

Engaging audiences: A critical reflection on the *Kaba Festival* art performances 2014-2024, West Sumatera

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Abstract

Effective communication is a key factor in the development of arts and culture, especially in traditional festivals involving community participation. This article explores *the Kaba Festival* organized by *Nan Jombang Dance Company*, founded by Indonesian dance maestro Ery Mefri. Using a critical reflection approach, the study analyzes communication dynamics in the festival by observing the participation and appreciation of artists, cultural figures, and academics. Findings show that participatory and community-based communication strategies enhance audience and participant engagement. Despite limited human resources, the festival successfully strengthens *Nan Jombang's* reputation, evolving from modest beginnings into a nationally and internationally recognized cultural platform. Now entering its 40th year, *Nan Jombang's* experience forms the basis for a strategic five-year plan (2025–2030) focused on cross-sector collaboration, digital media optimization, and training in cultural journalism. The study offers a model for building a sustainable, globally relevant art ecosystem while preserving local traditions.

Abstrak

Komunikasi efektif menjadi salah satu kunci dalam pengembangan seni dan budaya, terutama dalam konteks festival tradisional yang melibatkan partisipasi elemen masyarakat. Artikel ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi penyelenggaraan *Kaba Festival* oleh *Nan Jombang Dance Company*, yang didirikan Maestro Tari Indonesia, Ery Mefri. Melalui pendekatan refleksi kritis, artikel ini menganalisis dinamika komunikasi dalam perjalanan *Kaba Festival* dengan meneliti partisipasi, dan apresiasi para seniman, sastrawan, budayawan hingga akademisi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, penggunaan strategi komunikasi partisipatif dan berbasis komunitas meningkatkan keterlibatan kehadiran peserta dan penonton. Efektivitas yang tinggi dengan keterbatasan *human*

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resource, telah mengantarkan Kaba Festival dalam posisi puncak eksistensi sebagai sebuah kegiatan seni menggerek nama Nan Jombang Dance; tumbuh dari keterbatasan dan terus berkembang tanpa batas. Nan Jombang berkembang sebagai platform kebudayaan yang sangat diperhitungkan di kancah nasional dan internasional hingga berusia 40 tahun. Temuan ini menjadi dasar perumusan program strategis lima tahun (2025-2030) Kaba Festival yang mencakup penguatan kolaborasi lintas sektor, penggunaan media digital secara optimal dan pelatihan jurnalis seni-budaya bagi pelaku seni dan jurnalis. Hasil penelitian bisa menjadi contoh dasar tumbuhnya ekosistem seni yang berkelanjutan dan relevan dengan dinamika global, sekaligus menjaga kekayaan tradisi lokal.

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INTRODUCTION

The arrival of new media has changed many aspects of social life (Rachmad, 2024; Feldman, 2005; Flew, 2007), including the staging of performing arts festivals (Andri-R.M, 2016). Organizers must adapt their communication strategies in line with advancements in information technology, creating opportunities through digital media. The availability of internet networks, online media, and social media (Mustafa & Hamzah, 2010) has enabled performing arts festivals to rely not only on offline audiences but also on online viewers. *Nan Jombang Dance Company* has applied this approach in organizing *the Kaba Festival* over the past decade (2014–2024), transforming it into a significant performing arts platform both regionally and globally. *The Kaba Festival* began as a local event called *Galanggang Tari Sumatera*, which was held in 1988. In 2000, it evolved into *Padang Bagalanggan*, and since 2014, it has transformed into *the Kaba Festival*, continuing to this day (Makmur, 2023). *Nan Jombang Dance Company* is a traditional arts community rooted in Minangkabau culture, West Sumatera, Indonesia. The Minangkabau ethnic group upholds the philosophy of *adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah (ABS BK)*, which means that their customs are based on Islamic teachings, making Islam an integral part of their way of life (Sari, 2024; Fajria & Fitriasia, 2024). The traditional arts produced by this community are also part of the cultural heritage of Islamic civilization (Khusairi, 2021; Nasir, 2020), particularly within the Malay world (Khairiyah & Abdillah, 2023).

Studies on performing arts generally focus on three main aspects. *First*, research on the appreciation of performances, linked to local traditions that have evolved from their place of origin, along with shifts in values (Sinaga, 2018; Bahardur, 2018). *Second*, the management of production in performances, exploring how arts communities prepare shows, particularly traditional arts, and their existence after socio-cultural changes in society (Andri-R.M, 2016; Bisri, 2000). *Third*, research on organizing

performing arts from a production management perspective, relating to the progress of time, where traditional performing arts face modern advancements, adapting while preserving their local cultural roots (Widyasari & Yuwanti, 2022; Sasmita & Edlina, 2024; Utami, 2018).

Utami states that the management and administration of arts activities are essential tasks that should be addressed as early as possible, beyond the artistic aspects of a festival, event, or performance. Management is not limited to merely handling finances (Utami, 2018) but encompasses a broader scope. One of these aspects is communication, both internal and external. In contrast to Utami's focus, the study by Katuuk et. al examines the role of organizational communication in enhancing the existence of the Sanggar Seni Vox Angelica in Manado. Organizational communication plays a crucial role as a medium to achieve the goals of the arts community. It becomes the key to effective organization, acting as a mediator for leaders and members in providing suggestions, criticism, and ideas. Furthermore, it serves as the spearhead in improving the productivity and quality of performance of the leaders and members. This is the instrument to solve internal and external challenges (Katuuk et al., 2016). Meanwhile, Vida and Bisri reveal that the influence of globalization is strongly felt in the world of Indonesian arts. This is particularly evident in the rapid development of communication technology, which allows the works of artists from one nation to transcend borders and be enjoyed directly by people from other countries around the world. Artistic creations can no longer be clearly separated from systems such as production, information, trade, law, and telecommunications (Vida & Bisri, 2020).

A review of studies on this topic has not yet identified research on effective communication strategies in the development of the arts in response to the impact of advancements in information technology, particularly in the organization of the Kaba Festival performing arts event. Therefore, this study aims to fill this literature gap by explaining how effective communication must be applied in the development of the arts, specifically in the organization of performing arts festivals. Performing arts are a form of communication, and those involved must recognize that this field should not be neglected to advance the creative process and the development of the arts.

This study aims to address the existing literature gap by examining the relationship between communication strategies and advancements in information technology, focusing on the development of the arts ecosystem in the digital era. Three key questions are posed here: How can effective communication strategies be applied in the organization of the Kaba Festival? How can the Kaba Festival develop further? This research will also investigate the implications of effective communication strategies in

the context of developing the organization of performing arts festivals. These three questions aim to provide an overview of the dynamics of organizing the Kaba Festival's performing arts events over its existence, from the perspective of communication science, as well as insights into the journey of the *Nan Jombang Dance Company*, founded by Ery Mefri (Murgiyanto, 2013).

This study is based on three arguments: *first*, communication has not been recognized as a crucial factor for performing arts practitioners, who tend to prioritize the artistic side of performances alone, leading to excessive egoism between communities and individual artists. This results in poor relationships between communities and artists, which impacts the ecosystem for the development of traditional performing arts festivals in a region. *Second*, this research emphasizes the importance of recognizing communication strategies that can have both positive and negative effects. The positive impact can be greatly beneficial for artists, while the negative impact of poor communication among festival organizers can lead to ongoing conflicts. Third, the study underscores the importance of mastering communication skills to help artists navigate and develop their careers, ultimately becoming recognized performers on the international stage.

METHODS

This research is qualitative in nature (Creswell, 2013), aimed at examining the role and function of communication in the organization of performing arts festivals. Communication within an arts organization is a crucial factor in achieving its objectives. It must be acknowledged that, so far, performing arts festival organizers have utilized communication tools, but have not recognized them as equally important as the quality of the artistic works being created (Mulyana, 2004; Safitri & Mujahid, 2024).

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach with a case study design enriched by critical reflection, referring to the DEAL Model of Critical Reflection (Ash & Clayton, 2009). The DEAL Model stands for *Describe*, *Examine*, and *Articulate Learning*, a structured framework for critical reflection. *Describe* refers to the objective description of elements within the cultural event of the Kaba Festival, including what happened, where and when it occurred, and who was involved. Meanwhile, *Examine* involves analyzing the relationship between lived experience and theoretical concepts, in order to reinforce prior understanding of roles, meanings, and values embedded in the event (Hale Tolar & Gott, 2012). *Articulated Learning* focuses on identifying what can be learned from the event based on existing theoretical perspectives, as well as how to uncover deeper insights behind the experience and extract its most essential elements (Brooks et al.,

2010). These articulated learnings are intended to inform and guide future actions by relevant stakeholders (Saxena, 2023).

The term reflection refers to a mirror that projects the image of an object before it. In this context, it signifies an examination of the past to contemplate events and actions that have been taken (kbbi, 2016) serving as an effort to create space for deep introspection (Yuliyanto et al., 2018). Critical reflection became a widely used concept after Jürgen Habermas revived critical theory with a new paradigm. As part of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, he continued the work of predecessors such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse (Bertens, 2002). Habermas's thought focuses on rational communication, a process that is mutually acceptable and forms the foundation of a more democratic society free from domination. Some key concepts in his theory include communicative action, the public sphere, and rationality in communication (Habermas, 1985). These elements aim to achieve mutual understanding through communication that is free from domination between individuals.

Critical theory aims to drive more inclusive and just change. This is the essence of critical theory, which emphasizes the close relationship between analytical thought and socio-transformational action (Habermas, 1968). In this study, critical reflection is intended to analyze past communication dynamics critically, extracting new meanings from the research object. This process involves evaluation and assumptions, posing questions that allow for new perspectives and alternative interpretations. Such an approach fosters new insights, concepts, and objectives. Reflection-based action leads to valuable lessons and well-planned changes for the future (Media Koentji, 2020).

Interview (Chatra. et. al., 2023) were conducted with representatives from various audience groups, including artists, writers, choreographers, academics in the arts field, cultural figures, and regular attendees, totaling 25 people, who had also answered questions in the survey. Additionally, a literature review, both online and offline, was carried out to identify various issues surrounding *the Kaba Festival* performing arts and *Nan Jombang*. The methods used are highly suitable for obtaining comprehensive and in-depth data regarding the organization of *the Kaba Festival* from a communication perspective.

The data analysis process in this research begins with data reduction based on the scope of the study, where irrelevant data is excluded. Next, relevant data is retained for further analysis. The data is then organized to facilitate understanding and interpretation. The data is analyzed through a descriptive-critical approach (Creswell, 2013; Moleong, 2016) with a focus on effective communication strategies, this analysis provides an overview of the communication strategies employed in organizing *the Kaba*

Festival's performing arts events, highlighting their implications for the development of performing arts. Through this technique, it is highly likely to understand the impact of communication in organizing the performing arts festival and its implications for the arts community.

The structure of the results of this study is based on the research issues. In the first part, the facts of communication at *Kaba Festival* are presented in terms of perception; second, the factors that have allowed *Kaba Festival* to develop are outlined in the communication strategy of Kaba Festival; third, the implications of *Kaba Festival's* communication will be elaborated in the critical reflection section, leading to a new chapter as an implication for the communication strategy plan for the next five years (2025-2030) in building the performing arts ecosystem, both by *Nan Jombang Dance Company* and other art communities.

Communication strategies, critical reflection, and performing arts

Communication strategy is essentially planning and management aimed at achieving objectives (Zamzami & Sahana, 2021; Mukarromah, at. al. 2021) incorporating governance and methods as a systematically structured and gradual roadmap (McQuail, 2020). This strategy, referring to Paula Hall and Harold D. Lasswell, emphasizes that the core of the communication process is to secure understanding. Furthermore, to establish acceptance, this understanding must be nurtured, leading to motivation in alignment with the message's purpose (Hall, 2018; Lasswell, 1948).

The dynamics of communication involve a continuous and ongoing process of message transmission. Communication is considered successful from a capital efficiency perspective when it is effective (Mulyana, 2012) while from the impact perspective, it is referred to as impressive communication, depending on the implications of the conveyed message. Furthermore, from the perspective of its execution, it is known as persuasive communication. The key to a communication strategy lies in the process of delivering information, ideas, or messages in a way that is easily understood by the recipient, leading to responses that align with the communicator's objectives (McQuail, 2020). The principles of effective communication include clarity of message, simplicity, empathy, feedback, and contextual relevance (Keyton, 2011; Kurniawan, 2018; Turistiati, Tuti & Andhita, 2021).

Performing arts

A performing arts festival is a cultural event that requires strategic planning, strong team coordination, and integrated management (Utami, 2018). Festival management involves several key aspects, including mapping artistic potential, curating

programs, fundraising, government support, community and public engagement, and establishing a competent artistic board (Prasetya, 2017; Utami, 2018).

Performing arts differ from art performances. Performing arts are related to discipline and the creative process, involving movement and sound-based forms, such as theater, dance, and traditional music (Ediwar, et. al. 2017). Meanwhile, art performances refer to the act of presenting art, encompassing any type of artistic expression, such as art festivals and exhibition openings (Carlson, 2014). Performing arts attract a niche audience—those who have a specific interest, understanding, and appreciation for the messages conveyed in the performance. In contrast, art performances generally cater to a broader audience.

Performing arts is a branch of art that utilizes the body, voice, movement, and expression as its primary medium to convey messages, emotions, or aesthetic values to the audience (Ediwar, et. al. 2017) take place within a specific duration, where the elements of time (such as tempo and duration) and space (such as the stage or performance venue) are crucial components. The quality of a performing art can reflect the creative process, including concept development, rehearsals, improvisation, and interpretation, which play a significant role in creating a performance within an artistic community (Haryono, 2005). The main media of performing arts are the body, voice, and movement, as seen in dance, *randai*, music, and theater (Carlson, 2014). This is the fundamental difference from general art performances in public spaces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflection and perception of communication in *the Kaba Festival*

The Nan Jombang Dance Company community was founded by the Contemporary Dance Maestro from Ranah Minang, West Sumatra, Ery Mefri, who has performed on four continents throughout his career (Dinata, 2022). This is a remarkable achievement that deserves appreciation for the effort to introduce Minang culture to the global stage. *The Kaba Festival* is a product of *the Nan Jombang Dance Company*. The performing arts of *the Kaba Festival* serve as the main message delivered by *Nan Jombang* (the communicator) to the audience as the message receivers (Lasswell, 1948; Feldman, 1997).

The message content consists of traditional and contemporary performing arts, including dance, theater, literature, and various traditional arts from Ranah Minang and other regions. Various media channels are used, with the stage serving as the primary channel (Lasswell, 1971) during the main event, supported by new media and conventional media. Meanwhile, the feedback (Lasswell, 1971) for *Nan Jombang Dance Company* comes in the form of public appreciation, as well as the establishment of

goodwill and a positive reputation of *the Kaba Festival* within the arts community. Furthermore, through various media channels, the event is widely covered and reviewed on social media (Feldman, 1997).

The Director of *Nan Jombang Dance Company*, Angga Mefri, stated that this performing arts event is regularly held at the Manti Menuik Performance Hall, located in Gunung Sarik Subdistrict, Kuranji District, Balaibaru, Padang City (Interview, 2025; Chaniago, 2023). *The Kaba Festival* is an event that brings together artists with festival directors, managers, and producers from both domestic and international backgrounds. This program's journey has been phenomenal, as it has successfully invited renowned choreographers while also elevating and introducing traditional artists to prestigious performance spaces.

Ery Mefri was born on June 23, 1958, in Saningbakar, Solok, West Sumatera. He was raised in a family deeply rooted in Minangkabau traditions. His father, Jamin Manti Jo Sutan, was a dancer and a prominent figure in Minangkabau traditions. From a young age, Ery Mefri was familiar with the Minangkabau artistic heritage. He nurtured his talent by studying at the Indonesian Karawitan High School (SMKI) in Padang Panjang and later became a Civil Servant (PNS) at the Department of Education and Culture in Padang. In 1994, he had the opportunity to attend a choreography workshop at the American Dance Festival in Durham, United States (Wildan, 2016).

He is recognized among contemporary dance choreographers, alongside figures such as Bagong Kussudiardja, Wisnoe Wardhana, Sardono W. Kusumo, and Huriah Adam (1980s), as well as Eko Supriyanto, Mugiyono Kasido, and Ery Mefri himself (1990s) (Raditya, 2021) who are widely known in the performing arts scene in Indonesia and internationally. Ery Mefri is listed in the *Encyclopedia of 1001 Minang figures* for his historical contributions and lifelong dedication to dance (Hasriel, 2023). With over 40 years of artistic work, he has received numerous awards, including *the Tuah Sakato* and the Cultural Heritage of Indonesia (CHI) Award (Wildan, 2016). He was also honored with the Cultural Award in the category of Creator, Pioneer, and Innovator by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Eriandi, 2023).

A survey of the audience at the Kaba Festival performing arts event showed that 91.3% of respondents had attended the festival, while 8.7% had never attended. The latter figure indicates that some respondents were aware of the event but had never been present or had attended other events at the Manti Menuik Performance Hall, such as *Festival Tanggal 3*, *Kaba dari Nan Jombang*, and *Kato Babega*. The percentage of those who have never attended serves as a reflection of the organizers regarding the quality of curatorial selection and communication.

According to respondents, they became familiar with *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event more through social media than through online media and digital conversation spaces (Khusairi & Dianto, 2024; Ichwan et al., 2024). Survey data shows that 60.9% of respondents learned about *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event through social media. Unfortunately, this research does not specify which social media platforms were the most prominent. However, referring to recent digital media trends, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, and *TikTok* remain the top four new media platforms used in Indonesia (Elfina et al., 2022) and the Southeast Asian region. *The Kaba Festival* is known through online media by 17.4% of respondents and through digital conversation spaces by 21.7%. Digital conversation spaces provided by platforms such as *WhatsApp* facilitate the massive spread of information, especially since *the Kaba Festival* event is also shared by the public in these spaces. *Nan Jombang* has official accounts on *Facebook* (@Nan Jombang Dance Company), *Instagram* (@NanJombangDanceCompany), *YouTube* (@NanJombangDanceCompany), and more. These are supported by the social media accounts of the working team and dancers, including Ery Mefri. Learning more about *Nan Jombang's* official digital footprint is also very easy through its official website: www.nanjombangdance.com.

The organizers conveyed the message very clearly, informatively, and communicatively (Keyton, 2011; Kurniawan, 2018), as shown in the survey results. A total of 52.2% of respondents agreed that it was very clear and informative; 30.4% stated that it was clear and informative; and 17.4% expressed that it was somewhat clear and informative. The first positive point is that no respondent answered that it was unclear and uninformative. The use of new media has facilitated the promotion of the event, but it still requires human resources to execute it. It should be noted that the arts world needs art and culture journalists who understand how to cover cultural events, as their nature differs from regular event coverage (Interview, 2025).

The survey shows that the understanding of the message content (Hall, 2018; Lasswell, 1948) regarding the promotion of *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event and the cultural message conveyed through the participants' performances on stage was answered by 39% of respondents as very easy to understand. A total of 52.2% said it was easy to understand, while 8.7% admitted it was somewhat easy to understand. The second positive point of *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event is that no one claimed it was difficult to understand. Similarly, in the survey regarding the organizers' creativity in providing information about the event, respondents stated that 47.8% found it very interesting, 43.5% found it interesting, 4.3% found it somewhat interesting, and 4.3% found it less interesting.

The positive trend in effective communication of *the Kaba Festival* is also reflected in the 47.8% rating of "very good" when asked to assess the communication between the organizers and participants (Keyton, 2011). A total of 43.5% rated it as good, and 4.3% rated it as somewhat good. Lastly, only 4.3% rated it as less good. The last figure indicates that there are still aspects of the communication in the organization of *the Kaba Festival* that need improvement. However, this is still understandable, as the percentage is not significant and is difficult to overshadow by the very high percentage of "very good" ratings.

Despite the limited segmentation of performing arts, the survey shows that 56.5% of respondents are very interested in participating in *the Kaba Festival*. A total of 34.8% are interested, and 8.7% are somewhat interested. The third positive point for the Kaba Festival is that no one indicated they were "less interested." This interest suggests that the event is a platform that is highly desired by artists, choreographers, writers, academics, and cultural figures (Interview, 2025). The survey findings portray *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event in a positive light to the respondents, as a platform for the performing arts. Based on these survey results, continuous improvements are necessary to achieve high-quality performing arts management.

Reflection on the effective communication strategy of *the Kaba Festival*

The Kaba Festival began as a local event, first held in 1988 as *Galanggang Tari Sumatera*, then became *Padang Bagalanggang* in 2000, and in 2014 transformed into *the Kaba Festival*, which continues to this day. It has now become a special icon for *the Nan Jombang Dance Company* and is positively accepted by various communities. This positive response is marked by various journal article works that can be traced online, written by academics about the performances, including works by Ery Mefri (Muliati et al., 2019). For artists who have performed at the *Kaba Festival* or the *Festival Tanggal 3* at *Nan Jombang Dance Company*, the opportunity to perform on larger stages in the future is a possibility. According to Ery Mefri, all of this grew from limitations but was driven by a strong passion for the world of dance (Interview, 2025; Makmur, 2023).

Ery Mefri is the driving force behind the communication of all performing arts activities at *the Nan Jombang Dance Company*. It is acknowledged that there are limitations in terms of funding, personnel, and time, yet he must continue to create while also organizing events. The management of *Nan Jombang Dance Company* is very lean, consisting of a manager who is also part of the dancers' group. The dancers are an integral part of this lean and simple management structure. The effective communication of *the Kaba Festival* is built on principles of clarity of message, simplicity, empathy, feedback, and contextual relevance (Keyton, 2011). This event is no longer just an ordinary stage;

each year, it holds different values and meanings. The achievements in every opening of *the Kaba Festival* are always presented as progress from *the Nan Jombang Dance Company* as well as from the arts scene in the region (Interview, 2025; Mulyana, 2012).

However, according to Ery Mefri, the next issue is that the stakeholders involved in the performing arts, including *the Kaba Festival*, have not fully recognized this as an opportunity to play a larger role (Interview, 2025).

Communication reflection in building an arts ecosystem

The reality of performing arts has changed with the presence of information technology. Many supporting tools are now available to make the performing arts more engaging and enjoyable. The influence of digitalization, opportunities for multidisciplinary collaboration, and the commercialization of excessive production are both challenges and opportunities for the performing arts practitioners in creating works (Schechner, 2020). *The Kaba Festival* has built an ecosystem and artistic climate, becoming a public space as described by Habermas. It serves as an open communication platform for the arts, including public issues surrounding culture (Fraser, 2017: 245-255). The organization of *the Kaba Festival* performing arts event has been ongoing (2014-2024), winning and maintaining the discourse battle in the performing arts field, and it must be maintained and developed.

Many respondents suggested that the awareness movement from policymakers has not been implemented as it should, so they can have the same perspective on the purpose and objectives of holding a cultural arts event. For artists, three things are essential: the work, the stage, and the audience. All three contain economic opportunities for the creative industry, and this is where the role of policymakers is to provide opportunities for the growth of an economic ecosystem from the arts ecosystem (Interview, 2025; Habermas, 1985). The communication barriers in regional development have been repeatedly expressed by artists, including Ery Mefri, on various occasions (Interview, 2025). Briefly, the research results can be visually seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Research results

No.	Finding category	Description of findings	References
1	Conceptual	Emancipatory communication as a theoretical foundation aims to achieve social transformation through communication free from domination.	Habermas (1985, 1992)

		Rational and inclusive discussions are considered important to strengthen public space and community engagement.	Habermas (1985)
2	<i>Kaba Festival</i> communication strategy	Community-based approach: engagement with artists, writers, academics, and the general public.	Observation; field study; Creswell; Moleong
		Intergenerational dialogue: building bridges between digital natives (Gen Z) and digital immigrants (previous generations).	Prensky (2001)
		Participatory communication in local arts communities forms a strong basis for social engagement.	Interview; observation
3	Field findings	Respondents' enthusiasm for the 2025–2030 roadmap in building an arts ecosystem that involves the younger generation.	Interview (2025)
		Demands for cultural dialogue space and arts education based on local values (Minangkabau).	Interview, data survey
		There is great hope that the <i>Kaba Festival</i> will be able to become a driver of social change and the arts ecosystem.	Interview, survey (189 respondents)
4	Strategic impact	Establishment of a sustainable, community-based, and digital Minangkabau arts and culture ecosystem.	Critical reflection
		Increasing the interest of the younger generation in traditional arts through a more relevant and adaptive communication approach.	Reflection, plan 2025–2030
		Social transformation in West Sumatera through performing arts as a medium of collective communication.	Strategic plan

Critical reflection towards a new chapter

Modern management is essentially a system and leadership (Wibowo, 2017) not just goods and people. Goods and people can come and go, but a strong system will generate elaboration in a generative way. Referring to the tradition of Islamic genealogy,

the chain of knowledge (Rosenthal, 2007) in Ery Mefri's traditional dance includes Manti Menuik, Huriah Adam (Raditya, 2021), while contemporary dance is influenced by the contemporary dance instructors in the Choreography Workshop at the American Dance Festival in Durham, United States (Wildan, 2016; Chaniago, 2023). The prominent names continue to serve as communicators, encompassing several key aspects for the sustainability of *the Kaba Festival* within the discourse of cultural arts, using media optimally. The social capital is already very supportive. The production management of *the Kaba Festival* has shifted to become more modern and professional (Schechner, 2020).

Art and communication are two entities that are closely interconnected. Performing arts events like *the Kaba Festival* not only aim to preserve local culture but also to raise public awareness about the importance of cultural heritage (Rachmad & MM, 2024; Wimra, 2022) as outlined in the government program under Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture. The success of performing arts highly depends on effective communication planning (Mulyadi, 2010). Poor communication can lead to a lack of public participation, suboptimal resource management, and minimal cultural impact.

CONCLUSION

The Kaba Festival is a performing arts practice managed with a modern approach, maximizing all available media, utilizing limited resources strategically, and implementing effective, long-term communication. The communication strategy developed by Ery Mefri and *the Nan Jombang Dance Company*, rooted in community-based and participatory principles, has successfully fostered deep audience engagement. Through this approach, the audience is not merely a passive spectator but becomes an integral part of the cultural meaning-making and artistic transformation process.

This sustained audience involvement stands out as a central point in the critical reflection on a decade of the *Kaba Festival's* journey. Such engagement is not only a response to performance but a form of social dialogue that strengthens cultural heritage awareness and extends local values into national and global cultural spaces. It is this dynamic interaction that has brought *the Kaba Festival* to the height of its existence as a cultural platform, solidifying *Nan Jombang Dance* as a symbol of art that has grown from limitations and continues to evolve without boundaries amid the fluctuating landscape of the arts community. Based on this reflection, a mid-term strategic program (2025–2030) has been formulated to reinforce cross-sector collaboration among artists, communities, government, and media; to optimize the use of digital platforms as spaces for expression and cultural documentation; and to offer cultural journalism training for artists as a

strategy to strengthen local narratives. These recommendations aim to cultivate a sustainable and globally relevant arts ecosystem while remaining grounded in the richness of local traditions. In this context, audience engagement is not merely a marker of artistic success but a principal aspiration of this critical reflection, namely, the emergence of an art public that is conscious, participatory, and co-evolving with a living cultural space.

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