the very best films are screened for industry attendees. Exhibition materials that professionals might view as being of mediocre or poor quality could potentially diminish the industry approval for the event. Thus, the curation and sequence of films can impact how each film is received by the audience. As film critic Robert Koehler explains, the construction and selection of any section of films in a program immediately declares itself as, first of all, a critical statement, for the film festival programming is always and forever in its first phase an act of criticism (2009, 82). Therefore, higher education film festival organizers should always program to the strength of their films so as to signal to the industry the relevance of the student work and ultimately the film education offered by the institution.

Both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz prepare stakeholder expectations through the use of genre categories. This method of programming enables both higher education institutions

the best possible opportunity to communicate the intentions of the student filmmakers without unnecessary prescreening of dialogue or exposition. Similarly, assignments that defy or overcomplicate genre classification might be placed into categories such as 'works in progress' or 'final assessment projects.'

The outcome of genre categorization is twofold. First, it provides meaningful examples for qualitative assessment and comparative critical review. Second, there is educational value in that it informs less cinema-acquainted stakeholders of the necessary tropes and cliches required by specific genres for inclusion.

Industry Involvement

The positioning of film industry professionals in roles such as judge, patron, critic, or guest of honor also communicates that an event is industry standard – the inclusion of the industry in a more involved role than an attendee can ultimately serve to raise the perceived value of the film festival. Simply put, if a well-known professional is involved in a meaningful capacity, the industry is more likely to view it as a higher-value event.

The social theorists Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell discuss aspects of organizational prestige in their examination of institutional isomorphism and the collective rationality found in organizational fields. According to them, a "status competition" exists within certain organizational fields that results in a general pattern in which "organizational prestige and resources are key elements in attracting professionals" (1988, 87).

The professional attraction to an event ultimately leads to the legitimization it requires from the film industry for participation. So, through the involvement of select film professionals, a higher education film festival may prove its industry relevance. Furthermore, the inclusion of higher status participants can actually result in greater value and industry acknowledgement of the event.

In the case of Brunei Film Blitz, the festival purposely seeks the participation of industry professionals from other countries, especially from Southeast Asia. These professionals typically facilitate workshops and masterclasses indicative of their specialization and almost always engage in one-on-one discussions with students and local filmmakers. The rationale for this type of interaction may be attributed to the goal of Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia to have graduates work internationally so as to enhance their career opportunities and also avoid saturating the Bruneian film industry with a similarly skilled workforce.

Alternatively, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival focuses primarily on the local film industry's participation and actively invites a variety of industry representatives to be involved with the post-screening commenting session and jury judging process. These comment sessions are often critical of the students' work and provide valuable feedback. All the jury panels have been formed by local screen industry representatives, media policymakers, academic experts, etc. PRISM UBD Short Film Festival also partners with Progresif Media and Radio Television Brunei (RTB) – both are leading industry enterprises in Brunei – to utilize the online streaming platform of each respective company. In particular, two UBD short films, *Bunga* (2019) and *Suara* (2019), alongside three public service advertisement works, *Cyberchondria*, *Dispose Responsibly*, and *Texting*, after screening in the 3rd PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, were selected to air on RTBGo – RTB's OTT platform – in February 2021. Accompanying the five short films, a 10-minute documentary titled *Behind the Scene* featuring the 3rd PRISM UBD Short Film Festival was also produced and webcasted on RTBGo. One month later, Progresif Media – Brunei's largest online streaming platform that features Bruneian domestic content – also picked up six short films from those screened in the past three editions of the festival and published them on the Progresif Media app and website. Among the six selected short films, *Bunga* and *Suara* stood out, alongside *Laila* (2018), *Abang* (2019), *Voyager 2100* (2019), and *Anak Ayah* (2020). The partnership with RTB and Progresif Media confirmed and strengthened PRISM UBD Short Film Festival's functioning as one of the industry nodes that closely interacted with the domestic media industry in Brunei.

Professional Proficiency

Most film festivals offer elements of glamor and celebrity in addition to the exhibition of films. These elements are important in rarefying the events and promoting a sense of uniqueness that a traditional screening, which may be replicated multiple times in different locations, lacks. The degree in which higher education film festivals engage in these rarefied events may range from the presence of a red carpet to an exhibition of film posters, to the inclusion of an entertainment-filled gala evening.

While glamor and celebrity do not necessarily demonstrate industry proficiency, they are the sum of a great number of parts that must match professional expectations. These parts include attractive marketing material, correct on-screen titles and exhibition formats, appropriate screening sound levels, and access to the creative heads of department such as the writer, director, cinematographer, and, in some instances, notable cast members.

Professional proficiency indicates to the industry that the filmmaking students are educated and trained to a suitable level for employment. While much of the entertainment aspect of a film festival is typically handled by marketing companies, it is still imperative that the same duty of care is given to

spell-checked printed programs and confirmed correct screening dates and times. A misstep in the minutiae can have detrimental effects on industry perceptions of the event.

Although PRISM UBD Short Film Festival does not have a red carpet presence or entertainment-filled gala due to its small scale, each festival invites well-known Bruneian screen industry figures to appear in the opening ceremony and post-screening commenting session. These sessions are a rarefied event and reaffirm the function of the festival as a node for bringing together members of the Bruneian film industry physically together.

It is an entirely different situation for Brunei Film Blitz which focuses much of its attention on the glamor and celebrity of its participants. Red carpets as well as specialized events are used to generate local media coverage about the event and affirm its position as a top-tier national film industry event. Students of Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia volunteer at these events as ushers, greeters, and behind-the-scenes documentarians. These roles suitably place them in key positions for mingling and networking.

HIGHER EDUCATION FILM FESTIVALS AS INDUSTRY NODES

As elaborated above, film festivals are often identified as industry nodes and both Bruneian higher education film festivals adhere to isomorphic indicators to attract and retain screen industry participation. The next section will examine the role of the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz as mechanisms that seek to galvanize and inform the incipient screen industry in Brunei (Fischer & Liu 2021; Liu 2021).

The official number of production houses in the sultanate is unknown. It has been speculated by the Bruneian-based Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) that more than 60 production companies operate domestically, the majority of which focus solely on wedding and corporate videos. The small-scale nature of these production companies means limited opportunities for higher education media studies graduate employment.

Similarly, there exists a large number of 'gig-lancers.' This group of hobbyist content creators are known to severely undercut the screen industry market because media production is not their main source of income, and they can afford to take on projects for a fraction of the cost of a wholly dedicated professional media production business. This group presents limited opportunities for employment as the gig-lancer economic model generally dictates no budget allocations for free-lance or permanent crew. Rather, many of these projects are solo or 'friend crewed' productions and are not realistic in relation to the actual costs associated with industry-standard content creation.

Such an underdeveloped screen industry is highly problematic for the higher education screen and media providers in Brunei. Student enrollment in video specific media-related courses is often limited due to the perceived weak or non-existent job market. Many Bruneian parents are suspicious of ostensibly non-traditional sectors such as the creative industry and are more likely to pressure enrollment into perceived safer industries such as business or accounting.

These misgivings about a screen and media education are not unfounded as 53.8% of the Bruneian production houses surveyed in 2020 produced less than 20 productions a year. Equally concerning is the fact that 61.5% of production companies confirmed they were willing to produce content for free (Fischer & Liu, 2021). The rationale for much of this pro bono work is largely seen as strategic relationship building with clients that will hopefully result in full-paying production jobs in the future. In private conversations with the authors, many filmmakers new to the industry have shared that there is a preference to work for free as it lowers the expectations of the client and provides the filmmakers with some leniency from criticism.

It is no longer significant or special to make digital content. Media-specific technology has virtually removed all major physical restrictors and gatekeeping mechanisms that severely limited who made the content and how it was exhibited two decades ago. The situation is further complicated by AI software replacing highly specialized human-only skill sets such as editing or creating visual effects.

There are limited, designated means by which new local Bruneian content can be exhibited publicly, which is why the vast majority of professional filmmakers in Brunei utilize YouTube as a means to screen their work. In a study conducted in 2020, it was determined that 69.2% of production houses used social media or video-on-demand (VOD) platforms as audience access points (Fischer & Liu, 2021). VOD platforms are not gatekeepers that perform quality assurance before exhibition; most Bruneian content is viewed by niche audiences according to their technical and entertainment-driven expectations. Organizers of both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz recognize the importance of exerting some authority over the situation through the delivery of continuous positive semesterly examples of what a Bruneian screen industry can achieve. Student productions are not screened to the public if they lack a set of standard-level technical quality or artistic merit.

Radio Television Brunei is the only national channel available in Brunei. The production costs associated with broadcast as well as strict censorship regulations limit who provides content and who watches it. To date, very few Bruneian feature films screen at local commercial movie theatres. This situation has recently been the point of public debate as an article titled "Where's [the] public support for local films" was published in the Borneo Bulletin. The anonymous author argues, "the film industry will remain small and insignificant for as long as there's no public support for it" and chides the Bruneian public for

referring to local films as "excessively low budget or not professional enough" ("Where's Public Support," 2023).

This situation has destructive future consequences. Without local support or demand for Bruneian content, the need for Media Studies graduates in Brunei diminishes. To address the current state of affairs, both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz frame student screenings as alternative exhibition platforms. Tables 1 and 2 map the programming range of each event since inception:

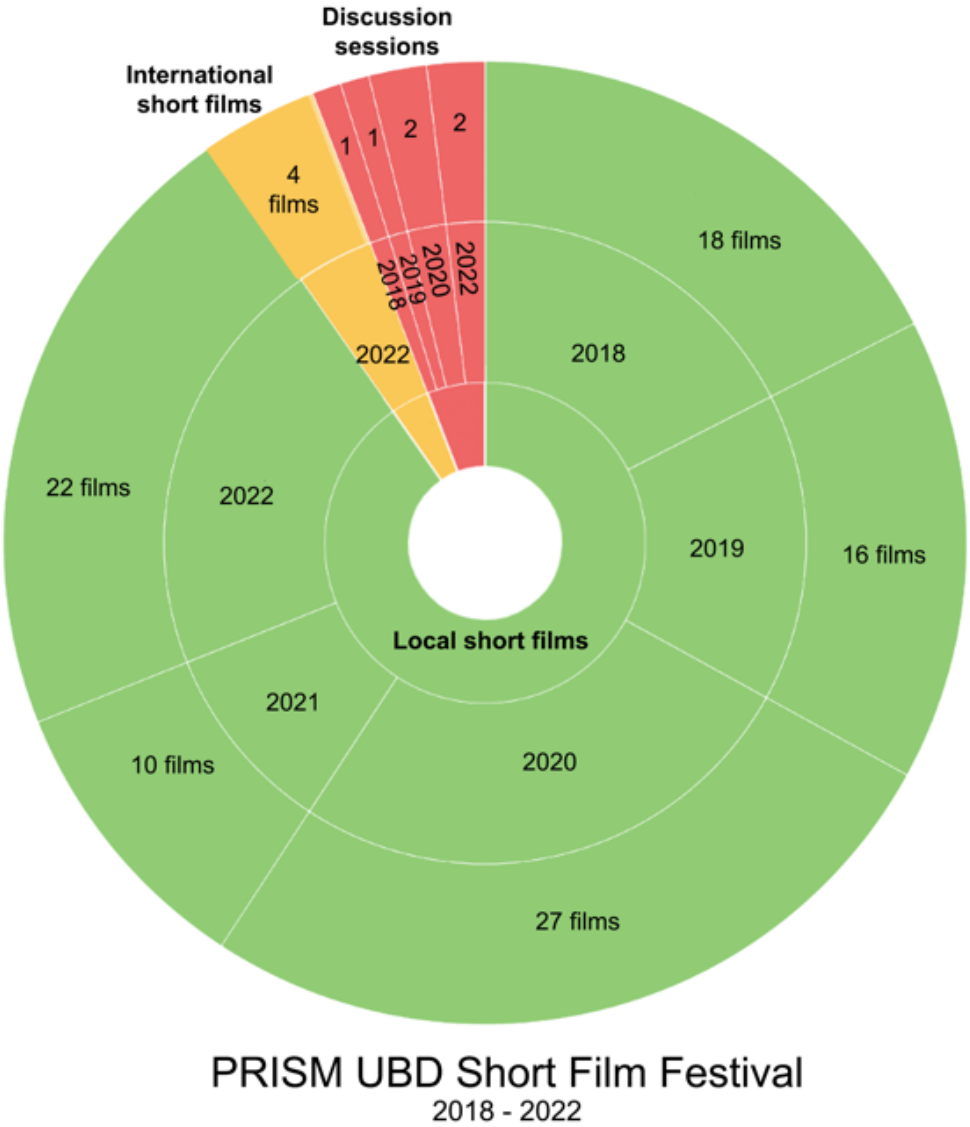

Table 1: Programming map of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival. Source: organizer.

A total of 97 titles of student short films screened over five editions by PRISM UBD Short Film Festival so far cover a variety of genres in fiction (comedy, family, thriller, and horror), documentary,

experimental, animation, smartphone-made shorts, music videos, and public service announcements. All these short films otherwise cannot receive any public distribution in domestic cinemas or on broadcasting TV or webcasting platforms outside PRISM UBD Short Film Festival except through the students' personal self-distribution YouTube channels.

Brunei Film Blitz has programmed 125 local short films, the majority of which are sourced from an annual 96-hour filmmaking challenge that requires filmmakers to produce a new film featuring a secret item announced at the start of the competition. The event has also screened 92 feature films specializing in national cinema from Southeast Asia and further afield. Filmmaking workshops with international screen industry professionals was a major component of the festival; however, it was removed due to logistical complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

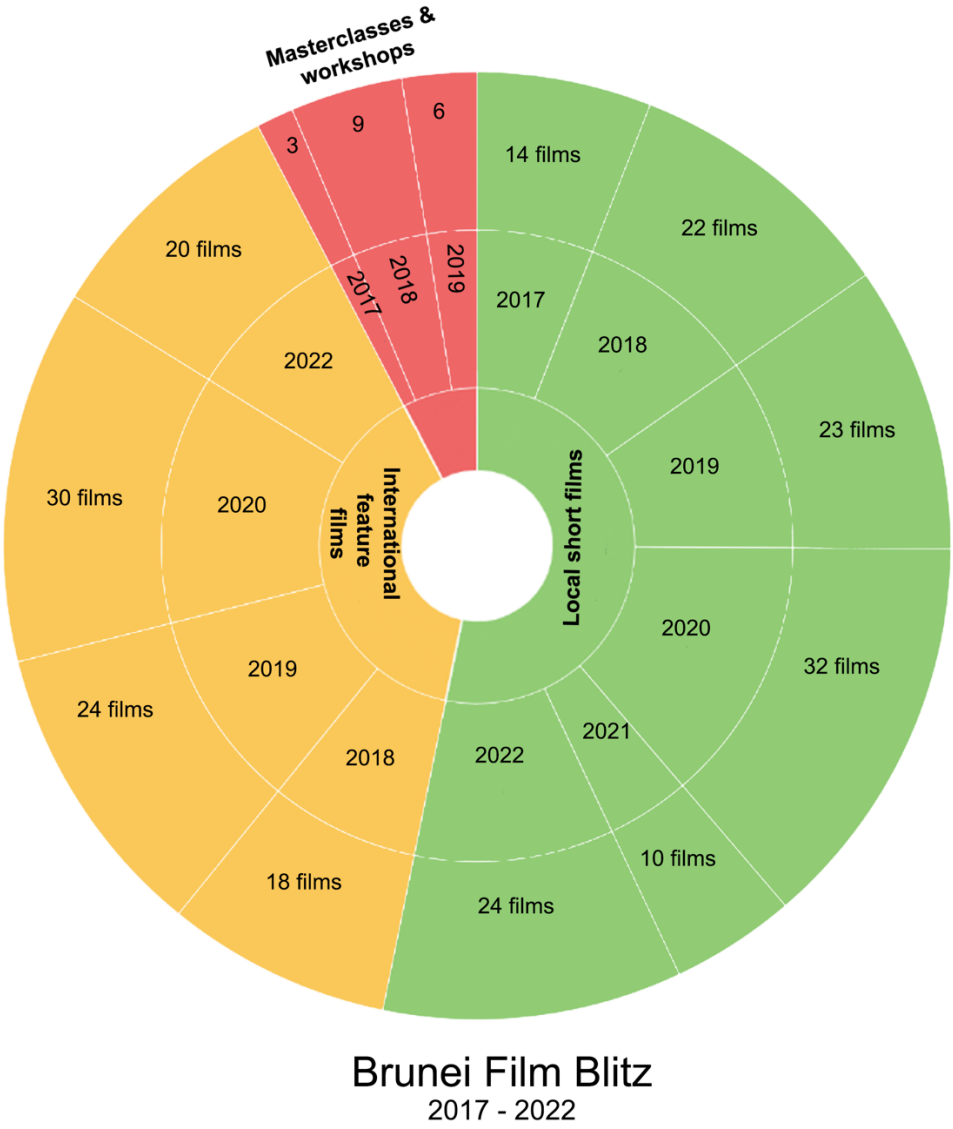

Table 2: Programming map of Brunei Film Blitz. Source: organizer.

It is important to keep in mind that Brunei Film Blitz is the first large-scale film festival in the sultanate's history. Thus, its inception in 2017 marked a significant maturation of the film industry. Similarly, the PRISM UBD Short Film Festival is the only big-screen exhibition point for student films. The films programmed are certainly important; however, the strict censorship laws as well as the lack of any significant promotional opportunities do not encourage the same programming liberties as film festivals outside of Brunei. Consequently, the authors hold that the existence of these two events and the new opportunities they represent in terms of alternative exhibition are the focus of this paper.

Film festivals occupy a favorable position with regards to exhibition in that they share many similarities with art house cinemas in terms of screening alternatives for what is commercially available. Thus, the fact that higher education film festivals feature student work generally means that they are less likely to be held to the same critical standard as commercial enterprises. That is, aspects related to low budget productions, non-professional screen performers, or use of basic camera techniques are largely overlooked if the work demonstrates competence. Both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Festival invite selected audience members to attend screenings. These specific constituents are critical but aware of the aforementioned limitations of the student work and therefore view productions for their potential contributions to the Bruneian creative sector. Tables 3 and 4 identify eight key stakeholders annually invited to the two events.

The data represents the first approach to determining the function of higher education Institutions in Brunei related to media sector growth. It is intended as a simplified means to communicate what is otherwise a highly complex and contrived social system. The transition from clusters of creativity to authoritative nodes is a gradual, opportunity-based process and worthy of a deeper future examination. However, for the purpose of discussing the current trends in Southeast Asian Media Studies, the authors recognize this is a suitable point of departure.

The organizers of the events understand the constituencies identified are not as all-encompassing as those in fully-budgeted film festivals, but they do serve a valuable purpose by informing future sector sustainability. It is important to note that PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz also implement placeholder constituencies. These constituencies represent vital but missing components of the Bruneian film industry. For example, Brunei currently has no film critics who can help inform the value of a film or provide context regarding the artistic, historical, social, cultural, or technological importance of a production. Thus, both festivals have taken proactive steps to reproduce this role within the event itself. In the case of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival, besides the post-screening media professionals commenting session, students are also given critics' sheets and asked to assess the films screened at the festival, while Brunei Film Blitz offers so-called meet-the-critic sessions in which established film critics from the Philippines provide face-to-face feedback to local filmmakers on their work.

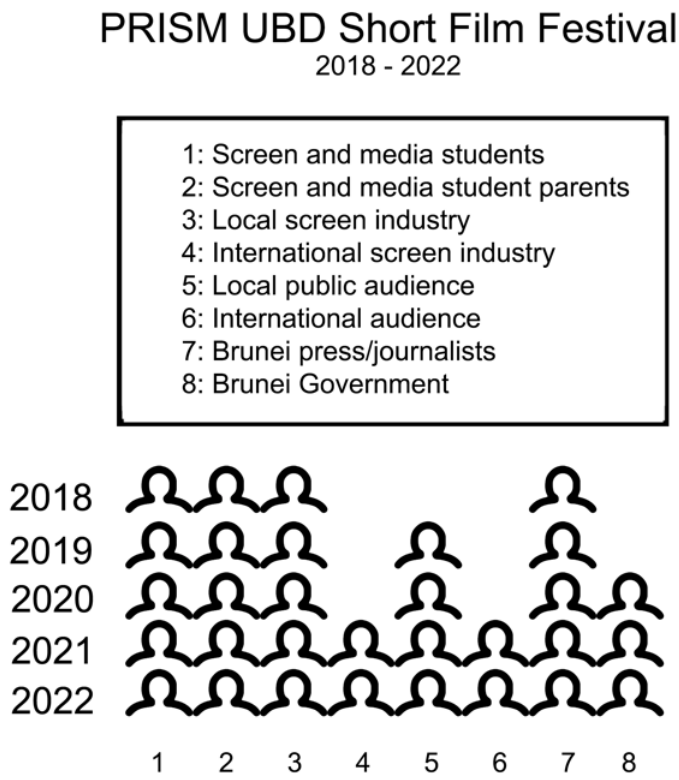

Table 3: Constituency participation of PRISM UBD Short Film Festival. Source: organizer.

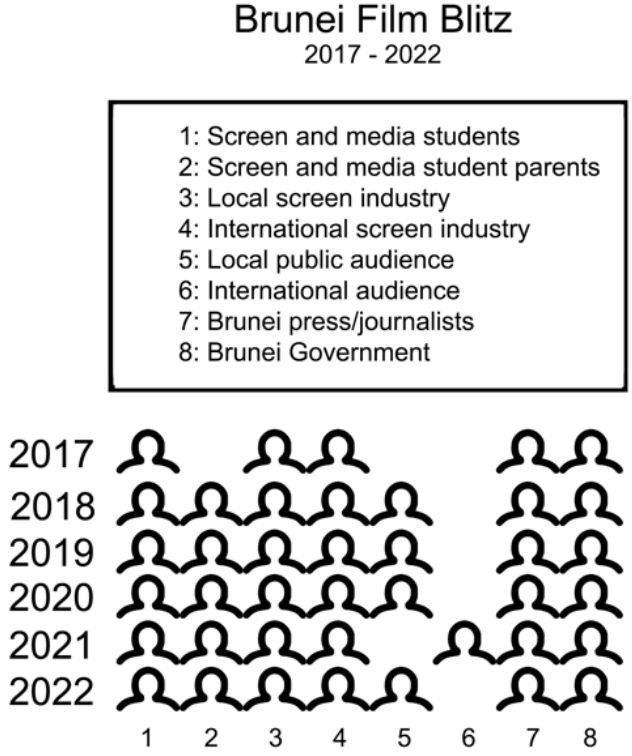

Table 4: Constituency participation of Brunei Film Blitz. Source: organizer.

Another placeholder constituency actively introduced by the two higher education film festivals is that of a distributor. In 2019, PRISM UBD Short Film Festival entered five student-produced films in the Australian-based Flickerfest 2020, of which *Bunga* was selected as a shortlisted finalist for the ASEAN competition section ("Student Short Film *Bunga*" 2019). The short film tells a touching story of a schoolgirl and a stray kitten named Bunga. Following its Flickerfest screening, *Bunga* went on to be screened in more regional and international film festivals, including the inaugural Asia Rising 2021, a showcase of short films from universities in ASEAN in an online screening organized by the Centre for the Arts, National University of Singapore in April 2021, and the Crosslight Film Festival organized by ASEAN University Network on Culture and the Arts in July 2021.

It also competed for the best children's film in the *Future: Kids* section in the 50th Sehsüchte International Student Film Festival in Germany in July 2021. Sehsüchte [transl.: longings] is acclaimed as one of the most prestigious student film festivals in Europe (UBD-FASS 2021). Similarly, Brunei Film Blitz organized the exhibition of seven locally-produced films in the 2019 ASEAN-India Film Festival held in Mumbai, India and more recently submitted six films on behalf of the filmmakers to the 2023 Muslim International Film Festival in Toronto, Canada. Such placeholder constituencies are necessary for the long-term viability of the Bruneian screen industry. Not only do they provide a valuable service that encourages quality and thoughtful productions, but they also represent future career opportunities for graduates who may not know such job diversity exists in the screen and media sector.

CONCLUSION

It was previously mentioned that government employees with ties to the screen industry are actively sought out to attend both PRISM UBD Short Film Festival and Brunei Film Blitz. The motivation behind this interaction is rooted in the likely formation of a future Bruneian film commission. In lieu of an official organizational film body, there exists a small, informal group of veteran Bruneian filmmakers who have formally raised their concerns regarding issues related to current codes of practice, especially that of the gig-lancers, and the need for standardized rate cards. Such discussions are welcome developments for media graduates as there are no unions or guilds to set wage rates or any regulations that determine suitable working hours.

As Brunei continues to diversify its economy, there has been a great deal of emphasis placed on growing new sectors. In 2022, His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei encouraged the younger generations to be "more visionary and daring to explore" careers in the creative industries (Bakar 2022). This is a promising directional change and a possible explanation for an increase in student enrollments in the screen and media courses. For example, in 2019, Mahakarya Institute of the Arts Asia's first cohort consisted of five students. Two years later the student body quadrupled in size. Likewise, the numbers

of B.A. graduates from the Design and Creative Industries program (DCI) at Universiti Brunei Darussalam in the recent two years have also tripled in comparison to the first batch of graduates in 2021. Such a high increase in their respective student enrollment in both institutions has undoubtedly benefited from the years of Bruneian media attention via the two higher education film festivals (Progresif 2021; Azahari 2022; "Local" 2022; Liu et al. 2023).

Optimism about the future is not without merit as 84.6% of the production companies recently surveyed specified that they spent at least 30% of their budgets in other local business sectors. Similarly, 69.2% of local production houses had an increase in the number of jobs compared to previous years (Fischer & Liu 2021). So it is possible a burgeoning Bruneian film industry could be actualized in the near future, especially if the government identifies it as a meaningful contributor to local economic growth.

It is also possible that both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival have influenced how the Bruneian government views the film industry. In 2022, the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry introduced the Brunei Content Festival. The purposes of this event are, 1. to raise awareness and promote local television and broadcasting content; 2. to generate more high-quality local content with commercial potential; and 3. to open up opportunities for local production companies and new media content producers to collaborate with international content developers. The authors of this paper were invited to join the judging panel for this inaugural event and asked to give feedback regarding its future operation. It is important to note that such an event does not represent competition but rather a legitimizing influence that will ultimately help establish the Bruneian screen industry.

The two higher education film festivals examined have been using strategic institutional isomorphic-based techniques to promote their media graduates as valuable, future contributors to the Bruneian screen industry. This paper has discussed how both Brunei Film Blitz and PRISM UBD Short Film Festival have transitioned from clusters of creativity to industry nodes and demonstrated that higher education-led events can impact a career sector.

A limitation of this paper might be that both authors were actively involved in the two higher education film festivals under discussion. The analyses and discussions articulated in previous sections are mainly based on the two authors' previous data-based studies on Brunei's emerging screen industry and their empirical approaches to operating the two institution-based film festivals over several years; however, it is important to acknowledge that the constraints of the two writers also being the main organizers heavily involved with the respective two film festivals might lead some discussions about the holistic functionality of higher education film festivals in this study being less representative or objective because of the somewhat limited database.

Thus, for future studies in the same field, a larger number of higher education film festivals from the ASEAN region and beyond could be included in the research pool and a more data-centric methodology could be developed and implemented to reach more elaborate research results. Areas of future study include a more robust examination of the transition from clusters of creativity to authoritative nodes of individual higher education events. Similarly, it would be beneficial if greater research was undertaken regarding the participation of key constituents and more industrial isomorphic indicators in promoting student enrollment in screen and media studies programs as well as the likelihood of future graduate employment.

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Rapping and Mapping Women's (Dis)Empowerment in the Songs of Pinoy Hip-Hop Artist Andrew E.

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ABSTRACT

The rise of rap in mainstream media can be attributed to the appeal of its authenticity in terms of plot lines and language. Hip-hop music communities have always considered rap as real life in lyrical form because the lyrics of this music genre are anchored in culturally bound communicative practices. Nonetheless, its eventual commercialization has led to its submission to the demands of popular culture, which tend to preserve existing power structures. The brand of rap of Pinoy hip-hop artist Andrew E. (Andrew Ford Valentino Espiritu) is characterized by implied sexual references and comedic verses embedded in the lyrics' narratives. Using Dell Hymes' (1964) conception of the ethnography of communication and Norman Fairclough's (2001) approach to Critical Discourse Analysis as the main theoretical and methodological frameworks, this study explored and examined how women are portrayed, empowered, and disempowered in the narrative rap songs of Andrew E. from 1990 to 2013. Having analyzed the narrative arcs and speech units, the findings reveal that sexual agency, social status, physical appearance, and objectification are prominent sources of (dis)empowerment for the women in the songs' narratives, and that the lyrics perpetuate hegemonic masculinity and misogyny.

Keywords: Andrew E., hip-hop music, Philippine popular culture, Pinoy rap music, popular music

POWER POLITICS IN POPULAR CULTURE

The power politics behind popular culture is governed by capitalist structures that control what is and what can be popular, be it forms of media, linguistic conventions, or ideologies. Simplistically, popular culture refers to what many people find favorable, which emphasizes its quantitative dimension (Storey 2018) and further implies that the shared taste of the vernacular predominates the aesthetic standards often imposed by the elite. However, if mass media and commercial propaganda drive and steer popular culture, what emerges as popular is less of an interest from the general public, but is rather a dictate from dominant groups who have the means to monopolize media that stimulate or subvert ideas.

Concomitant with the commodity culture that puts a premium on the economic value of objects, ideas, and people (Jackson 1999), popular culture concerns itself with being a commercial enterprise that standardizes goods in a way that will make them appealing to a presumed heterogeneous mass audience (Gans 1974). Popularity has become such an imperative for profitability that mass deception and manipulation have become commonplace to ensure that contemporary capitalism, a system characterized by "generalized and globalized monopolies" (Amin 2013, 15), can persist despite opposition. Through "standardization, stereotype, conservatism, mendacity, [and] manipulated consumer goods" (Lowenthal 1961, 11), popular culture helps the powers of control in enforcing certain beliefs and values that maintain their public status.

According to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who were among the most prominent figures of the first generation of critical theorists of the Frankfurt School from the 1940s to the 1960s, the culture industry "produces culture as a commodity" (Bowie 2022, 53) by molding, if not corrupting, the consciousness of the masses (Strinati 2005). In the case of popular music, Adorno believed that the industry only churns out songs designed to sell, making them inferior to the function and aesthetic of genuine art. However, some scholars challenged the critique of Adorno by arguing that popular music fulfills the function of genuine art which is to stimulate the mind (Paddison 1982). The history of popular music in America has served as an arena for social and political ideas. This can be observed in the blues tunes in the mid to late 19th century that tackled the struggles of people of color, folk songs in the early 20th century that expressed pro-union and anti-monopoly sentiments, and rap in the 1970s that told stories about violence and drug abuse (Cooper 1988).

Emerging from mass culture, popular music is often critiqued for its "banal uniformity" that could be "the locus of large-scale social change" (Hall and Blau 1987, 31). Beliefs and value systems preserved or challenged by popular songs inevitably shape the status quo. Given that the success of popular music can be largely attributed to the palate and ingrained dispositions of its target consumers, the music

scene in local industries can reveal the identity of the popular music market and the collective narrative of a community (Brandellero et al. 2013).

Under the lens of literary anthropology, which permits treating literary texts as ethnographic source material (Wiles 2020), song lyrics can be evaluated as social scripts using critical discourse analysis that "stems from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. All social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served" (Janks 1997, 329). Since lyrics are sung and performed, they are embodied by the musician, and the listeners' appreciation of music is tied to their corporeality (Peters 2020, 6). This is particularly true in the case of rap music, which first emerged as an American cultural movement against racial strife before the mainstream media transformed it into a global multi-billion-dollar industry that tends to perpetuate misogyny.

RAP MUSIC AS A MALE-DOMINATED COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

Rap music originated from the marginalized youth communities in the South Bronx of New York City in the 1970s that used hip-hop culture to expose issues surrounding the economic and social hardships of locals and immigrants in the boroughs which were infested with criminal activities involving gang wars, drug addiction, and arson (Naison 2019). Rap was a form of protest – an artistic expression of rage and a response to institutional discrimination. It articulated the lived experiences of its creators and primary audience. Through rap, the black community, whose voices were once repressed, gained a platform to showcase their cultural identity and express their collective consciousness through the narratives embedded in the lyrics.

Rap music was and still is considered authentic urban language as the lyrics consist of culturally bound communicative practices reminiscent of where hip-hop culture was created and first disseminated: the streets (Stæhr and Madsen 2015). Street codes, rap music, and social identity have a reflexive relationship as "the street code projects a compelling normative order, and rap lyrics would be viewed as reproductions of the code offered up to describe black urban street life" (Kubrin 2005, 365). This implies that if a culture of violence and misogyny is a compelling normative order in the street codes and rules of the hip-hop community, then rap lyrics containing such problematic themes will continue to be reproduced while the normative street codes persist.

Furthermore, if gender discrimination and hegemonic masculinity remain prevalent in the male-dominated rap industry (Adams 2006), then it only preserves, if not aggravates, gender power asymmetry. The tragic irony here is that the art of rap, which was initially intended to be an instrument to fight racial oppression, eventually became a tool to perpetuate gender discrimination.

Rap music began as a counternarrative to mainstream media; however, the commercialization of the genre has "caused many of its cultural representatives to fall prey to materialism, becoming less-representative of/for the community" (Hart 2012, 6). Under the pressure of the culture industry, where the rapper is both an artist and an economic agent, "[r]ather than upholding the barrier between organization/economy on one hand and entertainment/culture on the other, the performing of the rap persona often conflates these two spheres. The economic is retold in the narrations, whereas the narrations are sold as commodities" (Sköld and Rehn 2007, 67). It was also inevitable for the male-dominated rap scene to prioritize producing and promoting music with highly sexualized portrayals of men and women in narratives controlled by a patriarchal system, given that popular media have always exploited the profitability of sex and sexuality (Grossman 2020).

A cross-disciplinary approach to empowerment theory and narrative studies frames narratives as resources that shape identity development and community membership. This perspective leads to important questions:

> Who controls these resources? Which stories are considered to be true? Which stories are legitimated, and by whom? Why are some stories rejected and others valued? Who has the right to tell another person's story? If narratives are understood as resources, we are able to see that who controls that resource, that is, who gives stories social value, is at the heart of a tension between freedom and social control, oppression and liberation, and empowerment versus disenfranchisement. (Rappaport 1995, 805)

Studies focusing on gender issues in rap music recognize the ubiquity of misogynistic lyrics in the genre. In the study of Campbell (2011) that investigated the themes of violence and gender in the Billboard Top Ten rap singles from 1997 to 2007, it was found that emotional violence – verbal assaults meant to discriminate against and debase another person – is gender-specific. This male-on-female emotional violence involves name-calling using derogatory terms such as bitch, ho, and slut, and exists in contexts wherein "women are viewed as replaceable or invaluable objects, intended for male consumption" (Campbell 2011, 46).

In a similar study where Weitzer and Kubrin (2009) examined portrayals of women in 403 rap songs in rap albums that attained platinum status (sold at least 1 million copies) from 1992 to 2000, it was found that 22%, or 90 out of the 403 sampled songs, contained lyrics depicting misogyny, and in those 90 songs, five were by female artists while 85 were by male artists. Furthermore, five themes emerged from the content analysis: sexual objectification (67%), naming and shaming (49%), distrust of women (47%), prostitution and pimping (20%), and legitimating violence (18%). Songs with themes related to sexual objectification involve peer pressure being a factor that leads to male sexual aggression, women of stature being reduced to sexual objects, and the dramatization of sexual objectification as

gangbanging where a group of men engage in consensual or nonconsensual sex with a woman who is intoxicated or sometimes underaged.

Songs with themes related to naming and shaming involve the use of derogatory labels such as bitch, ho, and pussy directed at women in general. Songs with themes related to distrust of women involve narrative arcs where women seduce men for money, make false rape accusations to receive a financial settlement, or lie to men to get pregnant. Songs with themes related to prostitution and pimping involve women being viewed as economic pursuits. Finally, songs with themes related to legitimizing violence involve men priding themselves on sexual acts that harm women, justifying acts of violence, warning women who challenge the patriarchy that they will be assaulted, and condoning male violence against women.

In another study, the textual analysis of 38 philogynist (depicting women as admired, adored, or loved) rap songs released from 2000 to 2010 revealed the following:

> First, rappers were most often connected to women they viewed as independent, strong, coveted, supportive "ride or die" equal partners in life and love who were deemed different than the average woman. Second, in stark contrast, adored women were also described as abused and degraded by other men and needing to be "saved" by the rapper. Third, the relationships of the rappers and the adored women were sources of contention with their friends. Finally, rappers often verbally, physically, and emotionally discussed adored women in the same misogynistic way they discussed other women. (Tyree and Jones 2015, 68)

While philogynist rap music attempts to temper, if not counter, misogynistic rap, the lyrics still encourage hegemonic masculinity and preserve the patriarchy. Williams (2018) argues that since the early years of rap music, the genre "has engaged in the ideological contempt for and subjugation of women that structures patriarchal US society" (297). Even the gender politics involved in female rappers' (e.g., Lil' Kim and Nicki Minaj) attempt to reclaim their voice by depicting themselves as sexually liberated women "walk a thin line between staking a feminist claim to sexual freedom and conforming to the objectifying male gaze" (Williams 2018, 299).

It is crucial to stress that "rap artists are not solely responsible for the content of their work. The entertainment industry plays an essential role, cultivating sexist lyrics and rewarding artists who produce them with huge sums of money" (Weitzer & Kubrin 2009, 25). The culture industry and mass media have always banked on profitable stereotypes, but still, the extent to which their impact could be mitigated depends on what consumers would choose to demand.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PINOY RAP

The Philippines saw major changes when the United States colonized it from 1898 to 1946, as American culture had shaped the country's social institutions and even the people's musical tastes (Schons 2010). Even after the Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946, American military bases have remained in the country, and service troops stationed play significant roles in exporting American popular music, such as funk, soul, and rap to local radio stations. Filipino immigrants living in the United States and who exchanged tapes and CDs with their family and friends in the Philippines also became instrumental in popularizing rap music in the Philippines faster than in other Southeast Asian countries (Schons 2010).

A few months after the commercial release of Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" in 1979 – the first rap record in history – it became the first hip-hop single that reached the Billboard Top 40 (Lynch 2014). The song became so popular worldwide that in 1980 Manila-based singer and comedian Dyords Javier (George Javier) recorded a spoof titled "Na Onseng Delight" (Duped Delight) (Hip Hop Around the World: An Encyclopedia 2019). Quickly following was the release of singer-songwriter and comedian Vincent Daffalong's (Vincent Quilet) rap song "Nunal" (Mole) which was well received by Filipino listeners.

These songs led to novelty rap – a subgenre of rap that uses rhymes and injects humor in its presentation of folk beliefs, traditions, and customs – to become one of the most popular and commercially successful musical genres in the Philippines (Pineda and Cayabyab 2021). However, when Javier and Daffalong stopped producing records, Pinoy rap declined and was considered as mere fad. In an interview, Javier said, "[t]he reason for rap's popularity is colonial mentality. What is a fad in the States is instantly a fad to the market here, and it becomes popular" (Alcasid 1992, 20-21). Citing Marissa Bernardino's work *The History of Philippine Music (1970-1977)*, Alcasid (1992) argues that although Pinoy rap is an offshoot of Philippine music that has always been heavily influenced by Western chord patterns, it has managed to evoke a sense of Filipinoness where the experiences and sentiments of its primary audiences are captured.

It was Francis M. (Francis Magalona), dubbed as "Master Rapper," who brought Pinoy rap in the mainstream music scene by "[r]iding on the post-EDSA wave of nationalism" when he released the album *Yo!* which included the big hit "Mga Kababayan Ko" (My Fellow Filipinos) in 1990 (Pineda and Cayabyab 2021). His sartorial signature also complemented his music's brand of patriotism. According to Pineda and Cayabyab (2021):

> Aside from his patriotic lyrics and ethnic-inspired beats and mixes, he [Francis M.] also donned ethnic inspired costumes and accessories, like the putong, sarong, and batik vests, in his television appearances and concerts. His local rap style was influenced by

> global pop genres like world beat or ethnic fusion, which was fashionable during that time. Shortly after his success in the mainstream music industry, rappers and rapping became the new trend.

The appeal of Pinoy rap could be attributed to the rapper's ability to write and perform songs that resonate with the public and appeal to their sensibilities. As a derivative of Western hip-hop that flourished because of how it aestheticized the lived experiences of both the artist and the audience, Pinoy rap is also an expression of culture and a performance of everyday life.

In the 90s, the golden age of Pinoy hip-hop, Andrew E. (Andrew Ford Valentino Espiritu) revived novelty rap that capitalized on sexual themes and that used slang with sexual connotations. Although his music was critiqued by many for being taboo, vulgar, and scandalous, his debut album titled *Humanap Ka ng Panget* (Look For Someone Ugly) attained triple platinum status (Alcasid 1992). In 1995, Andrew E. founded his own record company, Dongalo Records, to discover new Filipino rap talents. One popular group that started through this independent label was Salbakuta, whose debut single "Stupid Luv" became a hit and spawned a movie, inspiring more artists to venture into the rap music scene (Dizon 2020).

ANDREW E. AS A PINOY RAP ICON

Andrew E. started his career as a DJ in California before he worked as a DJ at Euphoria, a discotheque in Makati City. He became widely known for the song "Humanap Ka ng Panget" which was included in his debut album of the same title. A year after its release, Andrew E. starred in a comedy film of the same title with veteran actors Eddie Gutierrez and Jimmy Santos. Thereafter, he worked on numerous projects for film, TV series, concerts, and albums.

As of July 2023, he has 44 acting projects and 22 soundtracks listed in IMDb (IMDb 2023). In 2010, his album *Clubzilla* was awarded Rap Album of the Year by Philippine Movie Press Club's Star Awards for Music (Dizon 2020). He has also served as a judge in singing competitions such as *Born To Be A Star*, produced by TV 5 and Viva Entertainment in 2016, and *HypeBest*, a rap competition in *It's Showtime* in 2018 (Dizon 2020).

Three decades after making a name for himself in show business, Andrew E. remains a prominent figure in the Philippine rap scene. His listenership on Spotify continues to increase despite him not having recorded a new song since his most recent album released in 2013. Table 1 shows the statistics of Andrew E.'s listenership on Spotify.

Time	Followers	Average Monthly Listeners
January 2021 pre-research implementation	131,805	159,421
October 2021 post-research implementation	158,133	224,319
April 2023 first draft of this article	249,666	412,235
July 2023 (first week) second draft of this article	259,662	518,199
July 2023 (last week) third draft of this article	266,025	604,695

Table 1: Andrew E.'s listenership on Spotify. Source: author.

It is worth noting that most of his streamed songs on the platform are from his most successful albums in the 1990s and early 2000s. Further, his recordings during this time reflect similar misogynistic attributes observed in American rap in the same period, as revealed in the studies of Weitzer & Kubrin (2009) and Campbell (2011) who also examined the lyrics of best-selling and chart-topping rap singles in the 1990s and 2000s.

Andrew E.'s success in the music industry not only proves that his contribution remains relevant to this day, but also provides an adequate period to examine possible changes in the themes and trends in mainstream Pinoy rap. The songs that served as artifacts of this study were shortlisted from the 118 songs included in the eleven official and commercially released albums featuring Andrew E. as the main artist from 1990 to 2013. Although he composed and performed on singles and original film soundtracks, these mediums are not included in this research as they are not within a similar mode of production.

Album	Song Title
Humanap Ka Ng Panget (1990) 4/9 songs	Humanap Ka Ng Panget
	Andrew Ford Medina
	Mas Gusto Mo Sya
	Binibi Rocha
	Ang Aming Pasko
	Kagat ng Aso
	Walang Santa Claus

Ang Dalawang Pasko ni Andrew E. (1991) 4/10 songs	Teng-Q
Ekstranghero (1997) 2/9 songs	Kapangyarihan
	Taga Bukid
Wholesome (1999) 4/12 songs	Maggy
	Banyo Queen
	Fax Me
	Mahal Kita
Much More Wholesome (2000) 5/12 songs	Honey
	Shanana
	Baño Queen II
	Baby You're D' Shet
	O.U.812
Porno Daw (2001) 5/11 songs	M.I.K. (May I Kwento)
	Sinabmarin
	Body Language
	Tina Moran
	Twinkle
Alabanger (2002) 3/14 songs	Gina Call Medina 1997
	Binnie Berenguer Rocha 1997
	Alabanger Song
Krispy na Kreamy Pa (2004) 3/12 songs	Krispy Na Kreamy Pa
	Pink Palaka
	Pretty Girl
Clean (2007) 2/12 songs	Lahian Mo Ako
	Girl
Clubzilla/Bass Mix (201) 0/8 songs	(none)
Andrew E Does Ballads Vol. 1 (2013) 3/7 songs	I Wish I Can
	Basta Sakin Ang Heart
	Dahil Mahal Kita

Table 2: Artifacts of the study. Source: author.

The 35 rap songs of Andrew E. all take the form of a narrative. The lyrics were analyzed as speech units (speech situations, speech events, speech acts). Thereafter, the constraints of discourse (contents, relations, and subject positions) binding the male and female characters in the songs were explicated

to see the emerging themes. The analysis of the rhetorical artifacts did not investigate the sound, rhythm, and structural effects of the music as it focused on treating the lyrics as social scripts that can reveal the linguistic and cultural identity of the Pinoy hip-hop community.

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF RAP AS ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

Kenneth Burke's *A Grammar of Motives* was the first installation of a trilogy that seeks to "uncover human motivations through an analysis of their linguistic expressions" (Morris 1951, 439). Here, Burke argues that man's literary products mirror human nature and motivation. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he "seeks the underlying motives for which words are strategies," and in *A Symbolic of Motives,* he probes into the "value-orientations that lie behind the motives" (Morris 1951, 439). The trilogy holds that man's use of language is inherently rhetorical, and Burke argues that "persuasion can be achieved only through identification" (Day 1960, 271).

In its simplest sense, identification is persuasion involving the use of language fashioned to establish the commonalities between the speaker and the audience (Day 1960). As Burke explains, "[y]ou persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (Burke 1969, 55). It is built on the premise that individuals seek to identify or relate with others and build social cohesion to overcome separation and division (Burke 1969). Essentially, the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of Burke's concept of identification as new rhetoric suggest that language and culture are interdependent.

Ethnography of communication – an approach which involves "combining ethnography, the description and analysis of culture, with linguistics, the description and analysis of language" – was a response if not a counterproposal to Chomskian linguistics that conceived language as independent of culture (Keating 2001, 285). The ethnography of communication is a theory and method that "explored language not just as a formal system of grammar, but as something culturally shaped in the contexts of social life" (Carbaugh and Boromisza-Habashi 2015, 2). For Dell Hymes, one of its primary proponents,

> it is not linguistics, but ethnography – not language, but communication – which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described. The boundaries of the community within which communication is possible; the boundaries of the situations within which communication occurs; the means and purposes and patterns of selection, their structure and hierarchy, that constitute the communicative economy of a group, but are not controlled by them. (Hymes 1964, 3)

To describe and explain the interdependence of language and culture, Hymes formulated a system of concepts to organize ethnographic inquiry. In the conceptual vocabulary, a speech community (a social group with shared rules for the use and interpretation of communication practice or language variety) can be studied and understood by looking into speech units that govern their interactions. These speech units include speech situations (settings where communication is expected or prohibited), speech events (sequence of speech acts the speech community recognize as routine), and speech acts (performative utterances).

Studying a speech community's use of language reveals its speech repertoire (communicative competencies participants possess) and speech economy (social valuing of communicative competencies) (Carbaugh 2015). Ethnographies of communication have been used in conducting field-specific activities that involve community immersion. The framework has also been used as a lens to examine texts in mass media, political processes, and various interpersonal and organizational settings (Carbaugh 2015).

Discourse analysis in music can be patterned after the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) since it is an interdisciplinary study open to "multidimensional analysis combining social, linguistic, psychological, visual, gestural, ritual, technical, historical, and musicological aspects;" by examining the textual features of song lyrics, one can gain an understanding of their respective social frames (Aleshinskaya 2013, 423). More specifically, Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to CDA posits that "sociolinguistic conventions have a dual relation to power: on the one hand, they incorporate differences of power, on the other, they arise out of – and give rise to – particular relations of power" (Fairclough 2001, 1).

This approach further asserts that power is closely linked to ideology and language since ideology is what legitimizes power relations, and language is "the commonest form of social behavior" that shapes ideologies (Fairclough 2001, 2). Fairclough's approach to CDA consists of three analytical categories and concepts for textual analysis: dimensions of meaning, values of features, and structural effects. The concepts under the first category, dimensions of meaning, centers on the constraints of discourse, which pivot on power in discourse, particularly, "powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants" (Fairclough 2001, 38-39). The three types of constraints that served as the analysis points of the study are: contents (what is said or done), relations (relationship of people involved), and subjects/subject positions (role in relation to the power possessed).

The rhetoricity of the lyrics of rap, which are essentially lived experiences and community narratives of hip-hop subcultures, are founded on the concept of identification. In this qualitative research anchored in the rhetorical and critical communication traditions, the inquiry commenced with the exploration of

available sources of information and proceeded with the critical examination of specific details pertinent to the units of analysis until a well-substantiated synthesis was achieved. The study examined situated knowledge in song lyrics by looking into the language, symbolisms, and meaning used in the text to examine the ways in which women were (mis)represented and (dis)empowered in the rap songs of Andrew E.

The data analysis procedure involved four levels of analysis, each corresponding to specific research objectives. The first level of analysis focused on describing the main characters in the rap songs in terms of their motives as well as dominant masculine and feminine traits, which may be positive or negative since an important element of dis/empowerment lies in the correspondence between goals and outcomes (Mechanic 1991, as cited in Zimmerman 2000, 45); the identification and classification of gendered traits were guided by Valledor-Lukey's (2012) Filipino gender-trait inventory. The second level of analysis focused on describing the speech units (speech situation, speech event, and speech act) used to depict the dis/empowerment of female characters; the speech acts were further classified and analyzed for the function they served as representative, expressive, commissive, directive, and declarative since these speech units were considered processes that contributed to the development of sites of (dis)empowerment. The third level of analysis focused on explicating the constraints on discourse to reveal the values and rhetoric embedded in and espoused by the narratives in the song lyrics. Finally, the fourth level of analysis focused on evaluating the sources and/or forms of dis/empowerment used in the narrative rap songs of Andrew E.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ANDREW E.'S MUSIC

Andrew E.'s narrative rap songs are – as he claims in the lyrics – typically grounded in his personal experiences and particularly about his career and personal relationships. These narratives are delivered as first-person accounts wherein the highly sexualized female characters are assumed to be real-life women Andrew E. knows. The descriptions of the female characters and their sexual encounters are detailed, thus inviting listeners to picture them like a fantasy that caters to the male gaze. In the 35 songs that served as artifacts of the study, two dominant representations of women emerged. The first frames women as sexually empowered individuals, while the second frames them as sexual conquest and status symbol for men.

Women as sexually empowered individuals

Unlike in popular gangsta rap in the United States in the 1990s and 2000s where physical and emotional violence against women seemed to be a constitutive element of hip-hop music, Andrew E.'s

songs possess no such content. Sex was always consensual, and often initiated by women. Although the female characters in the narrative rap songs of Andrew E. are portrayed as sexually liberated and at times can be aggressive, one could argue that they are still objectified by Andrew E., the male character-narrator-performer who controls the narrative to assert male bravado. Notably, the formulaic structure of Andrew E.'s kiss-and-tell stories projects himself as a sex symbol by showing attractive and affluent women chase after him. He challenges conventional structures of power through his work as an artist by presenting narratives in which he is the target of elites' sexual desire and servitude.

Song Title	**Lyrics showing social status**	**Lyrics showing sexual agency**
Andrew Ford Medina (1990)	Lahat sila ay may Mercedez Benz. […] Lahat sila nakatira sa San Lorenzo Ville *(They all owe a Mercedes Benz […]* *They all live in San Lorenzo Ville)*	Sabi n'ya sa akin, "Hey Andrew, can you give me a massage?" Hinilot ko ang front, pati ang kanyang back. Then, Ana squeezed me tight and then she gave me a smack. *(She said, "Hey, Andrew,* *can you give me a massage?"* *I rubbed her front, as well as her back.* *Then, Ana squeezed me tight* *and then she gave me a smack.)*
Sinabmarin (2001)	Ti-nour niya ako sa bahay at sa loob may swimming pool. Ang tindi talaga ng bahay kasi may elevator. *(She gave me a tour in their house with a swimming pool. The house was impressive as it even had an elevator.)*	So sa kwarto pinakita collection ng Andrew E. songs Pinakita rin collection ng mga (thong to-thong thong thongs) *(In the room she showed her* *collection of Andrew E. songs.* *She also showed her collection of thongs.)*
Gina Call Medina 1997 (2002)	At ang sabi niya sa akin, "Bakit? Magkano ka ba? Just tell me Andrew kung magkano'ng halaga!" *(And then she told me, "Why?* *How much are you? Just tell me your price, Andrew.")*	So tinaggal niya ang butones, hinubad ang polo shirt, tinanggal ang kanyang shoes, hinubad ang mini skirt. Oh shet, sa pwet, gusto niyang ikabit. Hindi ako pumayag but then siya ay nagalit *(She unbuttoned her top, took off her polo shirt, removed her shoes, took off her mini*

		skirt. Oh shit, she wants to connect it to her butt. I did not agree, which made her mad.)
Binnie Berenguer Rocha 1997 (2002)	Nakakita 'ko ng Porsche Hey Binnie! Is that yours? Sumagot siya, "Yes, of course." *(I saw a Porsche.* *Hey Binnie! Is that yours?* *She answered, "Yes, of course.")*	Ang 'di ko lang alam siya ay already horny Nang may biglang gumapang, kamay niyang full of sweat. *(What I did not know was she was already horny. I just felt her sweaty hand moving over me.)*
Pink Palaka (2004)	Sa Forbes ang bahay, mayroon siyang basement. *(Her house is in Forbes,* *and it has a basement.)*	So sa sahig siya'y biglang dumapa Pinakita niya sa akin ang kanyang palaka. *(She lied on the floor.* *She showed me her frog.)*
Pretty Girl (2004)	Ang girl na waldi-waldi taga-Faith Academy. *(This free-spirited girl studies in Faith Academy.)*	Nilagay niya ang kamay niya at inihimas sa puwit. Umupo siya sa table, kinuha niya ang phone. Tinanong niya ako kung ako raw ba ay all alone. *(She touched her butt and stroked it. She sat on the table, took her phone. She asked me whether I was all alone.)*

Table 3: Songs depicting sexual agency of elite women.
Source: Selected Andrew E. songs. All translations by the author.

As outlined in Table 3, the social status of women who make sexual advances is established by mentioning the luxury cars they own, the exclusive subdivisions they reside in, or the private schools they attend. Women are depicted as sexually suggestive by detailing how they initiate touching or how they undress themselves in the presence of a man they wish to seduce. But aside from these plotlines that demonstrate masculine pride, machismo is further legitimized by Andrew E. when he shares sexual encounters with women who expressed their concern about their image and privacy.

The songs presented in Table 4 suggest the social stigma surrounding female sexuality. While the women are empowered to initiate sex, it does not mean that they are sexually liberated. Their inhibitions stemming from family morals and rules are apparent. The lyrics suggest willingness to engage in sexual relations that are restricted by social norms.

Song Title	**Lyrics showing stigma against women's sexuality**
Shanana (2000)	Pero sabi ni Shanana-nana, "Drew, I'll just do it for you, ha?" […] Pero ang sabi ni Shanana-nana, "Drew, don't tell anybody ha?" *(But Shanana-nana said,* *''Drew, I'll just do it for you, okay?" […]* *But Shanana-nana said,* *''Drew, don't tell anybody, okay?")*
M.I.K. (May I Kwento) (2001)	At sa bahay nila buo ang moral, Pero sa phone ika'y io-oral. *(In their house, she acts all moral,* *but on the phone she is up for oral.)*
Alabanger Song (2002)	Sa kanyang house, every day, ako ina-arouse. Inaabot ako ng umaga, okay lang I feel so great. Strict ang kanyang parents pero parehong nasa States. *(In their house, every day, she makes me feel aroused. I stay until morning, and feel so great. Her parents are strict, but they are both in the States.)*
Pink Palaka (2004)	Kaya ako'y binatak at niyayaya Linggo, day-off ng kanyang yaya. *(So she pulled me, and invited me* *on Sunday, her maid's day-off.)*

Table 4: Songs depicting stigma against women's sexuality.
Source: Selected Andrew E. songs. All translations by the author.

Conservative and religious beliefs and practices in the Philippines have always negatively impacted Filipino women (Santos 2021) who are expected to subscribe to Marianismo, the counterpart of machismo which encourages chastity among women as rooted in values prescribed by Roman Catholicism (Morales and Pérez 2021).

On the other hand, Lizada (2017) notes that the macho culture has been situated and celebrated in various media (e.g., billboards, films, etc.), which makes contemporary Filipino male masculinity and sexuality a commodity. This is true in the case of Andrew E.s songs where his virility is established through narratives that purport to recognize women's sexual needs and sexual empowerment.

Women as men's sexual conquests and status symbols

Arguably, Andrew E.'s kiss-and-tell narrative rap songs where women are hypersexualized promote voyeurism inasmuch as they frame women as sexual conquest and status symbol for men. The male character – who is often the same as the performer who presents the events as anecdotes – is portrayed as thinking and acting in a way that makes the female character seem like a challenge and reward. Aside from women's social status, Andrew E. also intentionally provides in some songs descriptions of women's physical features – mostly facial features and body figure – that make them attractive and worth pursuing.

Song Title	**Lyrics showing descriptions of the female character's physical appearance**	**Lyrics showing the male character's effort to gain the woman's attention**
Binibi Rocha (1990)	Mata niya ay kulay brown, meron syang brace sa ngipin. Kamukha siya ni Rita Avila kung iisipin. Katawan niya'y 36-24-34. Sa panong paraan kaya ako makaka-score. *Her eyes are brown, and she wears braces. She looks like Rita Avila, if you think about it. Her body's 36-24-34. I wonder how can I score.)*	Kaya't ako'y biglang nagsabi, "Hey, girl, I like your style!" *(I blurted, 'Hey, girl, I like your style!')*
Maggy (1999)	When I saw this girl and she was sizzling hot. X marks the spot. Damn! Bigla akong nagulat. At that time, hindi ako makahinga sa tinde ng aking nakikita. Close up smile, looking like a child. *(When I saw this girl and she was sizzling hot. X marks the spot. Damn! I*	And so I approached her, nagpakilala ako, "Andrew E. baby! What's up? Anong name mo?" *(And so I approached her, and introduced myself, "Andrew E. baby! What's up? What's your name?")*

	was shocked. At that time, I could not breathe because of what I was seeing. Close up smile, looking like a child.)	
Banyo Queen (1999)	Nakilala ko tuloy itong magandang babae na nakabibighani sa aking mga mata […] Naglalaway sa palda niyang hapit na hapit. *(I met this beautiful girl who captured my eyes […] I was salivating at the sight of her tight-fitted skirt.)*	Nang ako'y makalinga, 'di ko siya matagpuan. Ubos ang aking money, di ko pa nahalikan. *(When I looked elsewhere for a while, I couldn't find her anymore. I spent all my money [on her], and was not even able to kiss her.)*
Mahal Kita (1999)	Oh, talagang mahal kita, pretty baby. *(Oh, I really love you, pretty baby.)*	Simula nang ika'y makilala, Gusto na agad kita mai-kama. Kaya bigla-bigla kitang niligawan Baka ako sa'yo maunahan. *(Ever since we met,* *I wanted us to get in bed.* *I courted you right away* *So you I will not be beaten to it by someone else.)*
Shanana (2000)	Sa isang tabi, umupo ang magandang young lady. *(The pretty young lady sat in the corner.)*	I gave the waitress two hundred bucks Para ating alamin ang pangalan […] Shook the girl's hand. *(I gave the waitress two hundred bucks* *To find out the girl's name […]* *Shook the girl's hand.)*
Twinkle (2001)	Beatriz Lucero look-a-like. Siya'y mestiza, Assumptionista na at that time ay bakasyonista. Rosy cheek, pink na pink, pulang pula. *(She looked like Beatriz Lucero.* *Fair-skinned, studies in Assumption,* *and at that time was on vacation.* *She had rosy cheek, very pink, very red.)*	Tinanong ko, "Meron ka bang boyfriend?" "Bawal ang boys, puro lang friends". So tanghaling tapat ko rin siya pinuslit. At para hindi maingay ang dog, Australian beef aking hinulog. Hala sige, kagat-kagat mga aso Habang ako kagat-kagat amo

		(I asked, "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Boys are not allowed, I only have friends" […]. It was noon when I saw her in secret. To stop the dogs from barking, I gave them Australian beef. While the dogs were biting the meat, I was biting their owner.)
Alabanger Song (2002)	And so ako'y na-intriga sa nakita kong mestiza. I freeze. Siya'y Vietnamese. *(I was intrigued with the mestiza I saw. I froze in disbelief. She was Vietnamese.)*	Kinausap ko at ang sabi ko, "One question, one answer." *(I talked to her and said, "One question, one answer.")*

Table 5: Songs depicting attractive women as sexual conquest.
Source: Selected Andrew E. songs. All translations by the author.

In contrast with the songs presented in Table 3 where women whose main descriptors denote their social status immediately initiate sexual encounter upon meeting Andrew E., the songs in Table 5 show that Andrew E. needs minimal effort to win sexual favors from women he finds attractive, which further boosts his ego. It is worth noting that Andrew E. finds no need to prove his worth since most of the women recognize him as a famous and financially stable rap artist. The songs "Banyo Queen," "Shanana," and "Twinkle" show Andrew E. willingness to spend money to gain sexual favors from women. While the lyrics demonstrate that both genders desire the same thing, legitimizing the "she wants what he wants" rhetoric reduces women to a one-dimensional character whose only function is to satisfy the male gaze.

WOMEN'S (DIS)EMPOWERMENT IN ANDREW E.'S RAP SONGS

Gender power asymmetry in the Pinoy rap music industry feeds the narcissism of the male persona, which advertently or inadvertently perpetuate misogyny; "[t]his type of Pinoy rap music has depended so much on active and passive voyeuristic mechanisms to such an extent that the humanity of a woman is completely ignored because of hypersexualized stereotypes" (Galang 2021). These were observed in the narrative rap music of Andrew E. where four main sources and sites of women's (dis)empowerment were found: sexual agency, social status, physical attractiveness, and objectification.

Sexual Agency and Social Status

The rap songs where the sexual agency and social status of women (see Table 3) are prominent in the narrative suggest that women from higher social class possess sexual empowerment. In these songs, female characters issue directives to the male character to achieve their goal and gain sexual satisfaction. These directives involve inviting Andrew E. to their mansions or inside their luxury cars where the sexual encounters transpire. While this type of characterization projects sexual agency and social status as sources of empowerment, the fact that the male controls the narrative makes it a voyeuristic device that defines women only based on their sexual pleasures. Some songs (see Table 4) also acknowledge the mores surrounding women's sexuality and sexual liberation, which disempowers women regardless of their social status. The binding customs and traditions that maintain the moral significance of chastity prompt female characters to request, if not beg, Andrew E. to not disclose their sexual encounter as they are concerned with the social stigma surrounding sex. In the rap songs which take the form of anecdotal accounts, this request was disregarded by Andrew E. who narrates these supposedly true events, proving the existence of gender power asymmetry in his work as an artist.

Physical Attractiveness

Several of Andrew E.'s sexual pursuits commence with descriptions of women's physical appearance where their facial features, body figure, and clothing were deemed seductive (see Table 5). Conventionally attractive female characters are complimented and pursued by the male character, which may appear as a source of empowerment on the surface, but may be considered as a disempowering attribute since they are only given attention and effort to earn sexual favors later.

It can be argued that mentioning the details surrounding the female characters' physical appearance only functions as a device to showcase Andrew E.'s charisma and to stroke his self-pride as he manages to prove that he could get anyone he wants, thus empowering himself in front of his audience. And like sexualized portrayals of women in television scripts where sexual fantasies of male audiences are fulfilled through distanced visual pleasure (Castro 2009), the hypersexualized stereotypes of physically attractive female characters in Andrew E.'s rap songs reduce women to objects of male fantasy.

Objectification

Unlike American rap that degrades women by casually referring to them as 'bitches,' 'hoes,' and 'pussies,' Andrew E.'s degrades and objectifies female characters in his rap songs by diluting their

identity. He unapologetically asserts ownership of the narrative by sharing his sexual encounters with women whose names were deliberately hypersexualized to toy with the imagination of his listeners who enjoy his brand of novelty music.

Song Title	Description
Binibi Rocha (1990) / Binnie Berenguer Rocha 1997 (2002)	The female character is named after a sexual act: "binobrocha" is Pinoy slang for oral sex.
Shanana (2000)	The female character is named after a horse which the male character enjoys riding.
Body Language (2001)	The female character is named Body.
Tina Moran (2001)	The female character is named after a sexual act: "tinamoran" is the Filipino translation for 'ejaculated'.
Gina Call Medina 1997 (2002)	The female character is named Gina to complete the double entendre "Gina Call" which is a sexual act: "jinakol" is the Filipino translation for 'masturbated'.
Krispy Na Kreamy Pa (2004)	The female character is named Kristina Krimipa, a pun that compares her to the popular donut brand Krispy Kreme.

Table 6: Songs that hypersexualize the female character's names. Source: author.

There are also songs where Andrew E. does not mention the names of the female characters. In "Banyo Queen" (1999), "Fax Me" (1999), "Mahal Kita" (1999), "Baño Queen II" (2000), "Honey" (2000), "M.I.K. (May I Kwento)" (2001), and "Alabanger Song" (2002), he only details the women's physical features and sexual prowess. The women in these narratives served no purpose other than to be the object of the male gaze. Most of these songs involve one-night-stands, but the same kind of identity dilution is used in the female character in the song "Mahal Kita" (1999), where Andrew E.'s long-time girlfriend is described only in terms of her being a sexually adventurous and sexually aggressive partner.

In these songs where women are objectified through dilution of identity, they are treated as accessories that reinforce machismo. The stories humans tell are central to identity formation and the maintenance of a community; names and labels affect the quality and direction of a narrative (King

2009). Thus, the namelessness of female characters is a strong statement suggesting that a woman's identity is not as valuable as her ability to satisfy a man's sexual needs and fantasies.

CONCLUSION: THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN PHILIPPINE POPULAR CULTURE

The stereotyping and sexualizing of women have been commonplace acts in Philippine popular culture and media. The visual prostitution of women had been customary in sitcoms especially in the 1990s, as this was strategic and profitable for "an industry that heavily relies on mass-based programming where 'gory if not sexy video' had to go on air to nail high television ratings" (Castro 2009, 41). The sexualization of women can also be observed in game shows and noon time shows where a group of women wearing skimpy clothing dance in the background for entertainment – a trend prompted by the phenomenal success of Sexbomb Girls, which Mendoza (2019/2020) describes as "a ploy that used sex to up the numbers in the ratings game" that "desensitized the audiences into accepting their images [sexualized women] as a natural part of our Philippine culture" (294-295).

The 1990s and early 2000s were periods wherein the age-old adage 'sex sells' became widely practiced in the Philippine entertainment industry (Mendoza 2019/2020). Thus, it is not surprising that the rap music that flourished during those years used sex and sexuality as central themes. The marketability of sex-themed stories served as the driving force of artists – who are also economic agents – to write lyrics where power is gained, lost, shared, and negotiated using performative language that not only aims to sell ideas through music, but also to establish a Pinoy hip-hop identity.

Alcasid (1992) points out the stark contrast between the opinions of Pinoy rap pioneer George Javier and rap icon Andrew E. whom he interviewed to learn about their insights in the trajectories and future of Pinoy rap. He writes that for Javier, "the fate of Pinoy rap music will depend largely on the rap artists themselves and how they treat the music;" but for Andrew E., "the audience will dictate the fate of rap" (34-35).

Andrew E.'s gendered and sexual narrative rap music that uses the same patterns in terms of characterization and plotlines proves that Pinoy rap is just another product of the culture industry that promotes conformity and false needs to help maintain structures of power. The gender imagery painted by the narrative rap songs of Andrew E. – one that celebrates hegemonic masculinity and misogyny – offers insight into the values of Philippine society as the power politics involved in the production and consumption of this music genre is also an invitation to understand the culture that gave rise to it. Nevertheless, hip-hop should not be monopolized and restrained to the experiences of men. It is high time to bring empowering narratives of women by women to the mainstream.

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Understanding the Practices of Cultural Heritage Reporters

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aimed to understand the process and provide a contextual explanation of cultural heritage reporting by contextualizing and exploring several journalists' practices. Using these practices as objects of study, the article concluded that from the perspective of cultural heritage reporters, such reporting promotes information dissemination, educational impact, awareness about culture, and public motivation in cultural heritage preservation, since media promote the emergence, preservation, and reproduction of culture. As information, cultural heritage reporting provides relevant, factual, and authoritative information about cultural heritage, including information about diverse cultures and their importance to society. Meanwhile, as education, cultural heritage reporting provides historical and scientific information that the public needs to know to better appreciate cultural heritage. Also, this type of reporting raises awareness because it promotes the importance of cultural heritage and urges the public to participate in preservation efforts. Lastly, this reporting also motivates the public to participate in activities using their own capacities to preserve cultural heritage. With these analyses in mind, cultural heritage reporting leads to the preservation of cultural heritage. Through this practice, the people are informed, educated, aware of the need for preservation efforts, and motivated to fulfill their role in cultural heritage preservation.

Keywords: cultural heritage reporting, cultural studies, qualitative communication studies

INTRODUCTION

Cultural Heritage Reporting and Preservation

The mass media have been considered as powerful and influential as they inform society, leading people to take action. In 2015, several news organizations in the Philippines actively reported the construction of Torre de Manila, tagged as an eyesore to the historic Rizal Monument at Luneta Park. According to Idia (2015), some news organizations provided a timeline of events to enhance citizen understanding and appreciation of the complexities involved. The same thing happened in Vigan City when media coverage led to the uproar over the planned demolition of the century-old Ayusan-Paoa bridge, making the Department of Public Works and Highways change its plan, saving the bridge. The Ayusan-Paoa bridge was later declared a National Cultural Treasure. Such a pivotal role is vital to cultural heritage preservation through its reporting, as more people appreciate and understand the value of cultural heritage, allowing intergenerational transmission that will make it last forever.

Thus, the media promotes the emergence, preservation, and reproduction of culture. The media systems play an active role in defining cultural heritage, preserving identity, and consolidating its components in society (Darwish 2019, 136). In addition, the role of the media in preserving cultural heritage could be defined as the use of journalistic, artistic, print, electronic, and broadcast mass communications to inform the professional archaeological community and the general public about the many methods, activities, and plans for encouraging the understanding, protection, conservation, and documentation of the world's archaeological, historical, artistic, and cultural patrimony for the present and future generations (Eck 2013, 1).

Audio-visual and radio archives are vivid testimonies of history and cultural identities. Preserving and facilitating access to cultural heritage is crucial in building the future. These stories include reporting the state of tangible and intangible cultural heritage for the youth, policymakers, and the general public to better understand, appreciate, and eventually act for preservation. By doing so, many future generations will have the chance to experience the cultural heritage that explains their unique identity. Digital Meets Culture (2015) confirms that such stories deserve to be seen and heard to inspire future generations and nurture creative industries.

Thinley (2009, 72) stated that without the media's positive role in the cultural domain, the chances of its corruption and degeneration may be high. Not utilizing the mass media to promote cultural heritage is missing the opportunity to use its reach and power to sustain the popularization of various cultural heritage for many generations. Hence, through its reporting, the mass media can strongly influence the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage. If the media put importance on reporting stories

related to cultural heritage, there are better chances of raising people's awareness which may lead to their participation in cultural heritage preservation.

Muted Voice of Cultural Heritage Reporters

Many developments are changing how people relate to and appreciate cultural heritage. Technological development has caused people to become increasingly disconnected from cultural heritage. The proliferation of digital devices and the ease of access to digital media has made it easier to ignore or forget cultural heritage. In addition, technology has undermined the traditional ways of preserving cultural heritage. For example, many cultures have orally passed down their customs and beliefs, which is becoming increasingly difficult as the world becomes more digital. Similarly, technology has made it easier to replicate and share cultural artifacts, which can erode the unique identity of a culture (Pinney 2023). An influential and powerful platform such as the mass media is needed to counter the changes in the appreciation and understanding of cultural heritage brought by technological advancements.

Presently, the effective role of mass media in propagating and preserving cultural heritage is the common focus of studies about media reporting and cultural heritage. The common epistemological views are that mass media coverage can strongly influence the reputation and propagation of cultural heritage. The mass media is also mediating to inform and educate the public (Hutagalung 2015, 1; Nahak 2018; Thinley n.d.). However, an interesting research gap about this topic is that the journalist's viewpoint on cultural heritage reporting is the muted, marginalized voice waiting to be heard, which this study intends to make privileged. This means that studies focusing on the perspective and experience of doing cultural heritage reporting are limited.

The common studies focus on the mass media's role rather than on what reporters are experiencing in doing the report. Compared to other studies related to media reporting on cultural heritage that the researcher was able to review, e.g., Jaakkola (2014), studies that present the meaning behind such action seem limited. Thus, understanding and describing the viewpoint of journalists in reporting cultural heritage and what is accomplished in such communicative activity is a significant and relevant contribution to mass communication studies, specifically in journalistic practices that focus on cultural heritage.

To this date, the researcher could not find a similar study focusing on the voice of journalists doing cultural heritage reporting. The closest one is a study about the entire practice of cultural journalism similar to cultural heritage reporting. As Jaakkola (2014) discussed, whenever there is a discourse about cultural journalism, not only is its quantity and quality lamented, but so is the need for more academic attention. Furthermore, another study by Skulte (2015) referred to Jaakkola stating that in the context

of contemporary society, cultural journalism is increasingly described all over the world in the academic discourses, as well as in professional discussions, as being in "decline," losing its quality and achieving a secondary position in the everyday routines in media organizations (40). Such statements confirm that the voice of a journalist doing cultural heritage reporting needs to be better explored in communication and media research in the Philippines and other countries.

In news reporting, it is essential to investigate the story produced from this communicative activity and to analyze how such a story is done. A journalist working on these stories has to experience numerous activities that affect how a story related to cultural heritage is made and presented. As Maximiano (2007, 114) stated, a journalist whose motivation is to pursue the moral mission of providing the public with accurate and valuable information will pass the many tests that the practices impose. Salud (2020, 43) added that it is necessary to understand how newsgathering works. Newsgathering is a compendium of talent, skills, experience, training, and character woven into a seamless whole. Hence, it is relevant to understand this practice, including a journalist's viewpoint in reporting stories about cultural heritage more than the role of the media.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Inquiry

In communication research, qualitative studies try to provide a contextual explanation of the meaning behind the action of a communicative activity, such as the practice of cultural heritage reporting. Malik (2022) stated that qualitative research explores subjects' perceptions and understandings of communication. Samaco-Zamora and Fernandez (2016) added that qualitative research allows access to complex feelings, thoughts, and meanings to answer theoretical questions about meanings, understandings, and perceptions. The need to conduct this qualitative study is pivotal as it will enrich the understanding of the communicative act of cultural heritage reporting that needs attention in the academe and the industry.

Participants of the Study

Since the study design is qualitative in nature, it considered four participants following purposive sampling. Nikolopoulou (2022) described purposive sampling as the researcher's judgment when identifying and selecting the individuals, cases, or events that can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives. The participants were two journalists based in a province and two journalists based in a metropolitan city in the Philippines. The participants were chosen based on the

following criteria: (a) a journalist or someone who works for a television or radio station; (b) a journalist employed for at least two years; and (c) a journalist who reports issues concerning cultural heritage.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this study was a semi-structured interview conducted virtually. The interview enabled the researcher to gather information about circumstances and processes that other means cannot observe effectively. Interviews are particularly well suited to understanding the social actor's experience, knowledge, and worldviews (Lindlof & Taylor 2011, 173).

Data Analysis

The captured data through the interview was transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. In the analysis, the researcher employed a rigorous process of data familiarization, coding, theme development, interpretations, and revisions. The analysis was conducted manually since the data gathered was manageable in volume. Analyzing by hand is still preferred by many people, mainly when the amount of data is not substantial. Using a computer to code fewer than 100 pages of text data is not worthwhile because of the time required to do it (Lindlof & Taylor 2011, 260). To ensure good understanding, the initial write-up was presented to the participants to check their agreement or disagreement with what was presented. The participants gave minor suggestions, and after the researcher addressed the issues, the participants agreed to the final research text presentation.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The general research question of this study is: What does cultural heritage reporting accomplish in preserving cultural heritage? To serve the purpose of the study, the researcher asked the participants interview questions, and from the verbatim of the interview, codes were identified that were later categorized as themes. Such themes described the participants' practices of cultural heritage reporting and its accomplishments in preserving cultural heritage.

The analysis of the themes can be considered a theoretical proposition that emerged from the data. As Saludadez (2021) elaborated, constructed knowledge is contextual knowledge – the meaning that defines the action, such as the cultural heritage reporting practices. The data analysis revealed four themes that describe the practice of cultural heritage reporting based on the participants' practices, namely cultural heritage reporting functions as information, education, awareness, and motivation.

Theme 1: Cultural Heritage Reporting as Information

Generally, the participants described their practice of cultural heritage reporting as information sharing. The news stories they produced aim to provide relevant information that help the public make decisions about the role they will play in the many activities concerning cultural heritage. In this description, the practice of cultural heritage reporting provides factual and authoritative information that guides media consumers in their appreciation of cultural heritage. Therefore, it is pivotal that the information used in any news story should be reliable.

Participant A had the following to share:

> I always see to it that when I report stories about cultural heritage, the information I share should be factual to promote cultural heritage and its importance well. *Kailangan nailalagay sa stories kung ano ang mga information na ginagawa ng City Government or other agencies and organizations sa preservation efforts for the public to know.* (transl.: It is necessary to put in the news stories the information on the efforts done for the preservation by the City Government or other agencies and organizations so that the public knows about the preservation efforts). (December 2021)

Participant C (April 2023) explained that cultural heritage reporting is challenging compared to another news beat. This kind of reporting requires a lot of consideration of how the information will be put into an understandable presentation, but at the same time, it can also catch the public's interest.

In addition, the information about cultural heritage and the call for its preservation make an audience understand its importance to their lives and to society. The information shared by the media shapes the public's understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage. That is why – as was shared by the participants – great care is required in choosing the information and the source of such information to be included in a news story. This theme can be related to what Shimray (2019, 2) discussed, namely that informing the people about the persuasive requirement of promoting cultural heritage awakens mindfulness and their interests. Furthermore, it will make them feel apprehensive that the promotion of cultural heritage can be done in different ways. Here, those who consume information are not only the general public but also leaders and policymakers whose possible actions may also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage. As Ling and Abdullah (2009, 3) reported, media coverage can influence how the public and policymakers become more aware of and think about an important issue. The power of the media relies on the quality of information they include in their story. Reliable information can better guide the public in all their life dealings, while misinformation is inaccurate information. Information about cultural heritage and its delivery in news stories is valuable in public decision-making processes and in participating in a movement for cultural heritage preservation. Hence, as articulated

by Participant A, information should be factual and authoritative. Such trustworthy information can be gathered through intensive research and a strategic decision on choosing the most qualified source. The sharing of information about cultural heritage is vital to all the efforts made in campaigning for the preservation of cultural heritage. Such information will allow for a cultural heritage to be shared intergenerationally.

Theme 2: Cultural Heritage Reporting as Education

Cultural heritage reporting is also educational because cultural heritage information is historical and scientific. However, cultural heritage reporting is different from the typical news reporting practice since it shares relevant information to popularize cultural heritage and disseminate accurate information. The information shared is based on historical accounts, research, and documentation proving authenticity. Hence, according to the participants, extensive research is needed to present factual details in cultural heritage reporting. According to Participant A: "I say educational because in my story I am providing them with facts that could deepen their understanding and appreciation on cultural heritage" (December 2021). Participant B reported: "I provide detailed information about the different cultural heritage that I am reporting because it is my way of imparting knowledge to my audience especially the younger generation. Through my reporting about cultural heritage, I am providing them with essential information not just to be informed but to be educated about cultural heritage and why their appreciation matters" (April 2023). Further, Participant C stated: "I am using my voice as a journalist to educate the people about their culture and heritage. *Para siyang advocacy ko* (translation: it's like my advocacy) as a journalist from a city that give so much importance to the preservation of cultural heritage" (April 2023).

As seen in the participants' responses, cultural heritage as education suggests that the audio-visual features of the media maximized in news reporting are powerful for teaching and empowering the younger generation about cultural heritage. Although different social media platforms are now proliferating as channels of various content about cultural heritage, traditional mass media, such as print and broadcast media, remain among the top choices in educational communication. The traditional mass media still dominate because it is cheap and accessible. More so, because they are cheap and accessible, they are best suited to educate the public about such information and issues about cultural heritage.

As one participant emphasized, cultural heritage reporting is essential in educating the public. Their education on cultural heritage can lead to understanding, appreciating, and preserving cultural heritage. This notion is supported by the discussion of Heritage Films (2020), stating that one of the reasons why generations of people document their history is to ensure told stories are accurately preserved.

Doing so will make sure the next generations understand the knowledge of their culture. There are a lot of experiences and wisdom that can be lost as time passes If stories are not recorded. When that information is documented, the reader, viewer, or listener has access to historical information that can be of significant value.

Meanwhile, Culture & Creativity (2017) emphasized the importance of education in preserving cultural heritage. Preservation is not possible without education since the latter is the strongest tool to educate people of their role in preservation. Hence, people need to understand the historical objects to be preserved, as well as the benefits of preservation, before being advocates themselves. This shows that the amalgamation of the mass media and education through cultural heritage reporting is valuable. Combining the influential role of education and mass media can further promote the preservation of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage reporting as education will allow more opportunities for cultural heritage to be appreciated massively, leading to its preservation. Understood as a form of education, cultural heritage reporting promotes and teaches what cultural heritage is and why its preservation is essential.

Theme 3: Cultural Heritage Reporting to Raise Awareness

Participants A, C, and D also view cultural heritage reporting as raising awareness with the hope that through their reporting, it can promote the importance of cultural heritage and call for the public to participate in all the conservation or preservation efforts. The mass media, in their role as powerful institutions, are vital in raising people's awareness about different topics in cultural heritage. However, this topic needs to be addressed, and cultural heritage reporting serves as a platform to set the agenda for stories related to cultural heritage.

Participant A stated the following:

> Our stories in the media are influential. That is why we should exploit them to better the public's understanding of cultural heritage and what can be done to participate in its preservation. As a journalist, I put importance on reporting cultural heritage. I believe that the better the chances that more people will be more aware of the importance of cultural heritage if it is continuously reported. I repeatedly discuss how an audience can participate in the preservation of cultural heritage for the audience to be aware. *Ano ang magagawa nila*? (transl.: What could have been done?) I feel that if *paulit-ulit natin siyang sinasabi* (transl.: I repeatedly report it), people will eventually learn from it. (December 2021)

Participant B added:

> Through my reporting, I am hoping that people will be aware and would understand why we need to preserve cultural heritage *sa huli kapag naintindihan nila* (transl.: and in the end when they understand) they will actively participate to the programs intended for the preservation. (April 2023)

Raising awareness is also explained by Battista (2019) in her article, saying that as human beings, people understand an object or concept, people value them more, and when people value these objects and concepts, they will protect them and strive to learn about them even more. Ling and Abdullah (2009) stated that awareness is essential for protecting and transforming cultural heritage into a gaining factor. Meanwhile, Goodarzparvari and Camejo (2018) explained that a global glance at various cultural heritages would demonstrate that many of these heritages have faced an increasing number of troubles and threats caused by unexpected natural occurrences, environmental parameters, social situations, and some human interventions. Preservation of cultural heritages against various troubles and threats is a complicated task for which several educational and practical approaches are needed. One helpful strategy is through reporting, as explained by the participants. Cultural heritage reporting is a multi-tasked approach to promoting its very subject. Making people aware of their cultural heritage through reporting is a valuable contribution, especially when people neglect their past as part of their identity.

Theme 4: Cultural Heritage Reporting as Motivation

According to the participants, more than providing knowledge to the public about cultural heritage, cultural heritage reporting is about motivation, i.e., motivating the public to participate in all the activities in their capacities to preserve cultural heritage. Through this practice, the public will understand and appreciate cultural heritage. This understanding and appreciation will serve as a motivation to act on cultural preservation. Campaigning for the public's active involvement in all activities concerning cultural heritage through reporting is an essential contribution of this practice, as articulated by Participant D: "I see to it that people are motivated to act, to do something to protect their cultural heritage, that cultural heritage explains who they are" (April 2023). Meanwhile, participant B hopes that people will be motivated to preserve cultural heritage through reporting.

Participant D added that while cultural heritage reporting encourages motivation, this type of reporting is not done regularly because it is not a priority to many news organizations. Stories about cultural heritage are infrequent and can only land in the line-up of any news organization if stories involve many controversies:

> *Hindi kasi palaging inire-report kaya mahirap din na sabihin na* we can motivate the public. *Kailangan maging regular offering siya sa line-up ng mga* news organizations so that the public will really appreciate cultural heritage. (transl.: It is not regularly reported, so it's hard to tell if we can motivate the public. Cultural heritage stories should be a regular offering in the line-up of news organizations so that the public will really appreciate cultural heritage.) (April 2023)

In sum, cultural heritage reporting as motivation manifests the influential role of journalists in society. Cultural heritage reporting makes society understand, appreciate, and preserve their cultural heritage.

Sub-themes: Cultural Heritage Reporting in Practice

The four participants stated that cultural heritage reporting requires different treatment than doing police, political, business, and other stories. After identifying the themes, further analysis also revealed that to perform the participant's cultural heritage reporting, there are specific practices (sub-themes) that the participants are also engaged in. Hence, to deliver a relevant story in cultural heritage, the following are the sub-themes that emerged: conducting research, selecting sources, and constructing creative and dramatic visuals.

Conducting Research

The participants explained that reporting cultural heritage requires an in-depth understanding of relevant information that would make a story clear. All the information presented should always be truthful and accurate, which can only be achieved by researching a news story, implying that cultural heritage reporting requires in-depth data gathering. Information needed in this reporting is valuable for all stakeholders to understand cultural heritage and enable them to appreciate it and eventually take action to preserve it. This theme is supported by Manav Rachna Educational Institution's (n.d.) statement, positing that research brings objectivity and accuracy to news reporting. Hence, a good story is always the outcome of research and investigation. Any information included in a news story should be reliable. The conduct of research can ensure the reliability of information about cultural heritage. Reliable information that is a product of research is what cultural heritage reporting should require – considering the practices that the participants identified, such as information, education, raising awareness, and motivation. In addition, research is a requirement to ensure that cultural heritage is reported realistically, allowing the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage to be

as authentic as possible. In general, cultural heritage reporting aims to allow cultural heritage to thrive for many more generations based on accurate information that is the product of intensive research.

Choosing Sources

The accuracy of a cultural heritage story is also best achieved by choosing the most credible sources of information. The participants explained that a news source in cultural heritage reporting could be an expert in the field, strengthening the discussion presented by the news story. The source/s of information should be credible for a credible story. This theme is consistent with what Greer and Kiousis (cited in Ling & Abdullah 2009, 7) posited, namely that media's credibility depends on the source and medium. The selection of a news source can establish the credibility of a cultural heritage report. The participants emphasized that authority or knowledge of cultural heritage should be prioritized as a news source. Like any other news beat, cultural heritage reporting values the very tenet of journalistic practice that ensures credibility in all aspects.

Creative and Dramatic Visuals

The participants shared that to capture the attention of media consumers about cultural heritage, stories should be presented creatively by using expressive visuals and can bring a sense of reality. As the participants explained, the use of creative and dramatic visuals can capture the attention of viewers for them to appreciate the beauty of the many kinds of cultural heritage. In a way, it is also a strategy to maintain the interest of the audiences in watching cultural heritage reports that to some are considered boring. Such practice is consistent with what Ling and Abdullah (2009, 6) stated, namely that visuals are attention-grabbing and readily foster an emotional connection with the viewer. Cultural heritage reporting requires creativity. This includes the proper selection of visuals that can make the reporting more appealing and effective. In addition, when the tangible or intangible cultural heritage is appropriately photographed, the reporter should apply proper techniques and strategies, rendering the visuals of cultural heritage reporting creative and dramatic. According to the participants, this is a manifestation that a cultural heritage reporter is hands-on in the entirety of the news management process. A cultural heritage reporter does not only gather information or write a news story, but he is also involved in other processes, such as selecting creative and dramatic visuals.

Participant B said:

> In doing a report about cultural heritage reporting, creative visuals are good support to the entire news package especially to us who are working in the television. *Kaya nga*

> *palagi namining iniisip ng cameraman ko kung papaano ang magandang paraan* to capture *yung magandang visuals, yung* color, framing, kind of shots *na gagamitin, dapat meron din siyang* texture at *parang yung*, and visuals are telling something, lively, *siya ganun*. (transl.: I and my cameraman would always think how to capture good visuals, color, framing, kind of shots to use. Our visuals should also have a feel of texture and visuals are telling something, lively, it should be lively). (December 2021)

Practices in Addressing Challenges in Cultural Heritage Reporting

The participants explained that, like any news story, challenges in reporting cultural heritage are inevitable, affecting the production and presentation of a story. Hence, the participants also identified their practices in addressing challenges in cultural heritage reporting.

Limited Resources

According to Participant A, who is based in the province, there are limited resource-persons, documents, and research materials needed to complete a story related to cultural heritage. The participant said that in writing a complete cultural heritage story, interviews with experts in the field, and documents that would support it are essential. Participant A stated:

> We have our local experts here, but those who are connected to national agencies related to cultural heritage preservation is a challenging to connect with. The media should also be given an access if we have repository of documents related to cultural heritage. *Ang mahirap kasi* is the process to get some documents is also challenging *sa haba ng proseso na pinagdadaanan.* (transl.: What is hard and also challenging is the process to get some documents because the process of requesting is rigorous.) At least there should have an understanding that we in the media are their partners in the cause of preserving cultural heritage. (December 2021)

Although some cultural heritage sites are difficult to go to for some of the experts on the topic, the participant tapped all available media to get the perspectives of agencies, organizations, personalities, or even officials outside the province. For example, virtual interviews on the phone and online via video calls are now an acceptable medium for newsgathering, if it is done legally. As Acree (2021) stated, while it certainly has drawbacks, video interviews can save executives and reporters tons of time and make connecting across time zones much more accessible. Hence, maximizing the potential for the new information and communication technology products to be connected to sources of information

about cultural heritage – regardless of location and time zone – is an alternative solution to limited sources. A policy on easy access to documents related to cultural heritage should also be in place for journalists but still guided with the protection of these important documents, as shared unanimously by the study's four participants.

Lack of Training

In a sense, information about cultural heritage can be considered historical and scientific. To present a comprehensive report about cultural heritage, a reporting journalist should at least understand the specifics of cultural heritage and the efforts done for its preservation. However, the participants shared that some journalists who report cultural heritage need the necessary training and education regarding cultural heritage and the appropriate reporting practices. Hence, the participants agreed that attendance at trainings should be prioritized by journalists doing stories about cultural heritage. Tabios (2021) stated that for local media to have an intense interest in cultural heritage, they should be re-oriented on the importance and values of it. The schools and the local government units should play vital roles in the undertakings. The lack of training can also be associated with cultural heritage reports not being a regular news beat of news organizations. Hence, employers do not prioritize the provision of professional development for journalists.

Preservation: The Accomplishment of Cultural Heritage Reporting

By connecting the themes and sub-themes, it can be said that through the participants' practices, cultural heritage reporting provides information, education, awareness, and motivation, leading to the preservation of cultural heritage itself. Cultural heritage preservation is expected because, through the practice, the people are informed, educated, and made aware of the need and their role to play in the preservation efforts. This concurs with what Mulder (2019) articulated, namely that creating heritage consciousness in the global community is a significant achievement. Becker (n.d) added that armed with information each individual can become a powerful advocate in promoting a safer environment for cultural heritage and cultural property. Such statements strengthen the importance of cultural heritage reporting. As Nahak (2018) stated, the mass media through its reporting plays a vital role in propagating any particular culture.

Similarly, when reported by the news, the care and maintenance of different heritage sites and their vulnerability immediately attract attention, and measures are taken for their preservation. While cultural heritage reporters practice the profession in the same manner as the other journalists assigned to another news story, cultural heritage reporters do not only provide information, education,

awareness, and motivation. They follow goals in their practice to safeguard and eventually preserve rich cultural heritage through news reporting. Hence, cultural heritage reporting ensures that the richness of one's cultural heritage is transmitted intergenerationally. It is a goal-oriented communication practice that allows the present cultural heritage to be appreciated by many generations. As the participants shared, cultural heritage reporting is a shared responsibility of journalists to their community. It is a practice that contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage which is a valuable part of one's identity.

However, the accomplishment of cultural heritage reporting is a significant contribution of communication and journalism that is not highlighted. Such accomplishment is critical and valuable for one's identity to be preserved, contributing to the development of a nation. Cultural heritage is one's identity, and its preservation for many more generations should be ensured as development can only be achieved if we understand ourselves and the community we belong to, which is achieved through practicing cultural heritage reporting.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study has proposed a contextual explanation and understanding of cultural heritage reporting and the accomplishment of practicing such. After analyzing and interpreting the interview transcript of the participants, four themes emerged that describe cultural heritage reporting that provides information, education, raising awareness, and motivation. Furthermore, from the four themes that emerged, the sub-themes are the specific practices of the participants. The voice of cultural heritage reporters was acknowledged and the study provides a theoretical proposition of what cultural heritage reporting accomplishes in promoting the importance of cultural heritage.

While undertaking the study, the researcher concluded that cultural heritage reporting is often ignored and considered as an underrated act of journalism that can be explored in communication research because this act serves an important role in the fabric of society. Hence, future research can be done using other qualitative methodological traditions. It is also important for other muted voices relevant to this practice to be heard and make their voice privileged for the practice to be better known and appreciated.

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Enmeshment Aesthetics: Social Media, Mobility, and Materiality in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This article contextualizes and situates the city of Chiang Mai in Thailand as a social media-oriented site for imagining oneself as part of *global* Thailand and for partaking in the cosmopolitan petit bourgeois consumer culture. Café-hopping for social media content production purposes is that trendy phenomenon in Chiang Mai that intersects with the emergence of enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai's consumption spaces. This enmeshment aesthetics offers a lens through which identity formation and the pursuit of mobility can be understood in relation to the acts of moving in spaces and forming relations with different objects. Here, social media plays a key role in facilitating and concretizing this phenomenon that blurs the modern national, cultural, socio-economic, spatial, and even ontological boundaries. Within such blurring, new kinds of identity and modes of engaging with objects, others, and spaces have yet to be investigated more deeply. Weaving together Thai studies, media studies, new materialism, and urban studies, this article seeks to illustrate that social media and its intersubjective dimension have been utilized in order to perform and reaffirm a social media user's imagined selfhood. Ultimately, this phenomenon exposes the ways in which the perceptual and material properties of objects and spaces become a pivot for constituting a desired self-image and visualizing it through the eyes of social media.

Keywords: enmeshment aesthetics, Chiang Mai, social media, materiality, mobility

INTRODUCTION

If one were to imagine oneself in Chiang Mai – the biggest city and a well-known tourist destination in northern Thailand – one can go on Instagram and search for #ChiangMai. One would find images of people strolling around gorgeous flower farms, people drinking matcha green tea in a Japan-inspired tea house, people eating chocolate croissants in a surreal Disney-like French patisserie, and campers making drip coffee with a breath-taking view of Mae Kampong village. These images on Instagram of aesthetically inviting cafés, coffee houses, restaurants, and social media landmarks with diverse landscapes and cross-cultural elements are the current prominent visualities of Chiang Mai.

As one of the online image-making sites, Instagram is a social media platform that allows its users to use still and moving images as forms of storytelling about individuals (the users) and the objects or spaces in their backgrounds. Looking at #ChiangMai on Instagram, images of the designs and landscapes of Chiang Mai's consumption spaces usually come up. These images reveal that the deliberate designs and features of these spaces are intentional about their appeal to the senses and their invocation of a desire to photograph oneself in such places and share the images as social media posts. If one keeps scrolling down #ChiangMai on Instagram, one will notice an act of crafting what Erving Goffman (1959) calls "personal mise-en-scène" where social media users' images feature their bodies against the field or a backdrop of their surrounding natural, cultural, and social settings.

As of the late 2010s, Chiang Mai has emerged as a social media-oriented site for imagining oneself as part of *global* Thailand, and for worlding – the art of being global (Bui 2021, 60). This worlding phenomenon is situated in what this article calls 'enmeshment aesthetics,' defined as the intentional and material embodiment of cosmopolitanism in consumption spaces that capitalize on the sensible dimensions of objects, foodways, and spatial designs. In this embodiment, the art of being global is done through forming relationalities between oneself, the intended aesthetics of a place, and the objects of consumption that altogether create the desired mise-en-scène. Despite seeming like a personal matter or endeavor, the question is whether these newly formed relationalities are to be kept secret or publicized to others.

The use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook has become associated with this phenomenon of enmeshment aesthetics, especially as it relates to the prominent café-hopping culture of Chiang Mai. The common scenes of people hopping between different cafés and consumption spaces with high quality cameras to document their daily activities for social media audiences reflect how Chiang Mai has grown into a "vast landscape of visual social media culture" (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020). Indeed, Chiang Mai has materialized into a landscape of semiotics that are meant to be felt and captured for social media.

With such a noticeable phenomenon, enmeshment aesthetics and café-hopping for social media offer a critical lens to understand Chiang Mai and Thailand in the 21st century. This intersection of media studies, area studies, place-making, and the metaphysics of media technologies has appeared to be an emerging trend within Southeast Asian media studies. The circulations of cultural elements, knowledge, and new relations between places and human practices speak to the global turn (Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017) where restricted boundaries of nation-states and academic disciplines no longer suffice to capture the complexity of transnational, transcultural, and global phenomena.

Through textual and aesthetic analysis with cultural studies perspectives, this article aims to weave together these interconnected aspects to understand the current trajectory of Chiang Mai, Thailand. The first part of the paper tracks the genealogy of aesthetics as a concept and contextualizes Chiang Mai's enmeshment aesthetics. The second part explores the intertwining of historical and sociocultural dimensions of enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai as an international tourist destination with a particular focus on the emerging local middle-class population and their pursuit of global mobility. The last part theorizes this social media visual culture as it pertains to the materiality of enmeshment aesthetics. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that enmeshment aesthetics is a new phenomenon that pushes toward future studies and understandings of people's engagements with identity formation, urban developments, and world-shaping technologies.

AESTHETIC THEORY AND ENMESHMENT AESTHETICS

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "aesthetic" as an adjective is synonymous with the words "beautiful" or "pleasing in appearance." When an object is described as "aesthetic," it usually means that the object triggers a sense of pleasure and satisfaction in the person perceiving and looking at the object. As a noun, aesthetics is used to refer to an "approach to [study] what is pleasing to the senses and especially sight" (Merriam-Webster 2023).

Aesthetics philosopher James Shelley argues that the term "aesthetics" was introduced into the philosophical lexicon in the 18th century where it has since widely referred to as "judgments, attitudes, experiences, qualities, objects, and values" (Shelley 2013, 246). As a large body of works, the study of aesthetics expands across different disciplines from the arts to philosophy, and to cultural studies and literature. Accordingly, there are many thinkers who have come to be associated with the concept of aesthetics, such as Plato, Aristotle, Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Theodor Adorno to name a few. These thinkers' works span a wide range of aesthetic landscapes from music to paintings. What these thinkers seem to agree upon is that aesthetics is contingent on ontological and epistemological contexts. That is to say, there is both a specificity and universality of knowing within aesthetic considerations that must be determined by the senses.

Alexander Baumgarten first adopted the term "aesthetics [as] the science of knowledge acquired through the senses" (Giovannelli 2012, 2). In Baumgarten's poetic use of the concept, aesthetics resembles the Greek word "aisthetikos" meaning "of the sense perception" (ibid). In forging the connection between sense perception and knowledge, Aristotle argued that humans' desire for knowledge begins with the "natural delight we take in sense perception" (Curran 2012, 24). In the entanglement between knowledge, sense perception, and sensual pleasures, Immanuel Kant emerged as one of the key figures in the philosophy of aesthetics. Kant presupposed that when one finds an object beautiful or aesthetic, one consequently seeks to pronounce that aesthetic judgment out onto the world and expects the same affirmation from others (Kant 2001, 7, 5: 212-213).. Kant famously said "[one] judges not merely for [oneself], but for everyone" (ibid.). In this spirit, aesthetics is not only a subjective experience, but also one that is highly intersubjective whereby one comes to be oriented (Ahmed 2006) toward the (aesthetic) world with objects and others.

When the presence of others comes to play a role in aesthetic judgments, aesthetics becomes a matter of socially mediated taste. Although taste denotes one of the human senses, it also refers to a broader schema of one's appreciation and dis-appreciation according to society's social narratives. Philosopher Carolyn Korsmeyer articulates that a study of taste "requires consideration of … the determinants of culture" (Korsmeyer 2013, 257). She points out here the role of social conventions that determine one's dislike or liking of certain sensible objects. Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) hence becomes an important reminder that taste is not only "linked with pleasure and displeasure" (Korsmeyer 2013, 257), but also acts as a "marker of class" (Bourdieu 1984, 2). In this Bourdieusian sense, aesthetics is truly what "[bridges] a subjective judgment with a consensus judgment" (Anderson and Peña-Guzmán 2022).

Through the framing of enmeshment aesthetics, the paper intentionally puts aesthetics together with the conception of enmeshment to intervene in the study of globalization and glocalization. Prominent global studies scholars Manfred B. Steger and Paul James use the term "enmesh" to illustrate the idea of glocalization where "the global is always dialectically enmeshed in the local (and vice-versa)" (Steger and James 2020, 4). Steger and James contend that glocalization reflects globalization's "homogenization tendencies that co-exist and interact with local dynamics" which favors the "expressions of cultural diversification and hybridization" (ibid.). Thinking with Steger and James, to enmesh is to entangle and hybridize. An English scholar known for their works on object-oriented ontology Timothy Morton similarly uses the term "mesh" to illustrate "the interconnectedness of all living and non-living things" (Morton 2010, 29).

Adopting Morton's usage of the term and putting it in conversation with Steger and James' use of enmeshment, this paper proposes that enmeshment aesthetics encompasses the intentionality and materiality of visual and material culture that, when entangled with peoples as agents, lead to the rise

of multiplicities, in-betweenness, and hybridity that destabilize any national, cultural, spatial, and ontological boundaries. Enmeshment aesthetics, therefore, stages an event where objects or spaces with different sociocultural and historical elements clash and enter the meaning (re)making stage. In short, enmeshment aesthetics makes visible how humans are aesthetic beings who intentionally orientate themselves toward the phenomenal world, by which they are themselves "open [for] a new page of aesthetics: a page that remains blank" (Sasaki 2010, x).

Bringing Chiang Mai back into the conversation, the overt mixing of Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and European cultural elements and visualities becomes enmeshment aesthetics. Not only that enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai is growing, but it is also a matter of contesting aesthetic judgments. When an imitation of the Hachiko monument originally located in front of the world-famous Shibuya crossing in Tokyo, Japan was installed along with an imitation of a Japanese subway station entrance at Think Park (a Japan-inspired shopping district located in Chiang Mai's Nimmanhemin area), it sparked critical conversations in Thailand about this overt Japanization (Thairath Plus 2022). Such overt Japanization gave rise to the locals' concerns about the fleeting of the local Lanna, i.e., northern Thai, in newly constructed environments or "texture" (Fuhrmann 2018) of Chiang Mai. In recognizing this tension, the paper acknowledges how urban-built forms and consumption spaces reflect both the coming of global influences and the preservation of the local memories of the place tied to its lingering visualities of the past. Nonetheless, the question that lies within this tension is one of authenticity and genealogy at the heart of the ethnic and national identity.

Following prominent Thai studies scholar Thongchai Winichakul in his discussion of Michel Foucault's method of genealogy (2019), many Thai scholars tend to fall back into producing knowledge that assumes a pre-existing, ostensibly authentic, and nationalist construction of Thailand or a dominant ethnic group. The prominent narrative that Thailand has never been colonized – perpetuated in Thailand's K-12 education system – has hindered critical reflections on the sociocultural history of Thailand and upholds the myth of the prehistoric existence of Thailand and pure Thainess untouched by its non-Thai counterparts.

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (2002) coined the term "crypto-colonialism" to capture the hidden conditions of coloniality in the foundation of the modern Thai nation-state where a dominant ethnic group of Siamese elites adopted the colonial West's creation of a modern nation-state. The current image of Thai national identity is created through the work of cultural hegemony and the Thainization of the ethnic others in the region. Crypto-colonialism along with Peter A. Jackson's description of Thailand as a "semi-colonial" country (2005) both complicate the authenticity of Thainess and resurface the erasure and marginalization of diverse ethnic identities present in the periphery of Bangkok, such as the Khon Maueng/Lanna people in the north, the Malayu/Peranakan people in the

south, as well as other prominent diasporic communities in Thailand, namely Chinese, Shan, Persian, South Asian, and Vietnamese communities.

These semi-colonial and crypto-colonial conditions put Thailand and its peoples in an in-between position where the nation is open to adopting the cultural elements of other cultures while the diverse ethnic locals grapple with preserving their identities. Such conditions arguably give rise to the co-existence of competing cultures from within and beyond the locality of Thailand whereby Thailand has "a long history of borrowing and appropriating other forms" (Ferguson 2010, 228) of cultures. Within Thailand, the current generations of non-Siamese and diasporic ethnic groups, like the Khon Maung of northern Thailand, have grown up with the sensible lingering of their otherness whereby they see the need to hold on to their distinct identities that are yet marginal to the Bangkokian image of Thainess. Thus, the discussion on retaining the Lanna aesthetics of Chiang Mai in response to the recent Japanization reflects the contemporary struggle arising from the history of Chiang Mai as a periphery to the cores of Bangkok and Thailand as a crypto- and semi-colonial state.

In situating enmeshment aesthetics in the context of Chiang Mai, recognizing these unique historical conditions is critical to follow Winichakul in dismantling the tendency to fall into producing other knowledge that assumes a pre-existing and untouched national or ethnic identity. The article thus understands enmeshment aesthetics as that which deconstructs the assumption of authenticity and pureness of national, cultural, and ethnic constructs.

In this view, the pervasiveness of Americanization (Talamayan 2019), the increase in diasporic media (Gordon 2019), the glocalization of popular culture (Aberin et al. 2021), the transnational exchanges and linkages in national cinemas (Espeña 2021), and the social media-driven enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai expose the relevance of complex inter-Asian and global contacts in Southeast Asian media studies. This not only carries the potential for understanding how Southeast Asia and its engagements with all forms of media are imbricated with global connectivity and the circulation of cultural elements across spaces and bodies but also allows its scholars to critically view the region's sense of place while recognizing its complex histories and coloniality.

MATERIALITY, URBANITY, AND SPACE-MAKING

In using enmeshment aesthetics as a point of departure, the article understands that textual and aesthetic analyses of social media images (discussed in the upcoming sections) point further to what Sarah Ahmed coins "queer phenomenology" (2006). Ahmed groundbreakingly illustrates how we, as human beings, come to know and experience the world through orientations toward objects and other people. The ways in which objects and other bodies come to exist in our perceptual (aesthetic) horizon

determine how we move, orient ourselves, and form relationalities with them. In the same vein, new materialism and the materiality turn in the humanities and social sciences have pointed to theories such as Assemblage Theory and Affect Theory that foreground the entanglement between matter/meaning and human/non-human in the larger ecologies of things. This turn marks a new shift that focuses on how the physical and non-physical attributes of objects or people allow them to perceive and make sense of one another relationally. The turn also emphasizes the materiality of non-human things that constantly inform a human's process of being.

Hence, framing enmeshment aesthetics as a practice that entangles national and cultural semiotics, an emphasis has to be put on its material dimension in the world of perception. Influenced by the works of theorists such as Manuel De Landa, Bruno Latour, and Karen Barad, the materiality and assemblage turn offer much insight into the interdependence of human actors and their larger relational ontologies and ecologies with non-human objects and non-human others (including material and nonmaterial beings). Without shifting away from the focus on social media, weaving together enmeshment aesthetics and the materiality and new materialism turn leads to a theorization of social media visual culture that acknowledges how what goes into social media content has a purpose and intentionality behind it.

Social media, as a recent 21st-century phenomenon, are the extension of the bodies of their users. It is where their users' sense of self materializes in a supplementing realm with a supplementing set of audiences, viewers, and followers. Instagram, one of the most prominent social media photo-sharing/image-making platforms, aspires to be "an authentic and safe space for inspiration and expression" (Instagram 2023) – signifying the platform's ambition for "aesthetic visual communication" (Manovich 2017) and the "redesigning [of] practices, cultural institutions, and material spaces" (Leaver, Highfield, and Abidin 2020).

As one lives with social media in the 21st century, one has learned to become aware of the materiality of things, objects, and others. The act of photographing a space, a place, and placing a body against such a backdrop reflects an awareness of the intersubjective dimension of social media. Social media owners, i.e., content creators, position themselves as subjects that move through the world, and at the same time, position themselves as objects of the gazes of social media. When social media users share an image of themselves with objects of consumption or with an aesthetic landscape, they are pronouncing their aesthetic judgment intended to reach their social media audiences. Enmeshment aesthetics, as what makes visible the clashes of cultures, offers not only a global sophisticated aesthetic judgment but also signifies exposure to foreign objects and places beyond what is already familiar locally.

Once enmeshment aesthetics concentrates on particular areas of Chiang Mai more than others, certain

neighborhoods become spaces known for social media visual culture. Nimmanhemin, now the nightlife and entertainment district of Chiang Mai, located on one of the busiest intersections of the city, is known for a concentration of chic cafés, restaurants, bars, shopping centers, and social landmarks that feature elements of hybridized Western and Asian aesthetics. This district houses One Nimman, an Italy-inspired shopping complex, and ThinkPark where the imitations of a Japanese subway station entrance and a Hachiko monument have been installed.

As of mid-2023, a section of what used to be a poorly maintained and dirty Mae Kha canal that runs along the Chiang Mai inner city has transformed itself into a new tourist spot with food stalls and shops resembling the Otaru canal northeast of Sapporo, Japan, but with a twist of colorful Lanna-style lanterns that were placed for the 2022 local Yipeng festival. Like Nimmanhemin and the Mae Kha canal, Chang Moi, a historical alley connecting Chiang Mai's inner city to its historic Chinatown, has recently received a large interest from young locals and tourists. Here, they can embark on a photo-taking adventure by crossing the alley in front of Chiang Mai's iconic rattan store near by a 1990s-themed Millilit café and Brewginning – Chiang Mai's famous coffee shop with hybrid Chinese-Northern Thai aesthetics.

Due to the richness of enmeshment in these areas, Chiang Mai locals intentionally visit these spaces of consumption in order to identify with and embody the spaces' intended conceptual slogans or gimmicks. Thus, Chiang Mai's café-hopping for social media and its resulting enmeshment aesthetics point to this new materialist and ontological turn that the Southeast Asian media studies scholars have yet to explore in detail. Combining with the region's complex historical and postcolonial conditions at times of rapid global interconnectedness, this turn toward how people, objects, and spaces inform one another's relational ontologies offers new lenses through which to view the intersections of identity formation, placemaking, and new media technologies.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the main subjects of the photos position themselves as the main objects in the mise-en-scène of the photographs that they share on social media. In these images, the enmeshment aesthetic elements in the background and around the subjects help to craft the subject's intended visual storyline.

These images feature Chiang Mai's Mae Kha canal and Think Park where the enmeshment of the local Chiang Mai and East Asian (Japan and South Korea mainly) aesthetics have become the city's prominent social media landscapes. An accumulated collection of these images in the online world comes to direct the current images of Chiang Mai as a place product for tourists, visitors, and even the locals themselves. Due to the author's formative years growing up in Chiang Mai and witnessing its changing visual social media trends, it became noticeable that Chiang Mai's current visualities are of enmeshment aesthetics, especially the cultural elements of Japan and South Korea. Arguably, this

phenomenon has shaped the place-making of Chiang Mai and stimulated the consumers to identify Chiang Mai in terms of "consumer goods and positive product images" (Porananond 2016, 90). Not only are Chiang Mai's current product images of Japanese and Korean aesthetics, they are also of affordable, accessible, and Internet-famous consumption spaces.

Figure 1: Mae Kha Stream with its Otaru canal-inspired aesthetics. Source: Instagram.

The next section will perform critical textual and aesthetic analyses of social media images and contextualize them within Thai tourism studies, the materiality turn, and object-oriented ontology.

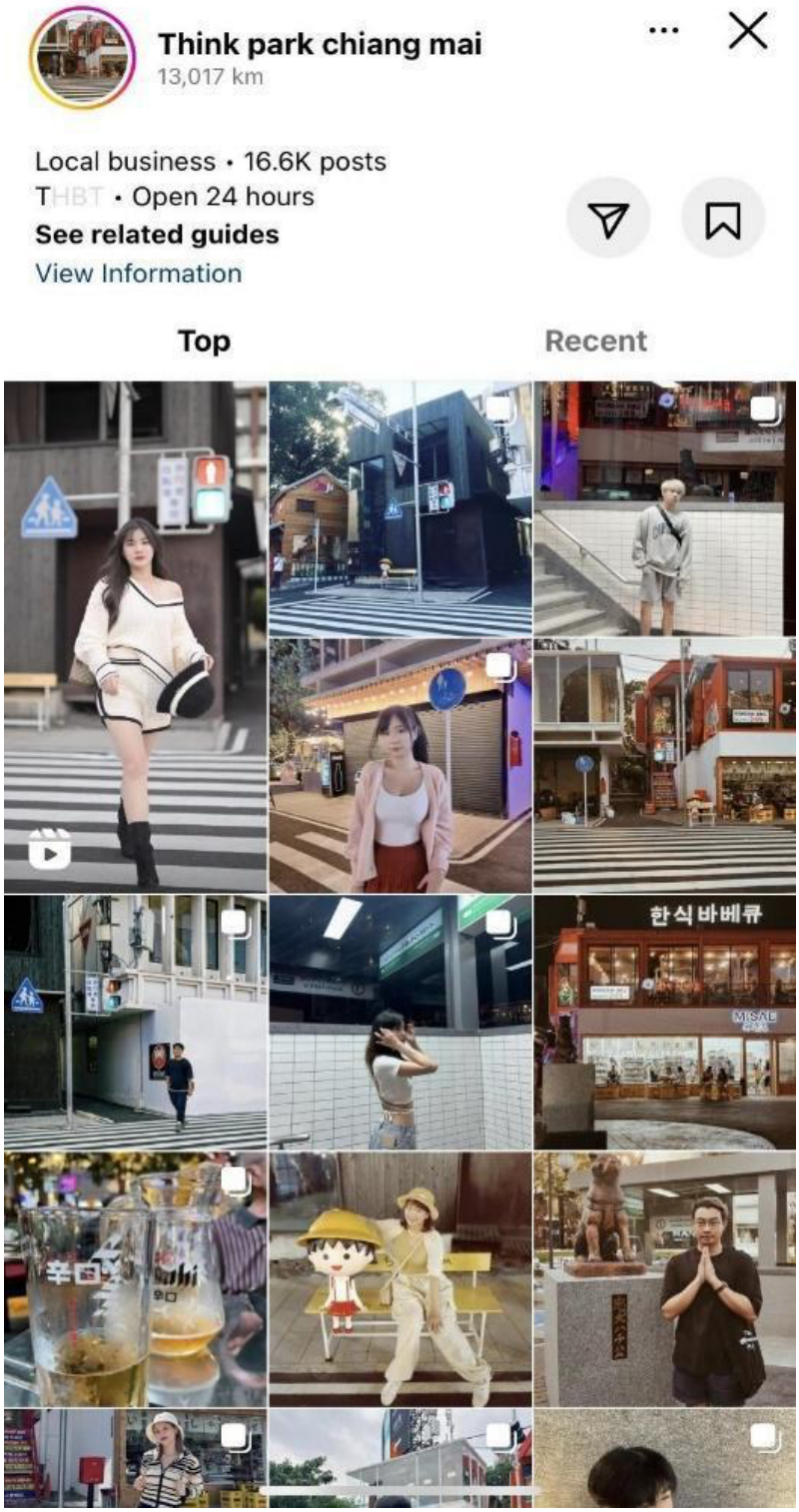


Figure 2: Think Park Chiang Mai with its Japan and South Korea elements. Source: Instagram.

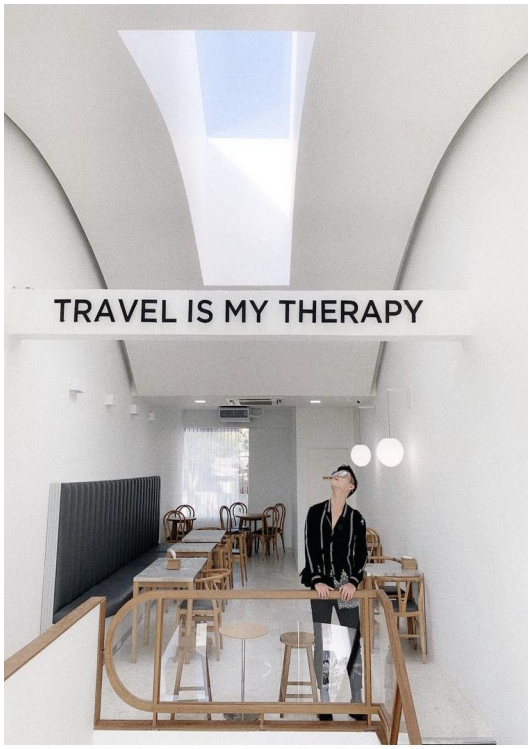
COSMOPOLITANISM, TOURISM, AND MOBILITY

According to a 2021 dataset by *Chiang Mai We Care เชียงใหม่ ฉันจะดูแลเธอ*, there are roughly 2,700 cafés in the province of Chiang Mai. In the heart of Chiang Mai city alone, there are already approximately 1,000 cafés. With these numbers, it would take years to complete a café-hopping project of the 2,700 cafés (considering that many more cafés will open and others close in the meantime). While these numbers reflect the overt café and coffee culture of the city in recent years, it is important to note that coffee and the presence of cafés have long existed in Chiang Mai. Starting in 1974, Chiang Mai became the first province in Thailand to start growing Arabica coffee as part of an initiative to eradicate opium plantations in the high mountain areas of Northern Thailand (Chiang Mai We Care 2021). Since then, the consumption of coffee has increased in Chiang Mai and in Thailand in general, and Chiang Mai has now become the province with the most coffee-related businesses in Thailand (ibid.). With such many cafés throughout the province, the rise of competition between cafés has led to rapid openings and closings. The ones that tend to survive and sustain their customer base have an exceptional quality of specialty coffee or are hard-to-compete with social media aesthetics. The visual aspect of cafés is a trendy element that many new cafés in Chiang Mai aspire to execute well.

As cafés with unique and eye-catching aesthetics grow in number, café-hopping for social media content production purposes is a phenomenon in Chiang Mai that began in the mid-2010s. This time period is significant because it marks the beginning of a push of café culture and enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai. This phenomenon concerns the exponential influx of international Asian and domestic tourists who come to Chiang Mai with social media technologies to capture their experiences while traveling. As a world-renowned destination for cultural tourism, the presence of international tourists has long been established in Chiang Mai. However, over the last decade, middle- and upper-middle-class tourists from within Asia with their eyes toward aesthetics and affordability have dominated Chiang Mai's tourism industry. With the influx of tourists and social media, the city has increased its consumption and hospitality businesses that cater to the different palates and tastes of its visitors. The phenomenon turns Chiang Mai into a place where spatial, cultural, and socio-economic mobility is visualized through coenesthetic experiences in consumption spaces, especially in cafés.

Cafés are first and foremost places where the consumption of foods and drinks to sustain the bodies happens. They are also places where the choices of what people consume and the deliberate designs of the spaces come to embody intended social meanings and represent the tastes and aesthetic judgments of the café goers. Hence, the different variety of foods, drinks, and design choices offered by different cafés determine who comes to such spaces. While cafés with humble aesthetics and European-style menus with simple coffee choices dominated Chiang Mai's early café scenes, the newer cafés with social media-worthy aesthetics and diverse beverage menus corresponding to the more adventurous tastes of recent younger tourists have attracted a much larger customer base. The

point here is that the constant presence of both international and domestic tourists in Chiang Mai has influenced how consumption businesses thrive better and how certain foods, drinks, and spatial designs have become popular markers of tourist mobility and lifestyle. As Chiang Mai's local urban middle class grew up witnessing these tourist-oriented developments in urban Chiang Mai and its accessible consumer culture, these individuals arguably aspire to partake in the same lifestyle. Hence, what affirms such aspiration and participation in this tourist mobility is the noticeable increase in locally owned cafés with non-Thai enmeshment aesthetics intended for social media content production.

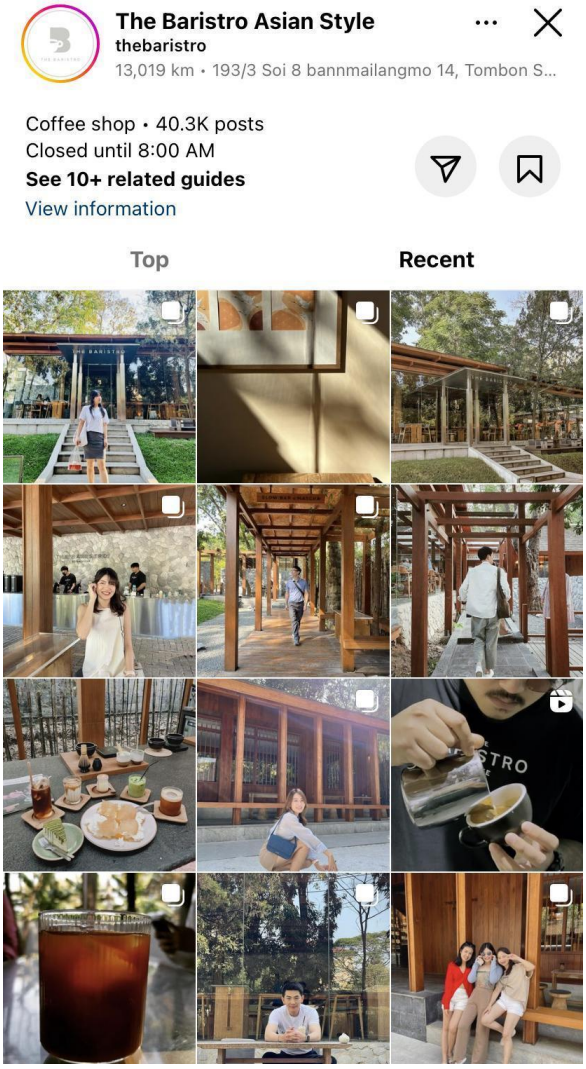


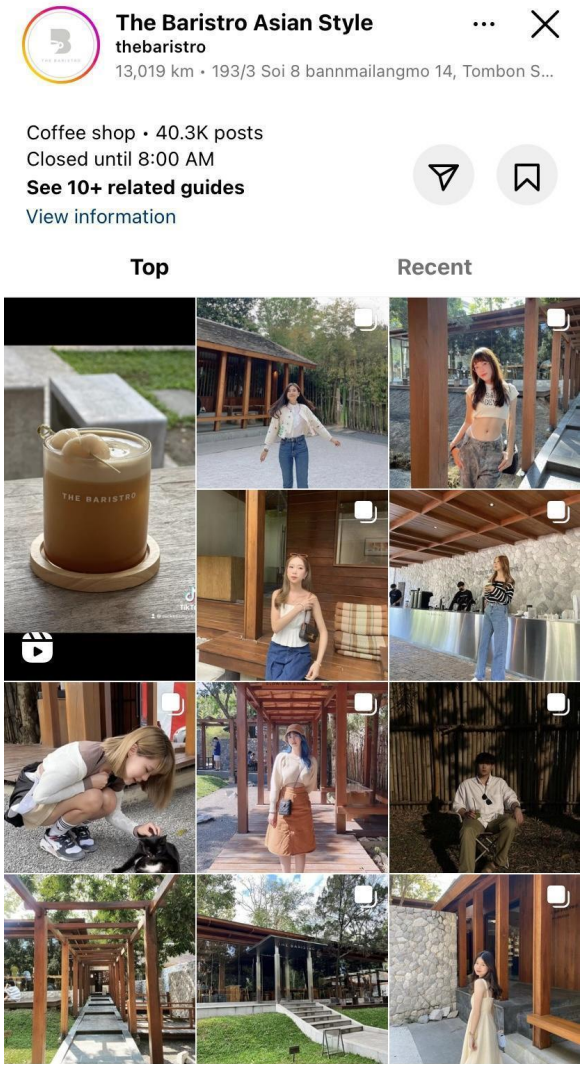
Figures 3 and 4: Transit Number 8's slogan TRAVEL IS MY THERAPY. Source: Instagram.

Figures 3 and 4 feature two public posts by social media users who took photographs of themselves with the slogan 'Travel is my therapy,' which is part of the intentional decorative design inside Chiang Mai's Internet-famous Transit Number 8 café. In the mise-en-scène of these two photos, the subjects appear in full body against Transit Number 8's backdrop of a modern minimalist architecture that illuminates the contrasting black and wooden furniture. The slogan 'Travel is my therapy' is positioned at the center of both photographs where both subjects look up to it. As a visual storytelling, these two photos communicate to their viewers the aesthetic judgment of the accounts' owners. By positioning themselves as subjects in these photos, they portray a sense of individualism through their chosen style of clothing and their staged body as immersed in the intended interior design of the café. Upon gazing at the slogan they communicate to their social media audience their affinity with it and that travel is *their* therapy. The slogan is written in English rather than in Thai, signifying the café owners'

global outlook. Thus, what is clear is the café's targeted niche group of café-hoppers and consumers who possess substantial knowledge of the English language and who are part of a socioeconomic class where 'travel is therapy' is a common desire.

As public social media posts, these two photos are part of the current image of Transit Number 8's intended 'airport-like' aesthetics. This deliberate design inspired by the local owners' love for international traveling (Dsignsomething.com, n.d.) allows the consumers to identify with the slogan, which then creates a sense of contentment with the café's designs. This contentment is therefore intentionally captured and turned into a social media post for their audiences.





Figures 5 and 6: The Baristro Asian Style (source: Instagram)

Like Transit No. 8, The Baristro Asian Style is another successful café in Chiang Mai that reflects middle-class consumption of enmeshment aesthetics. Having grown up with a family business centered

around tourism in Chiang Mai, Tor Thanit – an owner of the Baristro cafés with different locations throughout Chiang Mai – is inspired to demonstrate that aesthetically pleasing cafés can serve good coffee (The Cloud 2021). Through utilizing distinctly different and aesthetically inviting architectural designs in all of his cafés, Thanit is able to create highly affective spaces aimed not only as co-working spaces for young professionals with 'good' coffee but also for photo-taking opportunities. It intentionally enmeshes the local Lanna and East Asian aesthetics along with its high-quality coffee beans and western-style bakeries with a Thai twist to attract a wide range of customers (The Cloud 2021). In Thanit's other Baristro cafés, he similarly emphasizes the aesthetic dimension to attract a niche group of consumers – those who look for good quality coffee beverages and social media-worthy aesthetics (ของดีเชียงใหม่ KhonDeeChiangMai, Official 2021).

These aforementioned cafés reflect the owners' exposure to international travels and a middle-class work-life balance where 'good' coffee and 'aesthetic' working spaces are desired. These spaces make visible the invitation to their customers to form relationships with their objects of consumption and the designs of the cafés. This intentionality reflected in the choices of objects, spaces, and cultural elements offers an aesthetic experience that is already part of Chiang Mai's historical conditions as a tourist destination. Chiang Mai's tourism has long been world-renowned and materialized in the forms of affordable and accessible consumption and hospitality venues. Indeed, the whole province is now a hub of aesthetics-oriented petit bourgeois consumerism.

The influx of global tourists has been prominent in Chiang Mai, but its dynamics started to change in the early 2010s when tourists from around Asia, especially China, came to dominate the tourist scenes in Chiang Mai. Among Chinese tourists, Chiang Mai is known for being "a place of Wenyi Xiaozi (cultured youth, petit bourgeoisie) and has gained popularity among Chinese middle-class urbanites" (Gao et al. 2022). This phenomenon can be traced back to when the Chinese film blockbuster *Lost in Thailand* (Zheng 2012) turned Thailand into the number one most-visited country by Chinese tourists – making up over 26% of Thailand's international tourist arrivals in the late 2010s (Gao et al. 2022, 4). This film gave Chiang Mai a wide presence of Chinese tourists (Mostafanezhad and Promburom 2018) who have come to fuel Chiang Mai and Thailand's growing affordable petit bourgeois middle-class consumer culture. In the study of outbound Chinese tourists in Chiang Mai, Gao et al. (2022) argue that "a strong aesthetic dimension" (11-12) of Chiang Mai comes from its onsite affordable and accessible pursuit of personal pleasures.

The influx of Chinese tourists with a passion for petit bourgeois consumption and mobile technologies (Gao et al. 2022) led to a massive increase in Chiang Mai's aesthetic and tourist-oriented restaurants, cafés, spas, hotels, sightseeing programs, and shopping areas. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic that cut Chinese tourists' access to Thailand, domestic Thai tourists along with Korean and Japanese ones have since continued this demand for affordable and aesthetics-oriented consumption.

Chiang Mai, in this sense, has always responded to and depended on the presence, desires, and gazes of its domestic and international tourists as it navigates its role as a consumption hub. Hence, the place-making of Chiang Mai has always included the orientations of human agents to the ecologies of things human and non-human in the locality of Chiang Mai, which often generates the place-product images of the city. Not only that the local entrepreneurs have since invested in a tourist-oriented consumer culture, but the affordability and accessibility of Chiang Mai have also promoted what tourism studies call the 'performance turn.'

According to cultural geographer Jonas Larsen and tourism sociologist John Urry (2011), the performance turn in tourism studies emphasizes how "tourists experience places in multi-sensuous ways" (1112). Tourism is not a matter of passive inhabitation of a place, but it is rather an active orientation and immersion of oneself into an ostensibly foreign space. One is not just looking and seeing but is constantly grappling with noises, scents, touches, and affects that shape the responses of their bodies to such stimuli. That is to say, the materiality of a place as experienced through bodily perception is key to the performance turn in tourism.

The term 'performance' is critical in tourism studies as it offers a paradigm shift where tourist destinations have become "materially and symbolically staged" (Larsen and Urry 2011, 1112). It is here that the performance turn and the use of aesthetics bring to light how tourist mobility is about utilizing sensible objects and spaces to create a sense of being able to move across boundaries of space and social identities. To be a tourist is first and foremost to form new identity-based relations with objects and spaces, including unfamiliar sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc. Hence, social media is such prominent tool for capturing and publicizing such performances and embodiment of tourist mobility. The rise of social media visual culture along with the increase of consumption spaces in Chiang Mai reflects how the materiality of objects and spaces are intertwined with the performances of selfhood both in the online and offline world. Vlogging, blogging, photographing, and posting about oneself immersing in the materiality of Chiang Mai are thus acts to "corporeally stage social relations and inscribe presence into the 'atmosphere' of place and the moment" (Larsen 2005 in Larsen and Urry 2011, 1114).

The performance turn provides a further articulation of the rise of enmeshment aesthetics where relational ontologies between bodies, objects, and spaces take shape within these social media- and tourist-oriented consumption spaces. This turn in tourism studies is particularly useful in understanding Chiang Mai and Thailand's world-renowned tourism industry and how it has shaped the art of tourist mobility – where individuals' performance of the tourist role marks movements across national and cultural restrictions. The next section brings together this understanding of the entanglement between the performance turn and the 21st-century use of social media for negotiating this tourist mobility.

PERFORMING MOBILITY, SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATIONS, AND SUPPLEMENT

As mentioned in the previous section, what remains a subject of exploration in the increase of tourist-oriented consumption spaces in Chiang Mai is the locals' aspiration for performing tourist mobility. Being able to mobilize across different social, class, cultural, and national boundaries can be understood as an affirmation of an individualist self – a "global self" (Bui 2019) to be exact. Much like the aesthetics of Transit Number 8 and The Baristro Asian Style, the fact that different national and cultural elements clash together to create a sense of enmeshment aesthetics is a way to visualize tourist mobility. In the case of Chiang Mai, it seems that this global selfhood is heavily imagined through personal consumption of foreign/non-Thai objects, foodways, semiotics, and cosmopolitan aesthetics in cafés, restaurants, and social media landmarks. East Asian foods and Western bakeries in non-Thai-looking spaces become the embodiment of tourist mobility. While this embodiment makes clear how enmeshment aesthetics become materialized through objects of consumption in urban Chiang Mai, it also sheds light on the fluid subject-object identity of its consumers.

In *Being and Nothingness* (1956), French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre discusses in the section "The Look" how one exists as an object to be looked at by others. Sartre argues that this realization of oneself as an object of others' gazes gives rise to one's self-reflective consciousness where one becomes self-aware through the act of being looked at. Frantz Fanon, through his phenomenological account of being a black person in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), points to how the gazes of others "fix" and put him in relation to them. This experience of being a subject for oneself and an object of others points toward Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of "flesh" (1968) whereby as a visible being, we both see and are seen. As we participate in the same perceptual world as others, Merleau-Ponty points out how one's two hands can touch and be touched (2013), illustrating the fluid co-existence of body-subject and body-object identity. Emphasizing the role of the look in Sartrean existentialism and Fanon and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the article contends that social media allows and forces its users to operate as both an object of others' perception and as their own auteur – in a sense that they make deliberate artistic and aesthetic choices for their desired mise-en-scène.

As fluid agents that are both a subject and an object, social media users who café-hop in Chiang Mai rely on this ambiguity of the body and the inhabited spaces to form subjectivity and selfhood. Figure 7 illustrates a social media post from แฟนพาเที่ยว/My Life My Travel Facebook page where the content features "7 คาเฟ่เชียงใหม่ สวยทุกที่ ชิคทุกร้าน มุมถ่ายรูปถือปัง" (transl.: *7 beautiful and chic Chiang Mai cafés with fabulous photo-taking spots*). The significance of the language used in this social media post with over 3.7 thousand likes, two thousand shares, and 129 comments is that the aesthetically pleasing quality of these seven consumption spaces is instagrammable and worth-taking-photos-of. The post re-affirms the trend of intentionally immersing oneself in the materiality of objects and spaces by which the

enmeshment aesthetics of Thai and non-Thai elements offer a sense of tourist mobility that social media can capture.

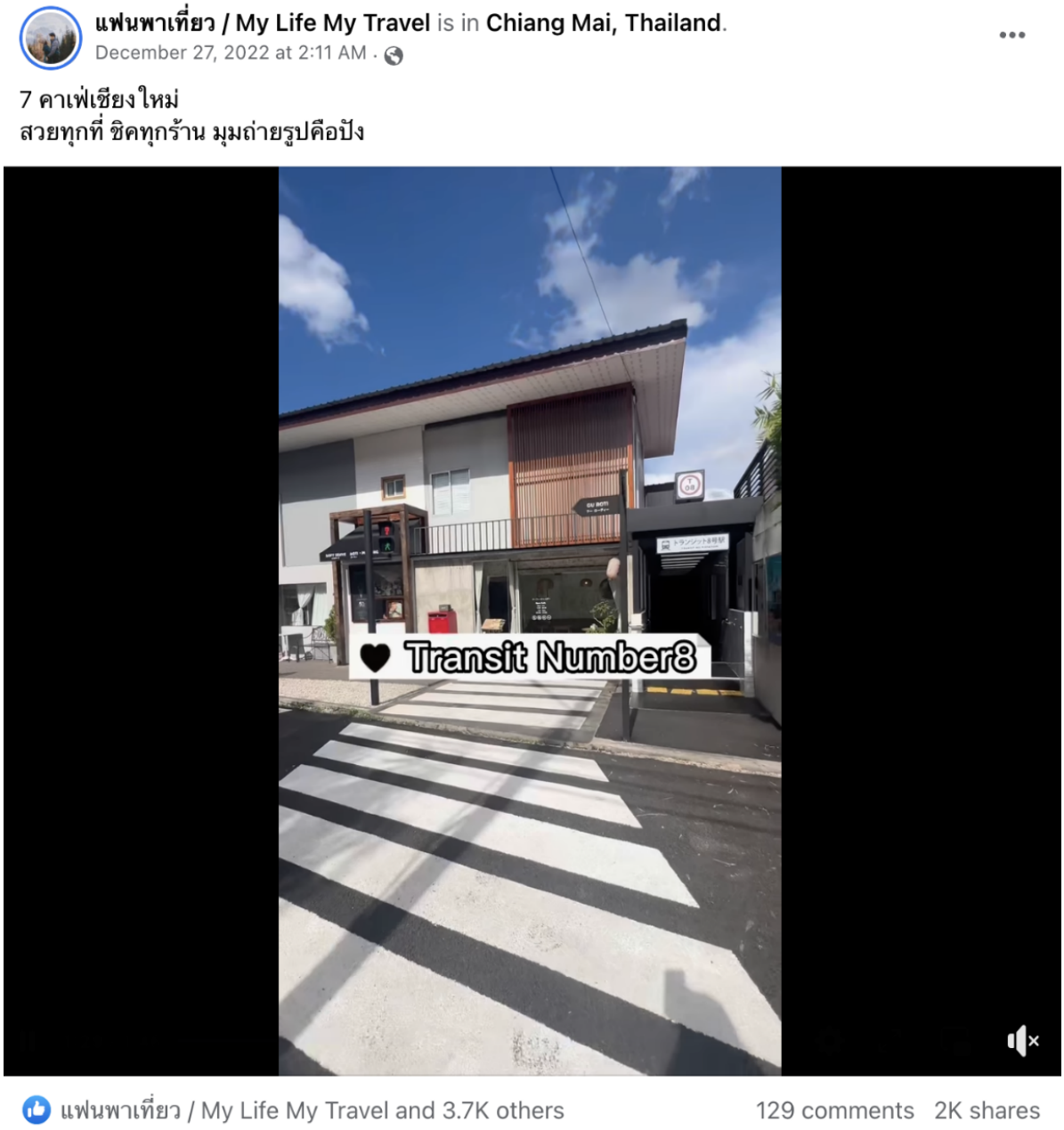


Figure 7: "7 beautiful and chic cafés in Chiang Mai with great photographic spots."
Source: แฟนพาเที่ยว / My Life My Travel Facebook page.

Young middle-class Chiang Mai locals grew up with tourist-oriented developments in their city. These individuals, like the owners of Transit Number 8 and The Baristro Asian Style, now possess the means to partake in Chiang Mai's service and hospitality industries as entrepreneurs and perform the role of tourists in and outside of Chiang Mai. Ironically, COVID-19 came at a time when both the tourists and

these local middle- and upper-class individuals' ability to perform tourist mobility became disrupted. Chiang Mai was left with barely any international tourists and Thais could hardly travel domestically or internationally.

Tourists' abilities to move and consume in different spaces and cultures combined with the positioning of East Asia and Western countries as models of modernity and "material progress" (Chou-Shulin 2010, 287), arguably constitute an understanding of class distinctions among the young middle-class individuals in Thailand. To perform the role of a tourist is to exude a marker of monetary wealth for leisure and travel. Being able to travel is to mobilize across different landscapes of cultures, linguistics, and nation-states. Mobilizing across these differences is, therefore, to be recognized globally as an agential citizen of the world who possesses the social and cultural capital required for achieving tourist mobility.

Disrupted by COVID-19, this anxiety to perform tourist mobility takes a turn where the social media visual culture fuels domestic tourism, but with an overt rise of East Asian- and European-inspired spaces of consumption to substitute the restricted ability to move outside of Thailand. In the years 2020 and 2021 prior to the reopening of Thailand to international travelers, domestic Thai tourists greatly partook in the café-hopping culture, frequenting especially those cafés with the aesthetics of European and East Asian elements that give an image of traveling abroad without actually leaving Thailand.

Figure 8 shows a review post of Jinju, an orange plantation farm in Chiang Mai, by a Chiang Mai-based photographer and social media personnel โตเต๋ (Totay). The post is from Totay's public Facebook page โตเต๋ไปไหน (transl.: *Where is Totay going?*). As the name suggests, this Facebook page features visualities of tourist mobility, traveling, and consumerism. Through reviewing Chiang Mai's social media landmarks, cafés, and instagrammable tourist destinations, Totay utilizes the aesthetic and the multi-sensible dimensions of these places through professionally edited photographs of himself and his partner to create a social media narrative around traveling and consumption. In his review of Jinju orange farm, Totay describes this place as "สวนส้มฟีลเกาหลีบรรยากาศดี" (transl.: *an orange farm with a good Korea-like atmosphere*). This sentiment toward "เหมือนอยู่เกาหลีมากๆ" (transl.: *feels like you are in Korea*) speaks directly to the desired mobility to take on the role of a tourist in times of travel restrictions and limited financial means. The fact that this farm allows imagining oneself in Korea while still being in Chiang Mai illustrates the ways in which the affordability and accessibility of Chiang Mai allow the transcendence of limited financial means and COVID-19 concerns.

Totay's post features a collection of aesthetically pleasing photographs where he and his partner are the main subjects of these photographs' mise-en-scènes. Whether positioning themselves in front of a little white cottage or inside a tent with a majestic view of lush orange trees and mountains in the

background, Totay and his partner craft a narrative of indulgence in a picturesque landscape. This set of photographs combined with the contentment with the Koreanness of the place allows this post to exude a sense of enmeshment aesthetics in Chiang Mai and connect to the young local middle-class' desire to partake in this tourist mobility that Totay invites them to join. This enmeshment of Koreanness with the local northern Thai locality turns Jinju farm into a site for performing a tourist role in Chiang Mai's affordable and accessible locality.

Figure 8: A review of Jinju the Orange Farm. Source: Facebook page โต๋เต๋ไปไหน**.**

Totay's aesthetic photographs and attitude toward the place's foreignness reaffirm Chiang Mai's current social media visual culture where non-Thai elements are greatly embraced and enmeshed with

the locally bound landscapes that complicate the sense of locality and globality. This in-betweenness and hybridity is currently what Thai social media influencers, photographers, and café hoppers have come to embrace since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thus, many small businesses in Chiang Mai have picked up on this momentum and have catered to this desire for enmeshment aesthetics in consumption and hospitality venues that all capitalize on bringing a sense of tourist mobility back to Chiang Mai. This again allows Chiang Mai to emerge as a place product for performing tourist mobility specifically through place-hopping for social media content purposes. This mobility is thus a reflection of what theorist Stephanie D. Clare articulates as a "perception of the world – and especially of spatiality – [that] is tied to this sense of being able to move through, in, and with the world" (Clare 2019, xxvi).

Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of the "supplement" (1998), this collective fascination and consumption of enmeshment aesthetics in affordable and accessible Chiang Mai serve as a supplement for the ability to move outside of Chiang Mai's locality and to partake in global consumerism. These consumption spaces with overt European and East Asian-inspired elements become the supplements for global tourism. It is this supplement quality of Chiang Mai that reveals how the materiality of objects and spaces through eating, drinking, and inhabiting a space becomes a driving force for the current social media visual culture when one pays a visit to Chiang Mai. Café-hopping for social media is a way to affirm not only one's disrupted sense of individualized lifestyle but also to seek global self-recognition at the affordable and accessible local level. Hence, this social media usage, in turn, pushes Chiang Mai's becoming a social media assemblage of enmeshed national, cultural, and spatial boundaries.

Chiang Mai, as a social media phenomenon, is ultimately layered with historical conditions that allow the city to embrace a vast landscape of cultures and aesthetics, as well as for the city to become one of Thailand's prominent hubs for performing global tourist mobility through social media. Hence, the growing scenes of cafés, restaurants, and social media landmarks with intended enmeshment aesthetics exhibit the subjective and phenomenological experiences situated within the materiality and intentionality of built forms, spaces, and objects of consumption.

CONCLUSION

The current social media phenomenon of Chiang Mai lies at the intersection of Thailand's sociocultural and historical conditioning as a cosmopolitan consumption hub, the pervasiveness of visual social media culture, and social media users' relational sense of being in the world. This paper has mapped out how social media, mobility, and materiality have come to form a unique visual storytelling practice

that centers on Chiang Mai's growing café-hopping for social media content. Social media thus plays a key role in giving rise to a (re)imagination of identity and mobility based on intersubjectivity and relations with objects, spaces, and others.

As an internationally recognized tourist destination, Chiang Mai has shaped the locals' aspiration toward globally recognized selfhood that embodies cosmopolitanism, individualism, and petit bourgeois consumerism. Combined with the impacts of the past COVID-19 pandemic, the emergence of aesthetically enmeshed cafés, restaurants, and social media landmarks reflect the anxiety toward not being able to partake in this global individualist consumerist culture.

Even in this post-pandemic stage, the café-hopping for social media content culture in Chiang Mai has continued to embrace the enmeshment of national and cultural elements as a supplementing mode of performing global tourist mobility in a much more affordable and accessible manner. This results in the growth and increase in spaces of consumption that capitalize on the designs and semiotics of non-Thainess and foreignness.

Utilizing the power of social media, capturing and sharing such performance of global tourist mobility in the online world becomes a common practice that transcends any financial and spatial disruptions. In constantly thinking about designing a personal mise-en-scène in intended social media images with enmeshment aesthetics, one relies on societal meaning-making to construct intentional relations with certain objects and spaces. Having to constantly alternate between the role of a subject acting as a personal auteur and the society's object of social perception, social media destabilizes the restricted social and ontological boundaries, which leads to new modes of going beyond space, place, and time where one is currently situated.

Importantly, this current social media phenomenon in urban-growing Chiang Mai reveals the ways in which media technologies act as a modern tool for shaping the sense of self and a place's materiality as a hub of global tourist consumption. This inseparability between people's pursuit of desired self-image and mobility as they participate in the perceptual world with other people and objects will always remain relevant in Southeast Asian media studies. The field will likely encounter more of this intentional meshing and blurring of modern social constructs and boundaries as long as people utilize media technologies to (re)imagine identities and to (re)negotiate their place in the world. Ultimately, social media and other mediums of representing a human's worlding will need to be understood as a necessary instrument for materializing new ways of being in the world that intersect with the enmeshment of the available national, cultural, regional, socio-economic, and ontological domains.

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Mediating the Pandemic in Jakarta: New Digital Platforms in a Time of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The mediascape in Indonesia is highly diverse and pluralized. Citizen activists have long used new media as a means of political engagement. Some examples include the use of e-mail discussion groups and online forums to bring down President Suharto in May 1998, and the use of WhatsApp groups by Islamic groups to bring about the downfall of the then governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (more commonly known as Ahok) in 2017. Indonesian citizens have proven to be early adopters of digital technologies, the nation is one of the most active social media users in the world, and Jakarta is widely considered as the Twitter city; citizens are digitally literate and are politically engaged through a variety of media. Digital media and new online platforms play vital roles in the so-called processes of democratization. This article looks specifically at two emerging media platforms, *Project Multatuli* and *LaporCovid-19*, as means to explore the ways in which citizens can continue to pluralize and democratize the mediascape in (post-)pandemic Indonesia. In this article, we look at how our informants have navigated their livelihoods, family life, and careers in pandemic-era Jakarta. Crucially for Evi of *Project Multatuli* and Irma of *LaporCovid-19*, this has involved initiating the use of new platforms to circumvent, counter, and mitigate the shortcomings in available media, governance, or health care provision. The paper draws on Vigh's use of the term 'navigating' to refer to the shifting terrain in which actors must determine which networks to utilize, which skills to deploy, and how to manage temporal unpredictability. The pandemic, which continues to fluctuate in waves, necessitates a nuanced and shifting response. This article seeks to place the varied responses of Jakartan-based actors in the context of these dynamic circumstances.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, digital platforms, mediation, precarity

INTRODUCTION

The media, argue Sen and Hill (2006), have always been present during Indonesia's revolutionary moments. The advent of digital media in the late 1990s was one of the enabling factors that helped bring about President Suharto's demise. Indeed, stifling the print media had been one of Suharto's standard methods for maintaining a sense of orderly public sphere. Numerous words were invoked to describe this desired atmosphere: *aman* (safe), *tertib* (orderly), *tenang* (calm), *kondusif* (conducive), and *biasa-biasa saja* (normal). This was juxtaposed with undesirable situations of that which were *rawan* (dangerous; susceptible to violence), *provokatif* (provocative), *hiruk pikuk* (lively and noisy), *kacau* (chaotic), that which could *mencemaskan masyarakat* (make society anxious), or that which was capable of *mengancam stabilitas negara* (threaten the stability of the state). The anti-Suharto and pro-democracy *reformasi* (reformation) movement which advocated democratic governance used email chat groups and online forums as means for mobilizing support which culminated in the massive student-led protests of late-1997 until the dramatic and bloody days of May 1998. The reviled and heavy-handed figure of the Minister for Information Harmoko fell along with Suharto, and the newly installed President Habibie dismantled the much-despised Ministry of Information. Some of the aspirations of *reformasi* were seemingly quickly realized with the burgeoning of press freedom.

Almost 25 years after this landmark moment, the trajectory of democratization has remained problematic. Tapsell (2017), for example, argues that digital developments have allowed for both media oligarchs and anti-oligarchic media actors to make gains. Indonesia's media are not at the proverbial crossroads, but numerous strands are developing simultaneously. The crossroads metaphor regularly deployed by *The Economist* news magazine to frame Indonesia misses the array of tensions which are both emerging and converging. As Mietzner points out, President Widodo has brought his seeming rivals from religious and populist-nationalist camps into his fold through having made Mar'uf Amin his vice-president and Prabowo minister for security (2020). While Widodo came to power partly on the strength of his political outsider status, his two-term presidential era has been marked by "democratic regression" (Power and Warbuton, 2020).

Writing in the early 2010s, Lim (2011) was optimistic about the role of digital media in being a continuing viable means for "mobilizing social movements and advancing human rights and social justice" (24). The flipside of this digital capability, however, was the way in which conservative groups mobilized to bring down the then-Jakarta governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in 2016. A vital source of agitation against him was a doctored video which represented him as having blasphemed Islam. Indeed, Lim (2017) notes the emergence of tribal nationalism during Jakarta's gubernatorial election that is produced through the formation of online "algorithm enclave." The algorithm enclaves facilitated the circulation and mobilization of racist and sectarian narratives in the digital-based media. The ease of digital production was thus an enabling attribute of a post-trust politics. Distrust

in governmental institutions such as the Komisi Pemilihan Umum (General Election Commission) was also promoted by the defeated presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto in 2014. In response, Kawal Pemilu (Election Watch) was founded as a means to scrutinize and test the veracity of the election's results. This citizen-led, open-data project drew on the contribution of some 700 volunteers (Graft et al. 2016). As an open data project, it can be seen as a forerunner to COVID-19 projects such as Kawal Covid and LaporCovid; the second of which we will consider in this article.

When the COVID-19 Pandemic hit Indonesia, we had already felt (along with other commentators) that many of the hopes and dreams of the reformasi era had only been partially realized or were severely under-threat. The New Order political elite had remained in positions of authority; media moguls had capitalized on the new digital mediascape. The COVID-19 Pandemic, however, became a complicating factor in recalibrating Indonesia's democratization as well as further encumbering State services with adequate health care provision. According to Mietzner, the Indonesian state underperformed at the start of the pandemic in comparison to similarly positioned nations, yet this inadequacy was not simply related to 'regime type' or 'development status' (2020, 229). This state's inadequate response during the pandemic was significantly felt by citizens at grassroot levels. They had to rely on a variety of social networks, personal connection, association, and modalities to cope with the various impacts of the pandemic on their lives.

During the pandemic narratives of disinformation, hoaxes and fake news circulated both on online and offline media platforms (Rahmawati et al. 2021). The proliferation of 'fake news' was enabled by the paid buzzers who supported the government and further polarized the digital conversation on social media platforms (Pambudi et al. 2021).

These narratives shaped the way in which health, governmental and religious authorities responded to the pandemic. During our fieldwork in Jakarta in 2022, we discovered that some residents were still affected by the circulation of this 'infodemic' on digital platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and/or Hello applications. This is especially the case in lower-middle class families since their livelihoods were severely damaged by the social restriction imposed by the government. To mitigate the declining democratic conditions and to counter the disinformation regarding COVID-19, many citizen-led websites, Instagram accounts, Twitter accounts, Facebook forums, and WhatsApp groups have been initiated. Paid buzzers have also become active in support of President Widodo. In this article, we consider two kinds of media which provide critical interventions in the 'backsliding of democracy' and the concomitant rise of misinformation and hoaxes. The examples we look at are the Project Multatuli and LaporCovid, which were both founded during the Pandemic Era. We consider these platforms through the work of their founders, Evi Mariani and Irma Hidayana.

CARING AND GRIEVING

The pandemic had precipitated new modes of mourning. And Evi, like many Jakartans, was having to learn to mourn while following health protocols. Having just returned from the crematorium, Evi and her relatives gathered online to mourn the passing of her father. The rising tide of COVID-related deaths in the middle of 2020 brought with it a whole host of other problems: a lack of coffins, a backlog of bodies to be cremated, the urgency to clear land for new cemeteries (Wijaya 2021), and, perhaps the most harrowing, mourning the loss of loved ones while in isolation.

It was in late June 2021 when Evi, at her home in Bekasi, a satellite city in southern Jakarta, heard via a WhatsApp message from her mother that her father's condition was worsening. Like thousands of Jakartans, Evi's father had contracted the novel coronavirus and was now suffering from the effects of COVID-19. With health care workers being overwhelmed and endless queues at the local *puskesmas* (community healthcare center), and with emergency wards full in every nearby hospital, Evi and her siblings were compelled to find a way to manage her father's health. With each day, chances of finding somewhere adequate for her father's care seemed to diminish. Each phone call to an Emergency Ward (*Instalasi Gawat Darurat*, IGD) was fruitless: Evi was told that there were often as many as 70 patients already ahead of her father in the queue. Yet, after four days of trying, Evi and her siblings managed to find a private hospital bed for their father.

Evi rushed to Bandung to be by his side, bringing her eight-year-old son and husband with her. Evi's father, lying on a hospital bed and short of breath, immediately asked her, "is this true, that patients are being classified as having COVID-19, even when they don't actually have it?" This was termed in Indonesian as 'dicovidkan.' Her father asked further, "is it true that their tests are being falsified, so that the hospitals can receive extra funding from the state government?" Evi, anxious over her father's condition, quickly dismissed his question. Yet, his anxiety and doubt about the integrity of Covid-positive results has haunted Evi ever since, pointing to the persistence of distrust in governmental and medical authorities.

WhatsApp groups were rife with stories, rumors, and news about COVID-19. One of the most circulated rumors was that hospitals were falsifying the COVID-19 status of patients in order to receive extra funding from the government. Could the government be trusted? Why were leaders taking such different and contradictory approaches to the Pandemic? Evi's parents too, through their Catholic church-based WhatsApp Group, were caught up in dilemmas of working out what to believe and not to believe. In the face of conflicting and inconsistent messaging from various ministries and levels of government, Evi's parents, like many others, were reliant on friends and religious authorities in trying to make sense of the Pandemic and to determine the most appropriate responses.

There was little opportunity or will to debate with her father. Evi's father soon passed away. Despite this personal tragedy, Evi recognizes her own privilege: being a member of the Indonesian middle-class in a big city like Bandung, her father made it to a private hospital and their family had enough money to pay for the care he received. The stratified health system made it easier for the middle class to access the health system; yet treatment for COVID-19 often came too late, and even the best-equipped hospitals were collapsing under the weight of patients.

Moreover, Evi herself, a former editor of *The Jakarta Post*, resigned from her job during the Pandemic, to start up Project Multatuli, a new critical media platform aimed at 'serving the under-reported.' Her own father recognized herself as being capable of mediating the fine line between COVID-anxiety, perpetual disbelief and distrust, and the necessity of taking steps to maintain the well-being of one's family. Evi, within her family, was recognized as having sharp judgement in navigating complex circumstances.

Evi's story is heart-breaking: the anxious search to find care, the confusion and tension between family members about the Pandemic, disagreements on how and when to give care. And then, in the event of her father's death: 'the problematic of mourning.' She came face to face with the question of how a family member could be mourned while maintaining not only COVID-19 protocols, but through also relying on the over-stretched and over-burdened infrastructure and administration of burial or cremation (Mariani 2012). Evi's family was one of millions of Indonesians caught up in the height of the Pandemic in 2021. While Evi's father might have died in a hospital, under the supervision of attentive medical staff, others died on the street or in their homes: some while waiting to be delivered oxygen tanks which they would have to self-administer. While COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout Jakarta in the months of June and July 2021, citizens scrounged for whatever they could to help themselves and those close to them.

Evi and her family came face to face with the lack of resources and health infrastructure that was barely available to members of the wealthy middle-class – let alone the urban poor. Evi's story thus speaks to her privilege: far more common and representative of the Jakartan experience are those stories where people died alone, uncared for, and without having proper medical treatment to ease the worst of the symptoms.

THE PANDEMIC POSES QUESTIONS

Studies on the pandemic in Indonesia have mainly focused on COVID-19 governance and the government's varied conflicting institutions. These studies were especially conducted in the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia. Several scholars have argued that the ways in

which Indonesia's government (both local and central government) responded to the COVID-19 pandemic have been heavily securitized or even militarized. The securitization of the pandemic could be seen in government policies, such as restraining information in the pretext of avoiding public panic, using COVID-19 to increase crackdown on critical anti-government voices and dissent, and over-relying on military officers and police in Indonesia's governance of COVID-19 (Chairil 2020a; 2020b). Indeed, the over-reliance on state security apparatus in enforcing COVID-19 measures – especially in social and travel restrictions – has been the persistent feature of the way the Indonesian state handles the pandemic. Meanwhile, Lazuardi (2020) suggests that the enactment of the community-based lockdown is very much entrenched in the long history of urban security mechanisms that relied upon the notion of mutual cooperation, surveillance and suspicion.

When discussing the role of media during the pandemic in Indonesia, scholars have largely turned their attention to the widespread of post-truth narratives – disinformation, fake news, and hoaxes – and news construction of COVID-19 by the authority (Rahmawati et al. 2021, Pambudi et al. 2021, Wahyuni and Fitrah 2022). Little has been known about how ordinary citizens of Indonesia navigate precarious access to health care and how their everyday life has been impacted by securitization and bewilderment caused by the pandemic. Following Strassler's (2020) term 'demanding' in relation to how images 'demand' social-political responses, we use the phrase, 'asks questions,' to the novel and intense situations posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic. How do non-state actors respond to a situation in which the state is only partially, fragmentarily present? In this article, we draw on the experiences of Evi and other Jakartans as a means of gaining access to stories about how the COVID-19 Pandemic was mitigated and securitized.

How has everyday life and access to medical care and information been navigated throughout the Pandemic? Has the securitization and militarization of the Pandemic's management impacted upon the mitigation of the Pandemic? Has the Pandemic called upon a particular kind of 'urban expert' to exercise their agency? What do the stories, which we have managed to glean via Zoom, WhatsApp, and email conversations, tell us about how state and non-state relations are being re-negotiated in the Pandemic and (perhaps) in the post-Pandemic era? We seek to explore the tensions and crossovers between state and non-state actors. To what extent do they call upon each other? How do the conditions, networks, and infrastructures of urban Jakarta facilitate, debilitate, or necessitate collaborations and partnerships between state and non-state actors? How does this Pandemic reconfigure our understanding of securitization within megacities of the global south? Does the state, and the city government fulfil its function of looking after the health of its citizens, and how do citizens securitize, protect their own health or safety when the state is either absent or partial (and compromised) in its efforts at mitigating the impact of a disaster (LaporCovid-19 2021)?

NAVIGATING METAPHORICALLY AND MATERIALLY

We employ the term 'navigating' as a means of framing the way in which citizens of Jakarta have coped, survived, mitigated, and kept the Pandemic at bay throughout 2020-21. The Pandemic has multiplied and complicated the kinds of precarities that are faced in everyday life. Following Vigh (2009), we value the term for how it refers to the act of moving through (progressing or simply staying afloat?) in shifting and changing circumstances. What happens when one's co-ordinates are unreliable? How can one calibrate one's position and circumstances when once-reliable reference points have become untrustworthy? Navigating means moving, making sense in constantly changing circumstances. Who becomes useful in a Pandemic? What kind of resources and networks are mobilized? This kind of hedging one's bets in fluctuating, volatile and precarious conditions, relates to Simone's (2014) appraisal of Jakarta as a city in which *preman* (gangsters) and other urban figures are constantly alert to any number of opportunities or threats and how to make the most of them.

The watery, sea-oriented metaphor of navigation is also particularly apt for Jakarta because of the numerous fronts on which it faces water-related crises. The city occupies the dubious position of being one of the world's fastest sinking cities (Colven 2020). The city, unable to contain the threat from the sea on its north coast, is also subject to 'downstream flooding' (*banjir kiriman*) where heavy rain in West Java province cannot be contained owing to large scale land clearing and deforestation. The water flows into Jakarta where waterways are congested, resulting in large portions of the city becoming flooded almost on a yearly basis. The city becomes, at times, redolent of a dystopic urban environment. Clearing out riverways and removing so-called illegal settlements further exacerbates inequal access to the city and the opportunities Jakarta offers. A much-discussed solution has been to shift the capital to east Kalimantan, which may potentially engender a new environmental catastrophe. We are curious about who sets the course and shapes the conditions which need to be 'navigated.' This partly takes inspiration from de Certeau, with his ideas of strategy and tactics: our navigating agents corresponding to the tactics of urban citizens who make their way through the infrastructured and planned city.

Since COVID-19 was officially acknowledged as being present in Jakarta in March 2020, Jakartans have had to navigate various waves of the Pandemic in their literally sinking city. Flooding and sinking aside, everyday urban life in this megacity of the global south is rife with small negotiations on a micro scale as citizens look to make the most of gaps in infrastructure (Ajidarma 2008) or to capitalize on any network or connection they may have (Simone 2017). Precarity has its corollary in spontaneity, flexibility, creativity, and improvisation (Simone 2004). The gaps in infrastructure, governance, health-care provision, social class, and information are part of how Jakartans have sought to navigate throughout the Pandemic; which has exacerbated, rather than introduced these issues. This involves a negotiation of political conflicts and tensions as well as producing a value, use

or function for others. Vigh also asserts that navigating also involves a temporal logic: a kind of imagining and projection of what the future will hold and what will remain as being useful.

SEPARATION AND EMPATHY

The COVID-19 Pandemic immediately imposed practical limitations on our possibility of doing fieldwork in Jakarta. Zaki was about to welcome his first child and he and his wife made the decision to stay in the Netherlands for the birth and the baby's first months. For Andy, the limitations took the form of a blanket ban on foreigners coming into Indonesia for research. Yet this disruption to research trajectories was insignificant in comparison to working out ways to both avoid contracting the virus and to continue to make one's living. Over time, the steady drip of stories of Indonesia's growing difficulty in facing COVID-19 started to become overwhelming. In May, June, and July of 2020, we both regularly received news of friends and family or colleagues who had either become very sick from the virus and had been hospitalized or had died from COVID-19. Friends in the most comfortable situations imposed their own lockdowns on their everyday life as a means of limiting social contact. They taught their children at home while juggling their own employment.

Much of the news we received came from WhatsApp. Likewise, portraits of recently deceased friends and associates appeared on Instagram accompanied by ubiquitous crying emojis and statements outlining people's memories of the newly departed. "These days are full of *Inna Lillahi*," an Islamic prayer and statement uttered after someone's death, which then became a common refrain. The steady flow of these messages in WhatsApp, the grief expressed via Instagram, and the almost macabre details of events unfolding in Jakartan hospitals jarred our sense of the Pandemic's trajectory in the Netherlands.

At that time, when health care facilities were overwhelmed and even collapsed, one of our biggest concerns and anxieties had been the difficulty and the complexity of the access to health care for our family and friends. We were also worried about the phenomenon of vaccine hesitancy among some of our friends and relatives, which could further increase their health risk and vulnerability. This health-related anxiety and insecurity that we experienced are also telling in the sense that our feelings cannot escape from class bias. For instance, the fact that we were much worried about health insecurity rather than economic insecurity, such as losing jobs and being unemployed for our family and friends, suggests that our social class's position significantly shaped our sense of insecurity during the pandemic. Indeed, as part of the Indonesian middle-class, most of our family and friends work in salaried and formal employment, which is less affected by the economic hardship caused by the pandemic.

Around us, we saw a tremendous faith in the hospital system's capability to rise during the Pandemic which enabled a policy of keeping everyday life as open as possible through the application of a light and smart lockdown. What we saw around us felt incongruent with the sense of sickness and death elsewhere. The Pandemic has indeed been global but the manner in which it has been experienced has been highly pluralized. Our article originates from this desire to see how people orient themselves in a time of insecurity, scarcity, and an unknown health crisis. How are resources and information made use of, or indeed, created and restructured, when trust in established authorities has become diluted?

RE-SHAPING JAKARTA

The COVID-19 pandemic, despite its scale, is one of numerous *krisis* or *darurat* (crisis, emergency) amongst numerous others in the post-authoritarian era of 1998 onwards. The term *krisis* sticks in the contemporary vernacular in terms of *krisis moneter* (financial crisis), *krisis politik* (political crisis), *krisis percayaan* (crisis of trust), to more recent formulations such as *krisis kesehatan* (health crisis), and *krisis komunikasi* (crisis of communication). Disasters too have been all-too-frequent markers of the recent years: the tsunami of 2004 in Aceh and the earthquake of 2006 in Java; the Merapi volcanic eruption in 2006 and 2010, numerous earthquakes in Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi.

The COVID-19 Pandemic is also not the first pandemic in recent memory: bird flu and swine flu both having an impact on Indonesia. Separately, flooding throughout Jakarta is a yearly, if not seasonal, hazard. Living with this kind of precarity and vulnerability to a combination of natural and human-made disasters or crises positions the COVID-19 Pandemic as being another crisis on the spectrum of many others. Sri Mulyani, the Indonesian Finance Minister has stated, "something different about this crisis is the large-scale lockdown'' (CNN Indonesia 2020). It causes its own kind of shock because it hasn't happened before. So, we have to think about what we are going to do, two or three steps into the future." The Pandemic is proving to be a "long moment of crisis" which is reshuffling social relations and urban fabrics: that is, it has a "transformative function" (Low and Smart 2020).

Prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia, the nation's health system was already stretched through its low doctor-patient ratios, just being one of several indicators of a limited health infrastructure. Indonesia, arguably, has faced unique challenges in tackling the Pandemic: a huge geographical expanse, incredibly diverse population of language groups, ethnicities, religious followers, not to mention a fractious and tense political environment. Yet in some ways, Indonesia has followed a common trajectory to other nations. From underplaying the presence or impact of the virus in the early days, implementing a lockdown of sorts (in Indonesia known as Large-Scale Social Restrictions, *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar: PSBB*) and then strategically emerging

from it, to securing a vaccine agreement with China and other vaccine producers' countries. Political leaders such as President Joko Widodo and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan have used the Pandemic as a means of asserting their political authority. Rivalries between governors and the central government have also played a role in shaping responses to COVID-19 at different levels of governance.

Marco Kusumawijaya (2021), a prominent urbanist and political activist working in urban Jakarta, argues that there is a tension and internal conflict between the national and the regional/provincial government in the governance of the pandemic. He said that many provincial governors throughout Indonesia wanted to implement tighter lockdown from the very beginning of the pandemic. Nevertheless, their plan was rejected by the national government which preferred to consider other aspects such as the economy, the tourism industry, and infrastructure projects. His voice resonates with the view that suggests responses to the pandemic have been the product of ongoing contestations between various and contradictory social groups at different governance levels – national, local and community – within the context of political decentralization (Meckelburg and Bal 2021).

As a nation with some 70 million informal workers (Susanty and Makur 2020), a harsh and long-term lockdown was always going to be hard to implement on a national scale. Many communities enforced their own *lockdown mandiri* or self-organized lockdowns. These are lockdowns which were implemented and policed by local communities. Blockades and barriers were put up at entrances to kampungs (dense, informal urban environments) to prevent outsiders from coming in. Visitors were subject to screening and rigorous health protocols: wearing masks, washing hands, and sometimes, being sprayed with disinfectant. Following health protocols took on a highly performative dimension and were part of a general sentiment, that, given the inaction and confused strategies from the central government, there was a growing realization that local communities would have to make their own decisions about how to police their communities.

In Jakarta, as in other cities in Indonesia, the police called on informal security actors such as *preman* (gangster; hoodlum) and *jawara* (local thugs) to aid in the enforcement of health protocols (Arrobi 2020). The resilience and innovation of communities in north Jakarta (amongst others) has proved to be a vital resource for mitigating the absences of state support (Wilson 2020). Marco (2021) revealed to us that his NGO, Rujak Centre for Urban Studies, has been working in advocating the provision of piped water for urban dwellers in North Jakarta.

Rujak's advocacy is fulfilled by the Jakarta's government by providing free water, refilled everyday by using a truck, and currently by permanent water tanks. This program was closely linked to his role as the chair of the committee for coastal planning (TGUPP Pesisir) in which he designed a planning on

coastal areas, including connecting transport system, providing piped water, and protecting the residents from seawater rising. Ironically, Marco suggests that to a certain degree, the Pandemic has been used to advocate for the improvement of justice for the urban poor dwellers in Jakarta. He said that: "strangely, (the) people have asked for this (clean and piped water), for a very long time and it was not provided until the pandemic took place'' (Kusumawijaya 2021).

The pandemic has also played a role in shaping everyday life and the physical make-up of the city. Under the lockdown, mosques and churches have been eerily quiet, while religious leaders have become pivotal figures in conveying protective health measures. Banners, murals, and signs have sprung up on city streets, creating a visual reminder of efforts to combat the spread of the virus and at times to critique the government's handling of the Pandemic. The pandemic has also left its mark on the urban landscape in other ways: the Wisma Atlet in Kemayoran, used for the Asian Games in 2018, has been turned into a make-shift hotel for COVID-19 patients in self-isolation. According to Marco, this is only possible since Jakarta is in the privileged position of having many government buildings and facilities which can be used for self-quarantine.

Cemeteries in northern Jakarta and elsewhere have been filled up, forcing new land to be cleared. The gravediggers themselves have, in some cases, been ostracized by their communities as being potential transmitters of COVID-19. LaporCovid-19, a civil society initiative which advocates the fulfilment of health and human rights during the pandemic, reports that not only have some 20,000 deaths not been officially recorded in Indonesia's toll, but thousands of health care workers – doctors, nurses, orderlies – have perished in their own efforts to treat the sick and ailing.

The terms *kewalahan* and *kekurangan*, have become some of the key terms of the pandemic. Hospitals have been overwhelmed (*kewalahan*) with patients; while patients suffer from a lack of (*kekurangan*) access to adequate facilities, oxygen. Doctors, too, lacked the resources to treat the patients. The resilience and ingenuity of non-state actors is a key strategy for mitigating various state absences. The work of Irma Hidayana, outlined below, is one example where a kind of data-driven activism has emerged in the wake of governmental denial and disinformation about COVID-19.

A NEW PLATFORM AMONGST IN THE MEDIASCAPE

Starting a new media platform during a pandemic sounds like a risky venture. Yet for Evi and her cohort, the pandemic and the click-bait driven mediascape demanded an alternative platform – what she refers to as "slow journalism." In contrast to rapidly escalating Coronavirus clusters and fake news spreading like wildfire through social media, Evi and her fellow journalist friends initiated a

platform which sought to provide an antidote to the sensationalist and polarizing coverage of the pandemic. Evi (2021) outlines her logic in founding Project Multatuli:

> [The foundation happened] with several friends, three other journalists, I founded Project Multatuli, which is a public-service journalism initiative. We want to tap into a news-desert or a niche. So we serve … So, we decided to focus our journalism on serving the under-reported. Hold power accountable. We launched the website in May and so far I think we have published maybe, 30-40 [articles] because we believe in slow journalism. Only three articles per week. We founded Project Multatuli because we see that the media industry in Indonesia has already been controlled predominantly by politically wired tycoons operating in a market-driven logic. Like click-bait. Worshipping traffic so much that it takes a toll on quality journalism. Armchair journalism. Viral articles are hogging the space right now. So, we see that as a problem. So, we want to disrupt that status quo in journalism. We don't want to follow the journalism that serves the elite more; more male-centric and more Jakarta-centric. We want to veer away from that concept. I'm calling Project Multatuli as a disruption to the status quo in journalism.

As Lim (2013, 653) demonstrates in her insightful study, media activism in contemporary Indonesia, including social media-based social movement, must conform to the dominant ideological meta narrative – such as religion and nationalism – and popular culture in order to be successful. It should also follow the principles of popular culture consumption such as light packaging, having a headline appetite and trailer vision. These qualities make it susceptible to being too fast, too thin and lost amongst the digital noise. In this sense, Evi is acutely aware of the peril of media activism in contemporary Indonesia. Her Project Multatuli presents a new kind of media activism that both counters the interest of power holder and speed-driven journalism that provide little space for advocating public interest.

Project Multatuli, thus, becomes a kind of vessel with which to navigate not only the Pandemic but the mediascape and the complexities of post-authoritarian era Jakarta. Evi recognizes the biases which are both gendered and Jakarta-centric, and while Jakarta cannot be dissolved from its conceptualization, the city is represented from perspectives which counter its construction as the centrality of national identity.

The following section addresses a different kind of media platform which performs a relatable kind of media activism. While Project Multatuli focuses on narratives and stories from the perspectives of the marginalized, LaporCovid-19 focuses on data and scientific-based analyses of the Pandemic.

LAPORCOVID-19 AND DATA-DRIVEN ACTIVISM

Having successfully defended her dissertation in New York in late 2019, Irma Hidayana was happy to be back home with her musician husband and son in the compact and architecturally designed house in a leafy suburb in the south of Jakarta. Irma's PhD looked at the role of the baby food industry and its role in maternal and infant health outcomes. Although neither being a (medical) doctor, nor an epidemiologist, Irma was well-acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of Indonesia's health system. Yet, by February 2020, Irma recognized that something was going awry with her government's response to the emerging global COVID-19 Pandemic. The first tell-tale sign was the denial that COVID-19 was present in Indonesia, despite the modelling of epidemiologists indicating otherwise.

Flippant statements from senior government figures stating that COVID-19 could be kept at bay through prayers and eating local foods, became all the more galling when she heard stories amongst her friends and their networks of people getting seriously sick and developing Covid-like symptoms. Newly released from the discipline and strictures of PhD-life, Irma found herself armed with both the skill set and network for articulating an alternative response to the unfolding health crisis as Indonesia – like so many other countries – lurched into uncharted, covid-saturated waters. LaporCovid-19, which she established with both close friends and a broader pool of volunteers, has become one of the main resources for gaining a sense of the scale of the Pandemic's impact in Indonesia.

Irma and LaporCovid-19 emphasize that the military involvement in handling the pandemic in Indonesia has been ineffective, unnecessary, and prone to corruption. Irma provides an example of how the military is involved in the procurement of COVID-19 testing kits, the intelligence agency's initiative to develop COVID-19 drugs, and the mobilization of security forces in rolling out mass vaccinations. Furthermore, Irma suggests that some military officers have been used to intimidate health workers (*tenaga kesehatan, nakes*) who protested about the long delay of their incentive payment. Irma's point is amplified by Marco who affirms that the government has the tendency to treat the pandemic with a heavy-handed security approach. Both Irma (2021) and Kusumawijaya (2021) pointed out how the state intelligence agency (*badan intelijen negara*/BIN) has been involved in the distribution of *bansos* (social aid) as well as in the development of so-called *vaksin Merah-Putih* (Red and White Vaccine, in reference to the national flags of Indonesia), which is proclaimed as a locally produced vaccine in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Marco suspects that the state apparatus attempts to manufacture the narrative that the people are *bandel* (stubborn) and not following the health protocols; thus, the government is given legitimacy to mobilize the police and military officers to discipline the unruly people. Irma also critiques the government and military for their role in the procurement of vaccines.

In January 2023, Irma reflected on her work with LaporCovid-19. It had created an enabling function. Irma frames it in this way:

> [F]rom the beginning, LaporCovid invited a wide range of health workers to participate in LaporCovid. Through their work at LaporCovid, people with different backgrounds, such as public health scientists in particular, became more aware and engaged. They took part in responding to the pandemic policy advocacy. This was a role that they had never taken on before. Most of them had only used to work on their own research studies and in their laboratories without paying much attention to public health-related policy. LaporCovid enabled them to actively (and very quickly) 'translate' their research findings into informing public health policy. This is why I would say that we've been able to 'create' new 'actors' in the democratic process. This is because the (public) health sector used to be pre-occupied with its own world and didn't want to be associated with any politics of public health – unlike activists and journalists.

Their voices were not always welcome. LaporCovid contributors also faced resistance, intimidation and doxing from various health organizations who did not appreciate the closer scrutiny of what was going on. Irma told us (2021):

> We would collect data and then write up reports. We send all data and reports to the government authorities both at the local and national levels. To the Ministry of Health, we send health-related reports and complaints. For issues on education during the pandemic, we send the reports to the Ministry of Education. For general issues, we'd send the reports to the COVID task force. We'd seek meetings with the Health Ministry and then follow up with what steps were being taken. Our proactive stance wasn't always appreciated, so to say. The ChatBot function we had on our website also proved to be particularly useful in harvesting complaints from different sectors. Nurses who didn't receive their COVID-19 bonuses, for example, informed us of the hospital that hadn't fulfilled their obligations. We were able to pressure the health services in order for the nurses to receive their appropriate pay. But these efforts weren't always successful. The new labor laws, enacted via the so-called Omnibus Law [implemented during the Covid Pandemic], have made it easier to fire workers, or at least, not renew their contracts. So, while it has been possible to say that new actors were able to positively contribute to health policy and the like, there has also been worrying trends in anti-democratic steps taken by the Widodo government.

The COVID-19 Pandemic created a moment in which digital innovation could prosper and emerge as a vital means for conveying detailed information of what was transpiring on the ground. At the same time, political and military elites doubled down on protecting their own interests – witnessed through the implementation of the Omnibus Law and the militarization of social aid. Irma Hidayana and her colleagues were equipped with both the digital media skills required to create a platform to service immediate health needs, while also savvy enough to negotiate the pressure applied to them from governmental authorities. While democratic regression may be a trait of the Widodo era, a variety of forms of resistance remain in play, LaporCovid being one of them.

CONCLUSION

Navigating involves moving in shifting, watery and changing circumstances. We navigate with our own tools: a particular skillset, education, or financial capability. Our interviews with Evi and Irma delineate the various ways in which they have been navigating Pandemic-era Jakarta. Our informants have projected the relevance of their skills and the likelihood of their utilization as a means of determining their next moves.

Echoing the Suharto era affectation of 'everything is calm and stable,' the early days of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia were rooted in denial that the virus had spread to the Archipelago. President Widodo took a proactive step and mobilized his buzzers to deflect attention away from the (likely) chaos that the Pandemic would (and did) cause. Media activists such as Evi Mariani and Irma Hidayana recognized, however, a countering role for the media. Project Multatuli and LaporCovid have provided new avenues for expressing critiques of contemporary social and political conditions in Indonesia. While throughout the Suharto-led New Order era (1966-1998) publications could be censored through the withdrawing of the 'publishing license,' censorship in the reformasi era and beyond has taken on much more diverse and varied forms. LaporCovid-19 received intimidation and resistance for its willingness to represent the causes of under-paid health workers. Project Multatuli runs courses for its writers in how to deal with bullying, intimidation, and harassment from the police.

Jakarta plays a role in shaping its citizens' movements and livelihood, while each of them negotiates and mediates their relationship with the city. However, they are not limited by Jakarta. Evi lives at its periphery, avoiding its congestion and taking advantage of the comfort of her home office in suburban, southern Jakarta. While Irma, whose home is also at Jakarta's periphery, remains mobile in this Pandemic time: travelling back and forth to the United States where she works as an occasional lecturer while her husband pursues his PhD. Her distance does not impinge upon her running of LaporCovid-19; virtuality has been absorbed into her everyday life.

The idea of navigating brings with it an idea of a destination, a final harbor where the vessel will 'find its shelter.' The Indonesian language term for this is *berlabuh*. We find that in navigating everyday life throughout the Pandemic, our informants find shelter not in some kind of imagined 'post-Pandemic' but instead through the creation of new platforms and utilization of skillset. The shelter is in the navigating the precarities and crises precipitated and deteriorated by COVID-19, rather than at an imagined, distant harbor of a solution. Rather than being unique, discreet, and fixed, new crises will evolve, which will need to be navigated in their own ways. Project Multatuli and LaporCovid, which have their origins in Covid-era Jakarta, are two means with which to navigate the evolving threats to democratization.

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Capturing and Interpreting Mediated Learning Spaces

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study examined the perceptions of Communication students to infer meanings and understandings as they responded to visual stimuli presented to them. It was guided by the objectives to determine how communication students perceive pre-selected visual stimuli, how they understand the meanings in these urban spaces, how they respond to the visual stimuli in an interview, and how they connected their interactions to the spaces in their lived experiences. Mimetic Art Theory was used to frame the analysis as it examined sources, tools, and methods that captured, analyzed, and communicated the visual dimension of communicative learning spaces through an interview with 25 Communication students. Thematic analysis was validated using inter-rater reliability tools. Findings revealed three emergent themes, namely, urban expression, lived experiences, and diverse meanings. Inter-rater reliability coding was applied by three faculty members. Inter-reliability results show that 60% consider lived emotions as urban expression; 62-72% see actual, changing, and hybrid emotions as lived experiences; and 82-90% find material culture, usage, and human behavior as sources of diverse meanings. A strong need for creating and maintaining space ensued from the connectivity and collaboration of students' activities. Parallel constructs of wireless sensor networks/mobile devices induced and enhanced engagements within the different spaces. Through mediation, learning spaces directly contributed to the quality of social interactions because the use of visual stimuli served as a medium for capturing, processing, and expressing how urban spaces mediated interpersonal interactions in various campus activities. More explicit and transparent methodologies and exemplary visual urban studies may help visual research gradually enter the realm of widely accepted options in the scholarship on the communication value of urban space.

Keywords: communication value, material culture, Mimetic Art Theory, urban communication

INTRODUCTION

Urban communication, like urban studies, is an interdisciplinary field that provides a fresh perspective to view the city and its transformation. The communication lens offers valuable perspectives and methodologies for the examination of urban and suburban life. It conceptualizes the city as a complex environment of interpersonal interaction, a landscape of spaces and places that shape human behavior in an intricate technological environment.

Cities – or the urban, in more abstract terms – are central to the mediated and non-mediated communication practices that set apart our current times in the conduct of our everyday lives. By the same token, considerations, about patterns of communication between individuals and communities, technology, aesthetics and representation have become progressively fundamental to an understanding of what cities are as a consequence of urban planning and policymaking. With the rise of professional practices like city branding and the development of concepts such as "creative cities" and "smart cities" into veritable global formats for urban development and regeneration, research on media and communication has become central to the making of rather than just the studying of cities (Aurigi 2005, 1253). This emerging field of urban communication research comprises an invitation to look at the variety of intended and inadvertent expressions of the built environment and material culture to fill a void in the study of media, culture, and communication and to determine how communication is enacted in these daily narratives.

Prominent scholars have approached the nexus of urbanization and mediation by actively developing cutting-edge theoretical concepts and methodological frameworks to examine both media and communication as central to structures and practices of contemporary articulations of urbanism (Aiello and Tosoni 2016, 1252). However, the uncharted field of urban communication linked to learning spaces within universities has remained unexplored at a level of methodological research. In this paper, the researcher argues that a systematic conversation on the methodological principles and practices that set apart this burgeoning area of inquiry is not only timely, but also much needed.

It is in this context that a city is seen as a laboratory to research with diverse and often unconventional forms of urban expression as "a diverse spectacle composed of inter-woven signs, competing stories, diverse actors, and social boundaries in a constant flux, and a hodgepodge of communicative genres" (Pauwels 2016, 1325). Corollary to this is the notion of the city as a medium and the city as content in that they highlight the importance of cities as both producers and products of particular practices, interactions, and narratives. The communication value of urban space is a new concept which merits further consideration. However, there are no methods for determining the communication value of urban space. The approach proposed in a previous study relied on Nowakowski's method, which supports the development of a fast and universal approach to evaluating the phenomena in urban

space (Kurowksa et al. 2021). Thus, in order to preserve and disclose this urban spectacle in constant flux, visual methods are of paramount importance.

This study explored and critically discussed emergent themes and key aspects of mediated and unmediated campus life from a socio-cultural and ~~a~~ communicative research perspective. It examined the perceptions of Communication students in order to infer meanings and understandings as they responded to visual stimuli presented to them. This study examined how communication students perceived images discussing how they understood the use of urban space. During the interviews, they were able to recount how they had interacted with and around these urban spaces by relating their particular lived experiences. The focus of the study was on the learning spaces in the Far Eastern University Manila campus as represented through pre-selected visual stimuli or found images.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

A previous study by Talbert and Anat (2019) on an analysis of active learning spaces sought to identify the critical elements of active learning classrooms that contributed the most to their effects on student learning and instructor performance, including affordances and elements of design, architecture, and technology integration.

One of the more obvious ways to study visual aspects of the urban sphere was to collect and analyze preexisting or so-called found images, visual representations, and artifacts. The potential benefits of using existing images or visualizations of urban society are manifold. First, the choice of existing visual materials and sources documenting aspects of the urban condition is broad, diverse, and rich; for example, historical photographs made with documentary intent. In today's networked society, huge repositories are becoming better organized and widely accessible. They provide access to a wide variety of public and private worlds, potentially traversing different cultures. Often this material can provide a unique "insider's view" of homes, institutions, neighborhoods, etc. Having not been produced for the particular research for which they later serve, such materials are, at least in this respect, "nonreactive" records, although, of course, they often should be considered as performances of some kind and for some purpose (Pauwels 2009, 1310).

Mimetic forms of the visual recording of city life are not limited to capturing preexisting aspects of material urban culture or the mere documentation of naturally occurring events. They can also involve more experimental set-ups in which respondents are recorded while reacting to unexpected stimuli. The choice between stills (photographs, drawings) and continuous film records depends primarily on the nature of the phenomenon under study (material-cultural snapshots or time frames versus fleeting

phenomena in their context of cause and effect) and on the information one wants to extract for specific research interests.

In order to mitigate or minimize bias (preconceptions and predispositions), several techniques have been developed to introduce a more "random" approach to the data-production process (Gendelman, Dobrowolsky and Aiello 2010, 69). Methodologically, a researcher could, for instance, use a sampling method probability, selectivity, or convenience to select research units that will be studied (houses or households in a neighborhood) from a database or draw a grid on a map to select the sites that will be photographed. Alternatively, one could decide to record every tenth house in a street or all visible billboards along a predetermined route.

Time, space, scale, and movement are often essential aspects of visual data production. Significant changes in the flows of cities can transpire in just a few minutes, hours, or days and span several years or even decades. A diachronic study of an urban environment could concentrate on the repetitive patterns of a number of activities and phenomena that occur during a day from the early morning until late in the evening, or it could focus on changes in the urban environment that span much larger periods of time. Therefore, some visual data-production techniques explicitly focus on sequentially researching social change and cultural expressions as they develop gradually in a particular physical or cultural space.

This study employed the Mimetic Theory in Art as an overarching framework to examine interpersonal, developmental, and ideological perspectives on select icons, sculptures, and images that Communication students are exposed to. Simultaneously, the new millennium sees the developed world functioning as an ocular-centric society (El Moussaoui 2020, 1291). This and other scholars discussed the concept of the intersection of ideas of knowledge and those gained from sight. These advances did not only shape our built environment but also changed our inherited culture. Hence, these perceptions were aided by historically unprecedented access to multiple images that resulted from the highly developed mimetic machinery of cameras and digital technology (Taussig 1993, 20).

Fundamental to the researcher's approach was understanding mimesis as part of an active process that embraces representation as *re*-presentation, rather than as a process that passively copies its subject in an attempt to reproduce reality. Simply, mimetic process and perceptions establish the relationship between urban spaces and interactions. The overarching objective of using Mimetic theory in this research can be summed up as follows: Art is genuinely a gift to the world. It is what we crave in human experience. Art gives meaning to our lives and helps us to find the meaning and relevance of our environment in as much as art appreciation is an essential part of our culture because it allows us to have a deeper understanding of our emotions. It increases our self-awareness and also allows us to be open to new ideas and experiences. Art, therefore, continues to open our minds and our hearts.

Corbin and Strauss (2008, 13) urge investigators to be more sensitive to conditions, actions, interactions, and consequences of a phenomenon and to order these conditions and consequences into theories. To facilitate this, they offer a useful tool called the "conditional matrix," which is a set of concentric circles with each level corresponding to a different unit of influence. At the center are actions and interactions such as cognitive participation, collective action, reflexive monitoring, and coherence. The inner rings represent individual and small group influences on these actions, and the outer rings represent international and national effects as indicated in the micro, meso, and macro labels in a given framework (see Figure 1).

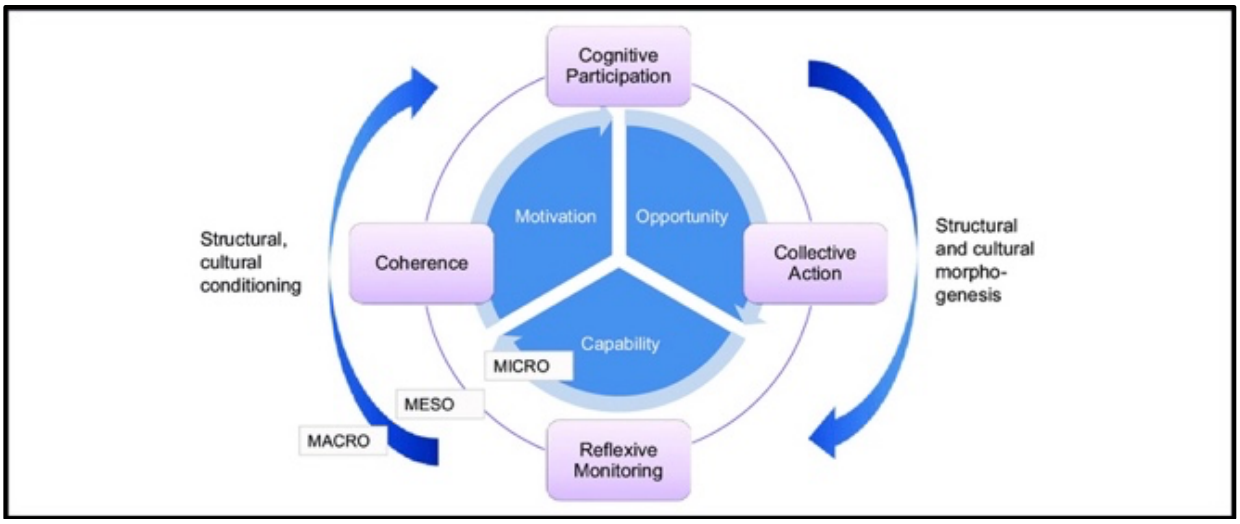

Figure 1: Modified Adaptation of Paradigm Model. Source: Corbin and Strauss (2008).

The study was performed to determine the communication value of learned spaces by setting the following objectives: 1) to determine how communication students perceive pre-selected visual stimuli; 2) to examine their understanding of the meanings in these urban spaces; 3) to evaluate their responses to the visual stimuli in an interview; and 4) to determine how the students connect their interactions to the spaces in their lived experiences.

Figure 2 outlines the procedural flow of determining this communication value of mediated/non-mediated learning spaces on the Manila campus of the Far Eastern University by interviewing 25 Communication students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

The categorization of themes in this study emanated from the characteristics of the phenomena being studied. However, they did not come from already agreed-upon professional definitions and local common-sense constructs but rather from respondents' values, theoretical orientation, and personal experience with the subject matter. A list of codes following an initial scan of the data was created relating to the research topic.

Themes that characterize the experience of informants – researchers are interested in understanding how textual data illuminate questions of importance to social science. Ryan and Bernard's (2023) study on analyzing themes suggested searching interviews for evidence of social conflict, cultural contradictions, informal methods of social control, things that people do in managing impersonal social relationships, methods by which people acquire and maintain achieved and ascribed status, and information about problem-solving. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) examined the setting and context, the perspectives of the informants and their ways of thinking about people, objects, processes, activities, events, and relationships.

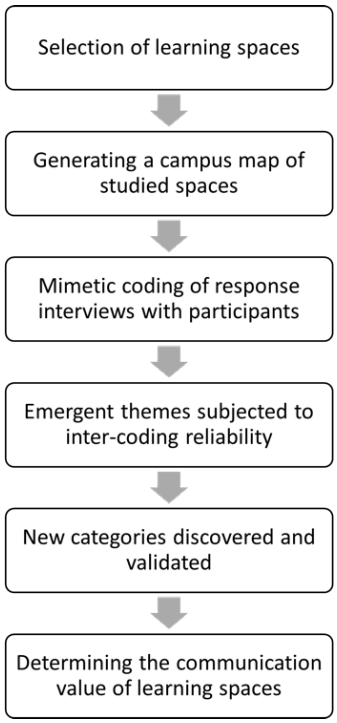

Figure 2. Data Gathering Process Flow. Source: author.

At the heart of qualitative data analysis is the task of discovering themes. By themes, I mean perceptions, experiences, feelings, values, and emotions in the minds of the interviewees. For the Mimetics, an interview with 25 students of the Communication discipline viewed the pre-selected visual data. Their responses were transcribed and subjected to mimetic analysis. Then, the results were further validated using inter-rater reliability tools on the transcribed data, categories, and themes. The approach used by the researcher in the inter-rater reliability was to select three faculty members to revalidate the categorized themes from the results of subjecting the transcribed interviews to in-vivo analysis. In-vivo coding is a form of qualitative analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the interviewees. It comes from grounded theory research and means that words or terms are so remarkable that they should be taken as codes. After this, the rater's scores were averaged among the interrater's faculty ratings.

Data-driven coding (inductive inference) of the pre-selected visuals was abstracted from highlights of the interview process. Using the respondents' exact words or verbatim coding (Saldaña 2016, 177-178) allowed the researcher to stay close to the data. A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey responses, drawings, artefacts, photographs, video, Internet sites, e-mail correspondence, as well as academic and fictional literature. The portion of data coded during the first cycle of coding processes can range in size from a single word to a full paragraph, an entire page of text or a stream of moving images. In the second cycle of coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, analytic memos about the data, and even a reconfiguration of the codes.

In the present study, data triangulation was employed as a technique to analyze the results of the same study using different methods of data collection. In this study, the transcribed data collected was triangulated with interviews and field notes from observations during the interview and so-called memoing as a key technique in qualitative research where insights are documented in the process. These three data sets were used for three main purposes: to enhance validity, create an in-depth picture of a research problem, and interrogate different ways of understanding a research problem. Most often, triangulation validated research findings by checking with the inter-raters on their different observations of the same phenomenon that produced the same results. It was also used to interrogate inconsistencies and data that were not expected to align. The methodological framework adopted and modified by Corbin and Strauss (2008) determined the degree of overlap between methods as conceptualized.

Data convergence indicated there was a strong degree of overlap and accuracy between the data sets collected by using different methods. Complementarity also built a richer picture of the research results by allowing the results from different methods to inform each other.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the campus map as a legend, the images of Figures 3 to 6 were shown to the participants. Excerpts of their narrative accounts are presented below.

The Manila campus of the Far Eastern University depicts the landscape of learning spaces amidst lush greenery spawning four hectares. The campus is noted for a number of historical art Deco buildings, preserved from the first half of the 20th century (see Figure 3).

Figure 4 of the University Library and the Food court depicts a collaborative active space for public thinking space as well as that of the pavilion. It is a representative image of a traditional learning space. The aesthetics show a collaborative space with movable furniture and dynamic, untraditional settings in multiple modes for visible collaborations.

Figure 3: Far Eastern University logo. Source: University website.

Figure 4: Far Eastern University Library. Source: University website.

Figure 5: Far Eastern University Food Court. Source: University website.

Figure 5 shows that the food court created an interactive learning space that enhanced connectivity and collaboration. The respondents' account of how this collaborative space was also a public thinking space reaffirms the images seen in Figure 2, which perhaps was designed unknowingly as an active learning design to elicit multiple modes of visible collaborations. Again, to many, the food court is perceived as just a space to enjoy meals. However, beyond that, such space could actually provide viewers with a tool for self-expression and group expression where visible learning and thinking could transpire.

Figure 6: Far Eastern University Pavilion. Source: University website.

Figure 6 shows the university pavilion. It was validated as a collaborative, flexible learning space for social interactions and visible learning and thinking. From this visual image, one can glean that the pavilion appeared to be a triple-sized classroom in an open space, with lush greenery providing a soothing environment – the place where small group discussions transpired within and through this space. This communicative space provided a haven for students from all disciplines and undertake various activities, such as practicing, writing, and verbalizing thoughts and feelings.

The highlights of the interview with respondent 3 (R3, an undergraduate student) are presented below:

> The University library is a living space for learning. For me, every visit to the library means new knowledge and new learnings. It opens up a whole new dimension of what I have yet to know, serendipitous as I continue my journey as a student. […] This learning space of the library humbles me as I continue to discover more and more new things, new dimensions and perspectives to the Communication discipline. For me, it is not just a repository of knowledge but a place where East meets West as I explore more journal readings on my thesis topic." (R3 interviewed by author, September 2022)

Respondents 4 (R4, a teaching assistant) stated:

> The FEU Food Court is one of my favorite spaces, not only because of the food but the cherished opportunity to connect and collaborate with classmates and friends. It has become a witness to varied emotions experienced by students on their respective journeys. […] As a teaching assistant and graduate student, this food court has become my arena to observe the dynamics of interactions of various students and even a potential source of ideas for thesis topics. (R4 interviewed by author, September 2022).

Respondent 5 (R5, an undergraduate student) and Respondent 6 (R6, an undergraduate student) found the Pavilion as their favorite open space on the campus. Thus, R5 stated: "I meet up with my friends at the Pavilion often; so for me, it is not just an open space but one that becomes meaningful as we huddle for our student projects or simply use it as a convergence point to gather as a group before we embark on a shoot." (R5 interviewed by author, September 2022). And R6 confirmed: "The pavilion brings to mind happy memories of connecting with new acquaintances and cementing relationships with others." (R6 interviewed by author, September 2022).

From all narrative accounts of the 25 interviewees, categories and themes were created using In-vivo coding and the results of these themes were presented in Table 1. Three themes emerged from the transcripts of interview accounts. These themes are urban expression, lived experiences, and meanings. The general themes alone would not make sense unless an inter-coder reliability tool is used to determine connections to the main themes. Therefore, the second column on the category is the result that emerged by using In-vivo.

Theme	Category	Inter-Coder Reliability
Urban Expression	Lived Emotions	60%
Lived Experiences	Actual	72%
Variable Experiences	Changing	60%
Modality	Hybrid	65%
Meanings	Material Culture	82%
Utility of Meanings	Usage	90%
Interpretations	Human Behavior	87%

Table 1: Themes, Categories, and Inter-coder Reliability. Source: author.

Various categories resulted for each major theme which were all abstracted from the verbatim interviews. For urban expression, only one category emerged, i.e., lived emotions, because the narrative accounts, when grouped and subjected to inter-coder reliability, can all be summed up under one umbrella category.

For lived experiences – the second major theme – three categories emerged. These are actual, changing, and hybrid. They refer to the actual lived experience accounts abstracted from the narrative. Changing refers to the volatile experiences in the FEU learning journey. Volatile means that different interviewees have different perspectives or accounts of their learning journey. Lastly, there is hybrid because the respondents all experienced hybrid online interactions for two years, from 2020 to 2022. Their narrative accounts of these years were rather limited because face-to-face learning only resumed in the first semester of 2022.

Evident in the findings of the study were qualitative elements such as the quality of social interactions with an emphasis on security inside the campus and educational utility or benefit of the space for the learning journey of a student. There is a strong need for creating and maintaining space that enhances connectivity and collaboration as regards the activities of students. Furthermore, wireless sensor networks and mobile devices were parallel constructs that helped induce and enhance engagements within the different spaces. This points to the fact that these spaces ~~had~~ directly contributed to the quality of social interactions.

The learning spaces in the Manila campus of Far Eastern University elicited mixed emotions among the 25 respondents as they recounted their lived journey. It reinforced active learning as defined broadly to include any pedagogical method that involves students actively working on learning tasks and reflecting on their work, apart from watching, listening, and taking notes (Bonwell and Eison 1991).

The highlights of respondent 1 (R1, a teaching assistant) are: "Every time I see a visual of my campus, I feel nostalgic because it brings to mind memories of my journey as a student. Now, as an alumnus, I cherish those lived experiences that have shaped my destiny. Thank you, FEU!" (R1 interviewed by author, September 2022).

Respondent 2 (R2, also a teaching assistant) stated: "I feel fulfilled whenever I see this photo because it reminds me of how my Tamaraw identity enabled me to belong and achieve success in various forms and ways. Of course, there were challenging times, but now I view them as learning experiences in my personal development as a young adult. Soon I will march as a graduate of the Communication program, and already I feel sad leaving this campus I have grown to love." (R2 interviewed by author, September 2022).

The narratives of Communication students described the affective domains – feelings, emotions, and experiences – stimulated by the image of the university. They associated empowering connectedness with their Tamaraw identity. Their perception of the Manila campus represented an image as a process that reproduced a lived reality, i.e., an intertwined relationship between the mimetic process of the FEU learning journey and its vivid memories resulting from a lived experience. In particular, accounts of

their lived experiences, such as academic activities held in the lush, spacious campus, recalled moments of collaboration and interactions. From the simple fire and earthquake drills all these form part of their lived experiences as students.

The findings from above support the elements of active learning design, as shown in Figure 7. Flexible learning space reduced the sedentary time among tertiary learners because accounts of narratives in the study findings point to a realization that innovative, flexible learning spaces account for improved academic learning outcomes in the thinking process. They reinforce a previous study discussing active learning spaces (Talbert and Anat 2019), with the visual model reflected in Figure 7. While to most visitors, a university library may simply be a repository of cognitive knowledge, the discussants articulated how this traditional space elicited their values, theoretical orientation, and personal experience with the said learning space. Triangulated data reinforced how the library enhanced validity and created a more in-depth picture of interactions as proof that the respondents' perception of the Manila campus was their lived reality.

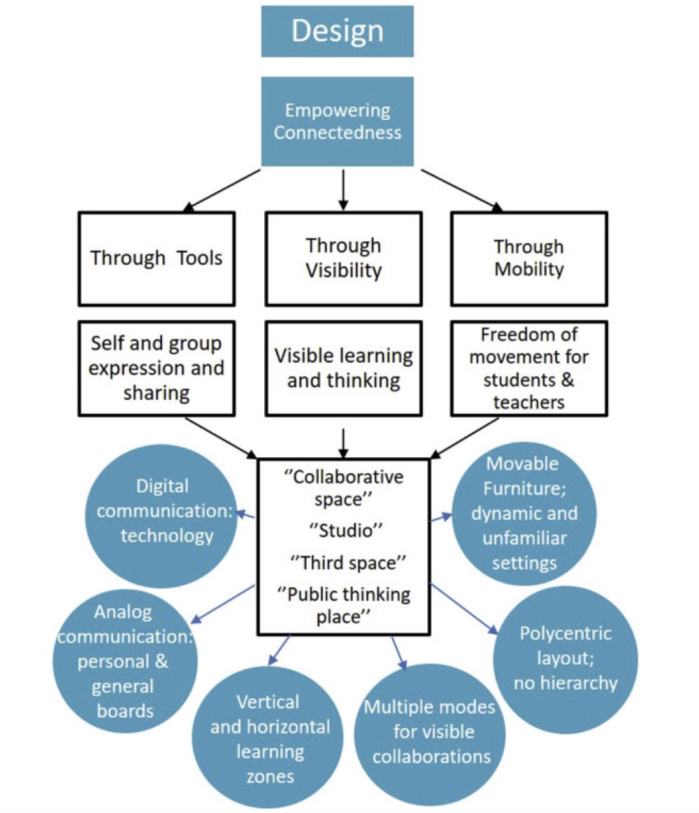

Figure 7: Elements of Active Learning Design. Source: Talbert 1998.

The narrative accounts about the university library revealed the students' feelings about their experiences using the library, not just to study but to read, conduct research, and even interact with other thesis students as they discovered journal studies for their research project.

As educational institutions increasingly seek to implement active learning, concerns about the learning spaces for active learning have naturally arisen. Numerous instructors, school leaders, and architects have explored how learning spaces can be designed differently to support active learning and amplify their positive effects on student learning.

Talbert's 1998 study was a meta-analysis drawn from literature reviews that resulted in the framework given in Figure 7. The goal was to analyze how empowering connectedness is achieved through tools, visibility, and mobility. Self-expression, group expression, and sharing are achieved through tools. Design and flexibility were key contributory elements to the learning processes as articulated by teachers and students. They proved instrumental to the thinking process.

This pavilion is one of the favorite flexible learning spaces of Tamaraws. They have vivid memories not just of academic activities that transpire here but also of collaborative meetings and discussions that extend even to discussions with teachers during conferences and workshops.

Furthermore, the design qualities illustrated in Figure 7 are reinforced by the narratives as several accounts allude to digital communication technology as enhancing the learning journey for Tamaraws. The presence of vertical and horizontal learning zones contributes to the maximized use of space for interactive activities, both curricular and otherwise.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted at Far Eastern University derived themes of urban expression, lived experiences, and meanings. Triangulated data enabled the researcher to support the argument that a systematic conversation on the methodological principles and practices can be undertaken as an attempt to qualitatively measure communicative learning spaces. Triangulation validated the research findings by checking different methods or different observers of the same phenomenon producing the same results. A previous study undertaken by the researcher had alluded to the FEU learning journey, and its results ran parallel to the constructs discovered through this study.

The many promising prospects of visual methods in the study of urban contexts presented a complex communicative constellation. Such methods require the development of scientifically informed visual competencies among researchers, more explicit and integrated methodologies, and general attention to maintaining highly reflexive attitudes throughout the process. The choice of visual imagery, i.e., found images, became critical to the study as this imagery served as a medium for eliciting its purposive communicative content beyond the utility of the space.

Previous literature about the notion of the *city as a medium* and *the city as content* highlights the importance of cities as both producers and products of particular practices, interactions, and narratives. This study was an attempt to present ways as to how the communication value of urban space was investigated using a procedural method validated inter-coder reliability tools and anchored upon the Mimetic Art Theory.

The use of the visual as a data source or as a medium for capturing, processing, and expressing social scientific knowledge about (urban) society continues to challenge current scholarship. It generates particular demands, including specific visual competencies but also unique rewards by creating new opportunities for captivating ways of building and disseminating knowledge. More explicit and transparent methodologies and exemplary visual urban studies may help visual research gradually enter the realm of widely accepted options in the study of the communication value of learning spaces in metropolitan universities in Manila, Philippines.

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The film festival review section publishes critical writing on film festivals. Authors should take a critical stance and reflect on at least one theme of the film festival/s that is relevant to the aims and the scope of the journal. Authors may discuss up to three thematically connected film festivals and should submit

a well-structured critical review. Authors must not be employed by the festival/s they are reviewing. Contributions must be under 2,500 words long. Authors of critical film festival reviews include their name and affiliation but no bio-note.

Exhibition and Event Reviews

The exhibition and event reviews section publishes critical texts on media exhibitions and events. Scholars, artists, curators and media practitioners are encouraged to submit reviews that apply academic and critical approaches. Authors may discuss up to three thematically connected exhibitions or media events and should submit a well-structured critical review. Authors must not be employed by the exhibitions and events they are reviewing. Contributions must be under 2,500 words long. Authors of critical exhibition and event reviews include their name and affiliation but no bio-note.

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