



Digital Cultural Activism: The Cultural Politics of *Lengger* Banyumas in the Digital Age

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[Abstract]

This research examines the cultural politics of *lengger* Banyumas, Indonesian traditional performers, in preserving local culture in the digital era. This research uses new ethnography to gain an in-depth understanding and probe a more nuanced spectrum of problems dealing with Indonesian performers. The results reveal that as a gendered performance, gender dynamics involving the intersection of gender and age shaped the minor initiatives of illiterate female *lengger* to preserve their own existence through digitalization. Moreover, patriarchal conditions trap the female dancers in gender inequality. At this point, body politics is practiced through the reproduction of traditional gender roles that position women to submit into society's

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expectation and led to the decrease in the amount of traditional female dancers. Therefore, the cultural politics of Indonesian performers in the digital era are possibly practiced digital cultural activism as an alternative mode to preserve culture. Thus, activism, which is elaborated with the digital literacy, is essential to empower them with the digital skills to challenge the digital era and boost society's commitment to preserve tradition.

Keywords: Digital Cultural Activism, Cultural Politics, Intersection, Gender Dynamics, Lengger

I . Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had the massive impact on Indonesian traditional performers such as *lengger*, a traditional dance from Banyumas, Indonesia. Data show that the number of female *lengger* and their communities decreased sharply after the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the interviews with the government officials, it was reported that in 2018, there were forty *lengger* and cultural communities around the district, while in 2024 there were only three active *lengger* communities. However, the cause of this decrease is not simply caused by the pandemic but is deeply rooted in the evolving sociocultural dynamics, particularly the intersection of patriarchal traditions and religious norms. In Jokowi's regime, the increasing prominence of Islamic modesty values in Indonesia often restricts the public display of the gendered dancing body. Indeed, it encompasses more complicated situations faced by traditional performers, including *lengger* and their communities.

Lengger was formerly performed as a form of gratitude to the fertility goddess in the post-harvest season, which was called a *baritan* (Fatmawaty and Alim 2020: 262). Yet, this particular dance developed into entertainment performed to welcome guests. Lysloff (2002) stated that *Lengger* was formerly performed for eight hours in seven stages, involving *klenengan* (musical concert), *kuda calung* (horse trance dance imitation), *bodhoran* (female dancers invite men to join them on stage), *jogged* (dance), *badhutan* (comic

interlude), *ebeg-ebegan* (horse dance parody), and *baladewan* (masculine style warrior dance). However, nowadays, this dance has emerged as a welcoming dance performed in 10 to 15 minutes without these stages, usually called as a *lenggeran*. It is merely due to the practicality in society.

There are also some opinions that spread regarding the historical development of *lengger*. Some believe that it was derived from the words *leng* and *ngger*, which were taught as *leng* or *hole* as a symbol of femininity, but it is revealed to be *ngger* or *jengger* represents a cock's crown as a symbol of masculinity (Fatmawaty, et al 2022: 3). Others believe that *leng-ngger* means *leng* or *hole* that can drive the audience to chaotic conditions, referring to female *lengger* dancers. However, there has become an agreement that *lengger* is derived from *eling-ngger*, a philosophical means to remind people to be aware of all their lives and to do good deeds. Thus, many things dealing with *lengger* are philosophically driven to be a virtuous human for others. *Lengger*, which is possibly performed by female and male dancers wearing female costumes and accessories such as *jarit* (a traditional Javanese batik wrap skirt), *selendang* (traditional shawl), *kemben* (a traditional Javanese strapless cloth top), and *konde* (Javanese bun).

However, the existence of male *lengger* dancers has been boosted by the social arena, which nowadays values them higher than female *lengger* dancers. According to Fatmawaty's (2023) research, *female lengger* dancers with no educational background, usually called traditional *lengger* dancers, while male *lengger* dancers usually have academic dancing backgrounds, can be classified as contemporary *lengger* dancers. In other words, the nature of being a female *lengger* dancer is inherited, while the male *lengger* dancer faces different conditions, as they not only inherit talent but also learn how to develop the dance with their academic background. This systemic inequality allows male dancers to readily access formal training at institutions like the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI). By earning bachelor's degrees, men institutionalize and legitimize their practice, while female performers are systematically marginalized from academic avenues due to domestic obligations. In most of rural area in Banyumas, deep-rooted society's

expectations still dictate that young women should marry soon and prioritize raising a family immediately after primary or secondary education, viewing this domestic role as a form of filial piety. In line with Bennet (2005) who stated that vast majority of young Indonesian women maidenhood is a journey that welcome them entering new phase of life. Consequently, male *lengger* faces significantly fewer social barriers while women should behave nicely to fit with the society's expectation.

Further, male *lengger* dancers even got many accesses to obtain some art foundation from the government, while the female *lengger* who lacked information had no access to gain that. Female dancers, who categorized as traditional *lengger*, faced significant challenges in directing the cultural politics. On the other hand, the male *lengger* often gained benefit from institutional funding due to their academic background and wide networking. Thus, the traditional female *lengger* relies heavily on the inherited talent such as dancing, singing (*nyinden*), and parody. However, their marginalized position in cultural and institutional hierarchies frequently leaves them excluded from prominent performance and recognition. In some cases, the male *lengger* dancer could even hire the female *lengger* as the talent in their event, in which it creates unequal power relations. Thus, it reflects West's (1990) the concept of cultural politics, which emphasizes differences such as identity, gender, sexuality, and status as key factors in shaping power relations. These differences play a crucial role in the cultural political constellation of *lengger* Banyumas, highlighting the varying experiences and agency of traditional performers. The female *lengger* needs more effort to overcome the challenge, positioning itself as a valuable asset of the culture, and practicing cultural politics.

Negative stereotyping has become an important problem when dealing with female *lengger*. Female *lengger* are often misunderstood and viewed as transgressing religious norms because of their appearances, which are perceived as "provocative" and revealing. Thus, the existing female *lengger* dancers empower themselves by creating art communities such as those created by prominent female *lengger* named Daisah, Narsih, and Sariah, who reside near the Serayu River. Interestingly, communities of *lengger* that still exist

typically share a common pattern: the owner consists of collaborations between female *lengger* dancers and musicians, with the owner often bound together as married couples. *Lengger* Daisah, along with her husband Hadi Sumarto Sukendar, founded the *Langen Budaya* community at home in the Papringan area of Banyumas. Meanwhile, *lengger* Narsih and her husband Edi established Sanggar *Ngudi Welas Ing Salira* in the Pegalongan area of Banyumas. Similarly, Sariah is married to a well-known *calung* musician in Banyumas. However, her situation is somewhat different from that of the other two *lengger*, as she recently decided to stop being a *lengger* dancer after her husband's mourning.

Previous researches focused mainly on male *lengger* because it is considered more interesting in Indonesian patriarchal and religious contexts. Fatmawaty et al (2018) revealed the success of male *lengger* in preserving their existence by using Bourdieu's theory. The results show that male *lengger* equipped themselves with sufficient academic background; therefore, it also has an impact on their arena. Furthermore, Fatmawaty and Suhardi (2023) reveal that the possession of *indang* (spiritual gifts) serves as another influential form of cultural capital. Further, it is supported by the personal branding of the male *lengger lanang* on Instagram, emphasizing values, character, codes of conduct, and morality that are positive and consistent (Yustika et al 2023). In addition, the male *lengger* intentionally negotiates negative stigma through virtual spaces (Fatmawaty and Alim 2020). Similarly, Nyta (2023) has taken an interest in creating informative videos of male *lengger* using motion graphic animation techniques. This reveals the use of the media to depict *lengger's* movement. Pakki et al. (2023) viewed male *lengger* as cross-gender dances, suggesting that they should be presented in a more attractive fashion. In line with this research, Hartanto views male *lengger* as a dance that affirms the cross-dressing notion of dance. Research on female *lengger* has been conducted from different perspectives. In Sidanegara, Cilacap, a female *lengger* participates in the sea alms ritual as an act of worship to God Almighty for abundant blessings (Sinta et al 2023). This aligns with Fatmawaty's (2023) research, which reveals that the role of female *lengger* remains mystified in relation to fertility.

This research reveals that gender dynamics are crucial factors in defining the power relation as female *lengger* are profoundly trapped in hegemonic relationships with both their husbands and the art community. It illustrates that within the context of gender relations, they are supposed to be mutually supportive in their respective roles. Nonetheless, men continue to assume that they are the only ones who take the role as the breadwinners (Walby, 2012: 6). Thus, we believe that in this context, women are forced to be obedient, despite the fact that female *lengger* also earn money to support the family. The challenges faced by *female lengger* extend beyond merely preserving tradition; they must also counter the stigma associated with their identities. We assume that the notion of the intersection between gender, age, and social background positions female *lengger* as subject who cannot actively reproduce their identities. To a certain extent, we identify activism, such as gender activism, plays an essential role in cultural politics to preserve Indonesian traditional performers.

The above explanation suggested that female *lengger* existence is critical as they are not only decreasing in number but also experiencing inequality compared to male *lengger*. The decline of female *lengger* reflects a structural regression where Islamic modesty norms and patriarchy have devalued a sacred ritual into a brief spectacle but more entertaining dance. This shift reveals a gender paradox: as religious restrictions marginalize the female body, male *lengger* practitioners paradoxically gain social capital. Consequently, the tradition's survival relies on its ability to survive in a sociopolitical arena that privileges the male over the female dancers' visibility. Therefore, more nuanced approach by engaging digital cultural activism is essential for the sustainable preservation of *lengger* in virtual landscape.

II . Method

This research was conducted using a new ethnography method to gather diverse narratives dealing with the preservation of *lengger* in the digital era, that involves the discourse of gender dynamics and

digital activism. In line with Saukko (2003), new ethnography provides a space for research subjects to speak personally. Saukko notes that the steps involved in new ethnography are not fundamentally different from those in traditional ethnography; however, new ethnography results in polyvocality. The new ethnographic approach is essential for exploring all aspects related to *lengger*, as this method yields a spectrum of data related to the varied experiences of the research subjects.

However, Spradley (1979) asserts that in ethnography, these steps can begin with identifying informants. The subjects of this study are female *lengger* and art communities as it is aimed to empower them for gender equality. Due to the declining number of *lengger* practitioners affiliated with formal art communities, this study utilizes purposive sampling to identify informants. Primary data collection focused on two female *lengger* maestros residing in the Serayu River region, Narsih and Daisah. To ensure a gender-balanced perspective and a comprehensive understanding of the tradition, the study also incorporates male *lengger* maestros as secondary informants, facilitating a comparative analysis of their artistic experiences. The next step is data collection, that are gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Researchers conduct in-depth interviews with dancers and community members to gather personal narratives and insights about *lengger*.

Further steps involve investigating *lengger's* digital literacy. According to Watkins (Watkins, 2008) digital literacy in relation to cultural institutions refers to the socio-technical elements necessary for ICT-based interactions with content. The data were analysed by using qualitative analysis techniques such as coding and thematic analysis to organize the result of observations and interview transcripts. Finally, all the data are related to the issue of recurring themes related to identity, tradition, performance, and community involvement to create a cohesive narrative to encapsulate the cultural strategies of *lengger* that involves gender dynamic and digital activism.

Distinctively, digitalization has also become a challenge for

female lengger to preserve tradition. Generally, the digital sphere is possibly viewed as a site of struggle, the media for *lengger* to negotiate the stigma, and preserve this tradition. In fact, while the male *lengger* has already engaged with the social media that boosts their existence, the female *lengger* tends to be diminished in the digital realm. Thus, digital literacy has become an essential issue to be addressed, as it is part of the cultural politics of *lengger*. Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to understand information but also capacity in the use of digital spaces efficiently. In cultural context, it is particularly significant to boost the traditional artist in engaging with the digital media, a prevailing mode to represent their identity. This statement aligns with Watkins' (2008) perspective that digitally literate communities do not just consume digital culture but also produce their own artifacts and can even collaborate with institutions.

III. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Cultural Politics of *Lengger* Banyumas

Cultural politics provides a crucial framework for understanding how power operates within societies by examining identity markers, such as gender, sexuality, and social status (West 1990: 3). This concept was developed by Rudolph (1992) at the core of questioning individual and collective identity, respect and disregard, pride and defamation, cultural glorification, and fear of cultural extinction. These identity markers are not merely descriptors of individuals but serve as instruments through which power dynamics are negotiated, reinforced, and contested. Furthermore, performance and cultural politics are seen as intertwined loci in cultural studies research (Diamond 1996: 7). In the case of female *lengger* performers, this situation is intricately woven into their interactions with various social spheres, including their relationships with their husbands, their roles within cultural communities, and their engagement with digital platforms.

Meanwhile, traditional expectations of marriage often place significant constraints on female *lengger*. Collective norms order

woman to adhere the specific roles that prioritize responsibilities as wives and caregivers, in which it restricted their fully engagement to develop themselves in art performance. Further, female *lengger* often faced systemic barriers in term of their participation and recognition to develop their cultural communities. The cultural field is frequently dominated by male narratives and leadership, which marginalized female voices in their cultural communities. Most of the decision related to the cultural communities are always under the perspectives of male leader, at this point refers to the female *lengger* husband. Female *lengger* will voluntarily obey and respect the male's order. Patriarchy, therefore, does not merely affect individual autonomy but also can lead to endanger the cultural heritage. As Scharff, Smith-Prei, and Stehle (2016) highlighted the existence of social norms and expectations that deeply embedded within cultural practices, reproducing the marginalization cycle. In the context of *lengger*, the marginalization was manifested in the reduction of female's dancer contribution that finally reduce their chance to positioned themselves as the core of the culture in the digital age.

The rapid development of digital society has presented a challenging situation for preserving traditional art forms, such as *lengger* requires more engagement with modern technologies and platforms, such as digital literacy. Digital Literacy is defined as the ability to access or use digital tools effectively to communicate and share an essential element aimed for preservation (Watkins, n.d.; Ertl and Helling 2011). At this context, it is also essential for the sake of digital archive that is crucial for broader audience and future generation. However, the patriarchal barriers faced by female *lengger* often prevented them to master these digital skills. Indeed, female *lengger* should be more aware that the digital platform is a powerful and transformative arena to challenge the dominant structure and to gain control over their own narratives. Uldam (2018) argued that digital spaces have the potential to disrupt the traditional hierarchies and voiced the marginalized group. However, the female *lengger* situation promoted the issue the current condition in which they are well-received through male dominated new media. Ahlstrand (2021) in Muringa (2026) illustrates that Indonesian media highlight women

anchors' competence in moral or domestic traits, rather than institutional authority. In line with this finding, this research also illustrates how moral and domestic traits has become all the guidance and control mechanism towards female *lengger*'s attitude. It is shown that the predominance of the male perspective in the media makes modern society less tolerant towards gender equality, and, at the same time, the patriarchal society imposes gender-stereotyped values (Tatsenko, 2022). Therefore, we assumed that it is an opportunity for female *lengger* to share their stories, to amplify their narratives, and to regain their cultural hegemony towards the society through the social media.

The above systemic barriers experienced by female *lengger* needs collective efforts to preserve the culture, a form of collective digital activism. As Kirik et (2021) al. emphasized, digital activism raised inclusion by connecting local narratives to global audiences. Digital activism not only boosted the collective awareness but can have the impact for collaboration, funding, and government's support that fundamental for the sustainability of traditional arts, such as *lengger*. According to Scharff, Smith-Prei, and Stehle (2016), digital platforms serve as critical spaces for intersectional activism, expanding different voices that interconnected gender, identity, and social status. Therefore, for female *lengger*, the digital spaces can also lead the audiences to accomplish their responsibility dealing with the preservation of culture. Social media campaigns highlight personal stories of female *lengger* challenge misconceptions and nurture empathy. Moreover, digital activism is possibly allowed *lengger* performers to influence government policy and public opinion. By amplifying the gender inequality discourse, they can advocate the own existence and amplify the preservation of culture. This strategy is significant to eliminate patriarchal trap in Indonesian society.

3.2. Gender Dynamics in *Lengger* : The Patriarchal Trap and Gender Inequality

The *lengger* dance in Banyumas can be viewed as a deeply complex cultural form that navigates gender limits, societies' expectations,

and patriarchal norms. The development and roles of both male and female *lengger* bring into more nuanced gender expressions that are interpreted, challenged, and often reinforced in traditional patriarchal situations. In addition, Lysloff (2002) stated that society considers *lengger* tradition as one that should be preserved, but their acceptance of this tradition is sometimes ambivalent. Thus, *lengger* can also be seen as transgressive in its blending and challenging conventional gender roles.

However, the presence of male *lengger* who embody feminine roles pushes these limits by introducing cross-gender performance (Fatmawaty, et al 2022: 14). As they perform feminine expressions in their gestures, dress, and makeup, they create a fluid representation of gender that contrasts with societies' expectations of masculinity. This type of performance challenges the strict binaries of male and female roles in traditional Indonesian society, positioning *lengger's* body as a site for expressing gender fluidity and alternative identities. For male *lengger*, their performance often receives ambiguous or compelled acceptance, as they must continually negotiate stigmas associated with gender non-conformity (Fatmawaty et al., 2020). The same expectation is embedded in the female *lengger's* body, which is associated with rituals that align them with fertility and mystification. The association between mystification and traditional gender roles strengthens patriarchal norms, positioning women as bearers of fertility, linking their value to social beliefs about femininity, and being required to submit to the social structure and behave as defined by society's norms (Fatmawaty 2023). This duality reflects *lengger's* layered function as both a cultural performance and a site of ongoing negotiation within a society in which gender dynamics posit the female *lengger* to submit into the patriarchal rules.

Lengger Narsih and *Lengger* Daisah, with their art communities, who actively participate as gamelan players in this *lengger* community, demonstrate a shared enthusiasm for cultural preservation. Both of these *female* *Lenggers* only completed education up to elementary school; even *Lengger* Narsih did not finish elementary school because of her commitments as a young *lengger*. They can be classified as digitally illiterate traditional

performers; in this case the social media is used for the basic needed such as sending messages or images in *Whatsapp*. Even, they showed little interest in exploring the social media such as for the benefit of their existence. Their age limits their ability to explore the digital more. Therefore, the intersection of age and educational background significantly contributes to limited digital literacy among illiterate traditional performers, especially in Banyumas. As Collins (Collins 2016) stated, intersection plays a significant role in defining how gender affects social discourse and multiple inequalities in which it relates to identity politics. Once, Daisah has to ask permission from their husband and children when she wants to try to download the *Instagram* application. As the spouse and children forbid her, she willingly obeys strict prohibitions. This situation reveals how cultural politics that emerge in the way *lengger* adapt to the challenges of the modern era. The lack of access to digital resources and patriarchal control over their bodies and actions restrict their participation, illustrating how cultural politics continue to shape the dynamics of power, tradition, and modernity in the *lengger's* life. The trap of hegemonic patriarchy has emerged in their broad relationship, reproducing the practice of body politics (Brown and Gershon, 2017: 1) that politically inscribe and control women's body.

The mere existence of cultural performers in Indonesia post-pandemic has resulted in prominent segregation among those who remain actively engaged in the arts. As stated by Narsih: "*My parents were artists. They were dedicated to developing the ebeg and calungan. Therefore, I continue their struggle*". In the context of female *lengger*, the burden of preserving culture is seen as a moral responsibility. Her struggle to preserve culture, which demands time and cost to develop the art community, embraces females as the guard of culture. Female *lengger* serves as a vital symbol in cultural preservation, acting as a guardian of traditions and local values passed down through generations. Similarly, Davis (1997) argued, women play a central role as the pillars of a nation and as the guard of culture, a truly meaning that is particularly represented in the context of *lengger*.

However, female *lengger* maintain common conventional norms

in the Indonesian patriarchal context, which are valued more after they get married and have children (Bennett 2005; Platt et al 2018). Marriage is aimed not only to fit with the social structure but also to prevent them from being negative labels, as has been experienced by many female dancers. Thus, they strictly positioned themselves to play their roles as good mothers, good wives, and good societies, to be obedient to their husbands, and to adhere to their spouses' and society's expectations. As Narsih and Daisah stated: *"even though we can afford our own money from the performance, we still have to be a good wife by obeying all our husband's orders"*. Indeed, in the context of gender relations between the female *lengger* and their husband, lack of freedom and agency, describing mere vogue practice of power relation and embodiment of hegemonic masculinity in Banyumas tradition.

Despite their central role in performance, female *lengger* remain subordinate within broader sociocultural and familial structures. Even *lengger* dancers often refuse to accept certain jobs if their husbands instruct them to do so. This situation highlighted hegemonic relations in the context of gender dynamics, which are consistently fortified by prevailing circumstances (Hughes-Freeland, 2008). The reproduction of patriarchal discourse positioned female *lengger* to obey their husbands, indicating a profound lack of autonomy over *lengger's* bodies. In Indonesia's patriarchal context, the breadwinner is labelled as the burden of males only as the head of the family, who should be responsible for the whole life of the family. It merely reproduces traditional gender roles, as conceptualized by Walby's theory of patriarchy, involving complex relationships between gender, capitalism, and employment (Walby, et al 2012; 1989). These roles prescribe specific behaviors for men and women, such as men being breadwinners and women being housewives. Indeed, the existence of art communities is not merely a manifestation of *lengger's* responsibility to affirm themselves as having good citizenship. At this point it also can be seen that the existence of cultural communities represents the collective spirit of Indonesian society in the modern era. However, in relation to their spouses managing the art community, female *lengger* seem to lack of authority. Female *lengger* take a domestic role as they prepare

snacks and tea for the art community in their weekly dancing practice just before they teach the dancer. Consequently, female *lengger* are trapped deeper in the flows of traditional gender roles.

The exercise of power towards a *lengger's* body is not only reproduced in the patriarchal context but also in the traditional context. Being a *lengger* needs to finish many rituals, in which we believe that the practice of rituals by *lengger* is another form of bodily panopticon, a hegemonic form of panopticon that is willingly affirmed and internalized by *lengger*. The rituals are manifested in various forms such as fasting, including practices like *mutih* (stop eating the rice), *ngasrep* (eat tasteless food), or *pati geni* (eat the raw food), to maintain their body as virtuous individuals. They believe that all the practices empower their embodied spiritual element, which is called an *indang*, and can be seen as intangible cultural capital (Fatmawaty and Suhardi 2023). Thus, *indang* that is believed to emanate a positive aura during *lengger* performances should be nurtured by *lengger*, involving a deep connection to spiritual and cultural traditions. The vital role of possessing *indang* is assumed to be to maintain the authenticity and transformative power of *lengger* performances, making them a source of inspiration and cultural pride. Thus, the embodiment of an *indang* in *lengger's* body requires many sacrifices. This belief is not only a personal conviction for individual performers, but also a communal understanding that strengthens culture.

The above findings demonstrate all efforts of *lengger* to serve as a guard of the culture in which it is difficult for them to engage with the digital era as they are trapped by the patriarchal condition. In line with Davis (Yuval-Davis 1997) who argued that women is symbolic border guards, bearing the weight of cultural representation. However, the notion of *lengger* articulates the reproduction of gender inequality linked to digital literacy, in which *lengger* have no equal right to have access to digital media. We argue that the limited access to be digitally literate is perpetuated by the constraints of a patriarchal structure, which positions female *lengger* as submissive, not only in their roles as wives but also within society. Therefore, we strongly suggest that active engagement of societies in digital activism is essential for promoting

the visibility and sustainability of *lengger* in the digital era.

3.3. Digital Cultural Activism: Preserving *Lengger* in the Digital Era

The cultural landscape of gendered dancing in the Indonesian context has intensified the unequal challenges faced by female *lengger* even within the digital era. These challenges are embedded within broader cultural and shared narratives about gender roles, which digital technologies have now mediated and reshaped. Female *lengger*, such as Narsih and Daisah, remain constrained by traditional gender roles, which limits their opportunities for broader recognition and mobility. Thus, the proliferation of female *lengger* through digital folklore emerges as the cultural politics of the *lengger* aimed at cultural preservation in the digital era. Digital folklore, as defined by Espenschied (2009) plays a central role in exploring how folk dances, such as *lengger* are documented, disseminated, and preserved through media technologies. Digital folklore encompasses the customs, traditions, and elements of visual, textual, and audio cultures that emerged from users' engagement with personal computer applications during the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century. In this context, digital folklore to empower folk art, such as *lengger* can be practiced by sharing all the *lenggers'* or traditional performers' activities on social media.

However, such a digital barrier presents a challenge for most digitally illiterate traditional performers. Female *lengger*, who has the role as wives and mothers, experienced discrimination in their autonomy to access digital technology, as they have to oblige permission from their husband and children. Therefore, the intersection of gender and age is a vital aspect in defining digital literacy (Crenshaw 1991: 1241). Intersectionality explains the more complex reasons behind the possible motives that lead female *lengger* to face various problems related to digital literacy. However, the paradoxical situation faced by female *lengger* as digital migrants limits their engagement with various social media platforms as they only use *Whatsapp*. As reported in the interview, they never explored the new progress of *Whatsapp* that is able to create a channel. Female *lengger*, expected as the embodiment of ideals

femininity as well as a good mother, wives, a good society, are ambivalently positioned to submit to the norm. This ambivalence aligns with Butler's (2011) argument that gender is a performative construct shaped by societal norms as well as Cixous (1975) emphasis on the intersection of embodied expression and cultural narratives. The heightened challenges of gender and age further marginalize female *lengger*, positioning them as digitally illiterate female dancers, that unable them to fully navigate or control digital platforms to sustain art performance that reflects their cultural identity. They are trapped in becoming more passive subjects (Staunæs 2003: 103 ; de Lauretis 1990: 115) who are controlled under the patriarchal concept of gender hierarchy.

The situation faced by female *lengger* in preserving culture requires further assistance, in which we believe that activism is essential. Sobande (2023) stated that activism in some ways is a form of resistance; therefore, in the context of *lengger* it reveals gender equality to gain more space not only to articulate their existence but also to preserve the culture. As a marginal group of performers who gain no excessive support from the government, the digital platform should be managed maximally. Hands (2009) argues the situation of how the marginalized groups have used digital platforms to achieve extensive visibility and mobilize support and further reaching massive audiences even challenging dominant narratives. For traditional dance groups such as *the art community or sanggar*, developing digital literacy allows them to authentically represent their cultural heritage. *Sanggar* can be seen as a form of collaboration in defining female's *lengger* agency. *Sanggar* and digital platform can shape an intertwined relation that support *lengger*. Couldry and Curran (2003) highlight the ways in which digital platforms have been employed to promote minority languages and cultural expressions that might otherwise be lost. These examples demonstrate the potential of *sanggar* or the traditional art community to use similar digital tools to support the preservation of female *Lengger*.

With sufficient digital skills, we strongly suggest that the art community of *lengger* utilize platforms such as *Instagram, YouTube, and Tik Tok*. Twitter or X is not considered an effective social media

platform, as people around Banyumas prefer to use TikTok or Instagram rather than twitter (now known as X). *Instagram* and *TikTok* are fairly chosen, as they require only a very short time to manage sharing cultural activities. In the Indonesian context, *Instagram* and *TikTok* are considered effective ways of sharing information. This condition is supported by the algorithm and attention issues that have become the main reasons for using both social media. In line with Alhabash (2024), people have different reasons for using *Facebook*, *Instagram* and *X*, such as the motivation to use the platform for escapism and relaxation of *TikTok*. Thus, *Instagram* and *TikTok* are virtual sites that empower traditional performers to preserve their culture.

TikTok becomes a possible medium to share the same narratives of preserving *lengger* dance. Some people are aware that they must create self-representation through media. Visual self-representations are shared among individuals and groups on social media, playing a key role in building and sustaining relationships, preserving memories, shaping norms and ideologies, and serving as powerful tools for identity formation and communication (Bhandari and Bimo 2022). Interestingly, the data shows that the number of users of *TikTok* in Indonesia is the largest in this world, even more than in America. Therefore, we believe that in the future, *TikTok* could possibly communicate what is written to the digital archiving memory, even though in some parts of this world, they have already used tik toks as a site of resistance (Cervi and Divon 2023; Cheng and Li 2024). *YouTube* is not a preferred media for traditional performers, as it requires more effort to edit and record videos. Societies can play a role in preserving culture, which is known as digital activism. Kirik et al. (2021) defined digital activism as deliberate actions by individuals or groups that leverage the fast dissemination capabilities of network structures and information technologies, primarily to significantly influence public opinion. We believe that this activism is the key to face the challenges faced by female *lengger* that involve support from society.

While it is reported that in some parts of Banyumas, religious factors are narrated as the main cause of the decreased female

lengger. At this point, the tension becomes more heightened to reveal the discourse produced by the religious context to position the women's body to submit to society's standards. Therefore, society's cultural awareness needs to be enhanced. Cultural awareness refers to the recognition and understanding of cultural background or beliefs, that help for understanding and respect other culture. Kaihlanen et al (2019) also stated that cultural awareness is related with cultural competence, where one's understanding of cultural features could improve one's ability to engage and respond to both the beliefs and behaviors of others. The importance of societies cultural awareness in the preservation of *lengger* through the practice of digital activism raised what is termed digital feminism. Interestingly, Jouët (2018) explored the social and political factors driving the resurgence of feminism and examined how feminists leverage digital media to advance their objectives. Unlike other writers who explore how digital advancement provides advantages for the empowerment of women's voices, Hou's (2020) findings highlight the precarity of digital platforms and the problems of politicizing personal issues in social media in the context of digital feminism. This form of feminism could positively reduce the labelling of *lengger* with negative societies' stigma.

Dealing with cultural activism, Dobrin (Dobrin 2020) stated that hashtag as a means of digital activism can enhance the cultural revolution. Thus, the hashtag such as #metoo has been the modes to provoke the digital solidarity for the victim. This global condition is similar to Indonesian context in which hashtag is also possible to be practiced as a preservation strategy. Meanwhile, Chibita (Chibita, 2016) expand the digital activism for sub-Saharan context. She stated that sub-saharan Africa has practiced the digital activism as a form of social movement that has the result on the gender equality dealing with LGBTQ issue. However, we believe that even though both can be managed as a social movement indeed managing the gender equality for traditional performers in Indonesia is just an ideal hope as they trapped in traditional gender dynamics that positioned women to be submissive. Therefore, in some cases the digital cultural activism can be seen as the social movement, but the result possibly relies not on the equality but more on the

preservation of the tradition.

Thus, the definite term of digital cultural activism as we proposed, is part of lengthy cultural politics in the digital era. Activism can serve as a model for society to empower other subjects. Yet, cultural awareness is also fundamental for the practice of digital activism. The communal responsibility is manifested through the digital activism. In line with Hands, digital activism has been effectively used to empower marginalized communities by providing them with tools to share the narratives and advocate for rights (Hands, 2011) . However, in Indonesia context, the digital activism should be equipped with the integration of sociocultural awareness and gender activism to raise more inclusive and culturally aware society.

Yet, cultural awareness is also essential for initiating societal engagement in digital activism. In conclusion, the integration of sociocultural awareness, gender activism, and digital tools is a powerful solution for preserving culture in the digital era. Communal responsibility manifests through digital activism. In line with Hands, digital activism has been effectively used to empower marginalized communities by providing them with tools to share their narratives and advocate for. Finally, digital cultural activism serves as a transformative force that preserves heritage, while raising an inclusive and culturally aware society.

IV. Conclusion

The above findings demonstrate that there is no monolithic element in understanding the problems related to inequality experienced by female *lengger*. In the digital reals. The intersection of gender and technology has significantly shaped the women's role as the passive subject rather than autonomous subject. Thus, it has led to the reduction of digital agency, that limit their engagement in the digital space. The societies' norm exerts their control over female's body, dictating women to behave and appear not only in the physical realm but also in the digital spaces. Therefore, all the power structures positioned female *lengger*, as well as female traditional

dancer in Indonesia, are trapped on the reproduction of political control over their bodies.

In the digital context, the intersection plays an essential role that posits women to be trapped as a passive subject rather than as an autonomous subject with a reduction in digital ability. Therefore, this study highlights the urgency of equipping female *lengger* with digital literacy for female *lengger* as this situation is faced by many illiterate traditional performers in Indonesia. Thus, more effort is needed not only from performers but also from the societies around them to preserve the culture on collective activism that involves gender and digital cultural activism. *Digital cultural activism* has become a form of communal responsibility for preserving *lengger*. We believe that a collective struggle is essential to bridge the role of society in supporting cultural preservation and promoting gender equality in the context of Indonesian traditional performers.

To sum up, the preservation of local folklore and traditional identity in the digital era need a resilient practice of the term as we called digital cultural activism in which it combines the digital activism and culture that engages the societies' awareness. Furthermore, the government's cultural policy should highlight the digital accessibility of performance funds, while educational institutions should integrate these traditions into school's curriculum to explore more on the locality. Finally, it can be underlined that the collaboration of government policy, pedagogy, and stakeholders to support the preservation by engaging it with digital cultural innovation.

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