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## Distancing in Live Performance: The New Normal of Thai Arts During a Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

Since the Covid-19 outbreak, social distancing has become the "new normal" for every aspect of human life. This obligation widens the gap in all social interactions, not only in physical contact but also in socio-cultural and economic views. Large public events and smaller gatherings have been controlled and sadly postponed or cancelled. At times, travelling across the country has been barred or restricted. The airborne virus has triggered an economic crisis in various sectors, including the performing arts. Because live performance has ceased, the entire arts industry has lost the income generated by ticket sales. This paper aims to highlight how the concept of "distancing" affects the Thai performing arts industry in binary perspectives. Taking a positive viewpoint, this concept is inspiring artists to create performance in various "new normal" forms. For instance, in musical performance, we have seen and heard the Hybrid Concert, the Hotel Fest and the Tuk-tuk Fest. In live performance, Co-with-U, a collaborative project among Silpathon artists across the nation, converted the physical stage into a live-streaming platform by presenting an interpretation of Covid-19 in musical-dance-drama forms. As well, online channels such as Facebook live and Instagram have been used to re-promote artworks, to communicate and to remind artists' supporters not to forget them during this distancing period. In contrast to the positives, distancing also disrupts the performing arts ecosystem. Handicapping performance, minimising scale, altering schedules or even temporarily closing live shows generated serious setbacks. By elaborating the crucial points for and against, significant case studies from the theatre and live productions will be reflected and discussed.

**Keywords:** Distancing, New Normal, Covid-19, Performance



## Covid-19 and the Thai Performing Arts Industry

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that Coronavirus 2019 was a pandemic, countries all over the world have taken immediate action to curb the contagious virus. The first novel coronavirus infection in Thailand was reported on 13 January, 2020, then numbers dramatically increased. On 26 March, 2020, Thailand invoked an Emergency Declaration. The decree's restrictive measures included limits on movement across the provinces, prohibitions or limitations on entering or leaving the country, bans on gatherings, closing all schools, postponing the three-day Thai New Year celebration and imposing a 10pm–4am curfew. Outside of Bangkok, provincial governors were authorised to close gathering spaces. Since the early days of the outbreak, the motto "Stay home, Stop the Disease for the Nation" has been promoted. "Risk-Prone Places" have been closed to curb the spread of the virus. Because of the need for prevention, entertainment venues, movie theatres and sports venues were all ordered to close down.

It took several months but Covid-19 in Thailand has been controlled, and the number of infected patients has decreased. The Thai government has decided to resume business to restore the economy to normal. Businesses and activities have gradually resumed, with precautions continuing. The Centre for Covid-19, Situation Administration (CCSA) has eased the restrictions for low-risk business in the first phase from 3 May, the second phase from 17 May, and the third phase from 1 June. Activities said to be high risk, such as cultural and music performances for live audiences, resumed in the fourth phase from 15 June. Recently, on 1 July, 2020, resumption of the fifth phase of business has been approved by the Royal Thai Government.

This paper aims to reflect the situation of the Thai performing arts industry by exploring the situation pre-Covid-19, during Covid-19 and post-Covid-19. The integration of a "new-normal" concept will be discussed by highlighting how 'distancing' has impacted in various perceptions, from the performance component, across production management and in the new-normal form of performing arts business. For a positive view, the concert business enables projecting the new form of performance. However, it seems incompatible with the live performance business. Elaborating on this point, case studies from Alcazar Cabaret show, KAAAN show, folk theatres and concert performances are explained.

## Alcazar: The Cabaret Show

Alcazar, internationally known as the Alcazar Cabaret show, is one of the noted cabaret shows in Thailand. It was established on 8 November, 1981, at Pattaya, a nightlife city on the holiday coast. Initially, this show employed 100 staff, in a 350 seat-theatre. As the number of visitors continued to increase, a 1200-seat auditorium was built and opened in 1990. Later this expanded to a modern 1500-seat theatre. Four daily show sessions entertained tourists, who were mostly Chinese or Russian. The VIP tickets at 800 baht for foreigners and 300 baht for locals were almost always booked out in advance. However, since the Thai government declared a State of Emergency, performances have halted. During this crisis, the 250 staff have not staged a single show.

This researcher interviewed a queer dance-performer, Opor, better known publicly as Opor Alcazar", has worked with Alcazar for almost seven years. Her story with Alcazar began in 2013, first as a member of a costume crew supporting the show production. After experiencing a life as backstage crew for two years, she then took a chance to be a stage-performer, replacing someone who resigned. Since 2015, she has permanently performed the role of the Chinese seller, one of the three comedic characters in the scene called *Ba-Jang* (a Chinese traditional sticky rice dumpling). In that scene, they lip-sync the Chinese song, and act as though searching for a customer. Once found, they jump off the stage and approach the audiences quickly. Visitors, especially a Chinese look-like, would always be targeted and teased. This scene creates a humorous and joyful moment because the stage-performers improvise interaction with their lovely audiences.

For almost seven years, she performed the 70-minute show every day for three rounds, at 6.30pm, 8pm and 9.30pm. During the tourist high season, an extra round would be added at 5pm. As permanent staff, Alcazar has an alternate day-off per week. Social insurance covering medical treatment is provided. For senior staff, accommodation in a dormitory was offered without a monthly charge. Alcazar allocates the workers incremental salary and an additional bonus. For a stage performer, tips from the daily-photo session are shared weekly. "There is no termination contract, but trust commitment", she said. This company grew and retained their staff until he or she reached the age of 60 or resigned before retirement.



The emergency decree by the Thai government abruptly paralysed the production. No live stage show led immediately to no income. At first, the company kept providing monetary support. Long-term cabaret employees were entitled to claim aid from the Social Security office. However, assistance of 5000 baht was allocated for only three months, from April until July. Indeed, that money could not cover all the living expenses so some of the workers struggled and were forced to search for side incomes by selling goods via an online market.

While the disease demanded physical distancing between the live actors and their viewers, it tightened ties between the Pattaya cabaret communities. The industry-wide suffering propped up relationships and changed "business competitors" into "tolerant partners". Alcazar has created a digital platform called *AlcazarTalk Live* as a free online space for the cabaret show society to share their experiences, show their skills, or even promote their products. Apart from that, short clips of performers have been uploaded via China social media in order to communicate with their Chinese fans. Again, these digital platforms have been used to send regards to global customers and update them about the situation. However, Alcazar did not convert their stage show into a virtual stage. The company prefers to hold back the live dance performances until this period of isolation is over.

Because the performance gap has been prolonged, every show business all over Thailand has faced financial constraints and pain. However, while other companies were forced to lay off their employees, or at worst, permanently close down, Alcazar was the only place that tried to retain its staff. Regarding this point, the China Global Television Network (CGTN) website quoted the excerpt from Pavin Petchtrakul (2020), General Manager, Alcazar Cabaret:

"We're stepping into our 40<sup>th</sup> year next year, so it's, sort of we are becoming a big family here, so there's no way we can tell them to pack their bags and leave".

To spend this distancing period productively, Alcazar had gathered the stage actors and crews for practising, rehearsing and preparing their own sequences in order to prepare for re-staging at any time. After being paused for over four months, the Thai Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) announced the Phase 4 of business relaxation,

which mentions the easing of restrictions and allows activities, including music and cultural performances. By following the government's disease-control measures, Alcazar is the only place that was able to quickly announce its re-opening. "See you on 23<sup>rd</sup> July, if you are missing us", was the first message posted on Alcazar's official Facebook page. This text lit up the hopes of the stage performers, not only Alcazar staff but also the whole Pattaya cabaret show contingent because it demonstrated that the months of social isolation and distancing are going to cease. Exotic stage shows will soon be back.

To re-open, "new-normal" components must be included in the performance. First, the show had to be rescheduled. The everyday show was altered to be an evening weekend show with an audience in 300 social-distanced seats. Alcazar decided to discount the ticket to 300 baht for stranded foreigners and 200 baht for Thais, hoping performances at lower prices would be seen as a gift, entertaining people through this pandemic. "Profit collecting is not the essential point for this period. Being an entertainment that is able to hearten people is our aim", Opor said.

Distancing's concept applies creatively in the performing part. While all sequences and the number of performers have remained, blockings and floor-patterns are slightly altered. Therefore, the improvised scene of *Baijang* must take place upon the stage. Opor and her friends needed to re-choreograph their actions and movements by widening the 'distancing' among themselves and the seated viewers.

Lighting up the Alcazar stage created an instant phenomenon for the touristic performance industry. From the 23 July show, the desire for nostalgic memories of pre-covid days brought onlookers back to the live stage. Theatre is not only the place to feel and experience the on-stage stories, but also a shared space where performers who had to be laid off bought seats out of fellowship and friendliness, hoping that one day, they would be called back to shine with their workmates again.

## KAAN Show: The Cinematic Experience Live Show in Thailand

Six kilometres away from Alcazar and Pattaya town is home to the Singha D'Luck Cinematic Theatre, a 1400-seat theatre hall. The KAAAN show is a



spectacular cinematic live experience, produced by Panjaluck Pasuk Co., Ltd. This show is the one and the only live performance that hybridised the live-action, cinema technique, stage performance and world-class technology. By fantasising ancient Thai literature, this show projects incredible futuristic adventures, where the written characters come to life.

Based on interviews, Sirimon Pitikorndaecha, executive production manager, says the KAAAN show has been staged since 2017. The 90-minute live show's routine had been continually adjusted to match with the tourists' program. Audiences have been mostly Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese and Korean as well as Thais. Before the virus hits the stage, a standard one-hour daily show was most likely.

The KAAAN show is created by a workforce of 170, 40 staff for operations and 130 workers for the production crew. This business recruits both freelance performers and permanent staff. The monthly payment is allocated with no additional dividend. To be a KAAAN performer – or as they are called, “KAANER” – the candidate must pass an audition. Performers who have experience either on the stage, or good physical appearance, or who are acrobatic and have aerial or gymnastic skills, are most often chosen. Nevertheless, non-skilled practitioners are also welcome. New trainees must attend a two-month workshop. After learning professional skills, they then can then perform. A three-year contract would usually be offered for those who want to be permanent staff. Before Covid-19, 64 performers were engaged in multi-character roles. Another 10 specialist cabaret performers fulfilled engagement with audiences.

At most performances, the 1400 seats always sold out. Apart from walk-in tickets, the company strategized various promotional packages for the whole year to attract customers from different target markets. Additional show programs would be conducted to meet particular demands. Apart from the ticket income, revenue was increased by a souvenir shop and snack bar. Space is also provided for collaborative partners to perform their business and create a broader community.

In mid-March 2020, the Covid-19 disease closed the theatre. All staff were assigned to take leave or to work-from-home. Performers were required to rest. While the stage could not be lit up, administrative work continued at a low-key level. Online meetings took place weekly to sustain the organisation. During this challenging time, the first emergency plan was announced then adapted. Staff were initially paid 50 per cent of

their pre-covid salary then that figure was reduced to 30 per cent. After this announcement, some workers preferred to leave so they could instead claim the 5000 baht government compensation for laid-off workers. To communicate and provide a full understanding during the crisis, a group was established on the line application for continuing dialogue.

The greatest difficulty for management during this outbreak was not about the economy, but personnel. Cutting off salaries could cause disappointment and a negative attitude. Staff could suddenly quit their jobs, but to build up the skills of performers took time and was a continuing process. As an executive production manager, Sirimon had to maintain relations between the company and employees while also social distancing. By managing this, motivational phrases such as ‘getting together’, ‘getting a job is much better’, or ‘be patient together’ continued to be posted. By bringing back the sense of togetherness, she called all staff back to the theatre hall. Gathering activities such as checking stage techniques, mapping projection, or repairing costumes were assigned.

The relational distancing between the KAAAN company and its supporters is another essential point that needs to be borne in mind. Similar to other show productions, KAAAN company uses Facebook for informing followers in both infographics and written form. While digital platforms provide all kinds of effects and enable performances to be digitised, KAAAN intended to keep things steady.

About this point, Sirimon stated: “There is no star performer in a KAAAN show. Creating an online performance for drawing a global audience might not succeed”. She added: “We aim to create a live experience for our audiences. Converting the spectacle performance to a virtual platform, the sense of involvement and excitement may flow out”. However, to promote the KAAAN community, *Tik-tok* clips, or Challenge clips such as “Work (Out) from Home” were posted. These creative snippets showed the readiness of the KAAANERS, the stage performers, who were always practising and enthusiastically waiting for a restaging. As well, messages such as “Be waiting for us,” “We do miss you” and “Do not forget us” conveyed to customers the feelings of staff and retained relationships.

When the Thai government eased entertainment restrictions and a competitor, Alcazar, began performances again, KAAAN remained shut. The critical factor was that foreign visitors, who constitute 50 per cent



of the target market, are prohibited from entering Thailand. To launch a “new-normal” show by minimising the scale of the live performance, allowing only social distancing seats and entertaining only in-country guests seemed less than realistic. Besides, ‘Covidphobia’ could affect customers’ minds and behaviour. Costs were difficult to meet without the seats being filled in the normal manner without social distancing.

Putting more space between the face-to-face show and the audience could also create the feeling of inadequacy. In this researcher’s opinion, there is a point where emotional marketing can appeal to the loyalty of fans. From the interview, it was surprising to learn that about 25 percent of onlookers are repeat guests. Increasing the time before the show returns may create a greater impact.

### The Confrontation Between Local Folk Theatre Performers and the Digital Stage

Working in the performing arts industry carries an element of struggle during the time of Covid-19 restrictions. Apart from stage-distancing, the government also keeps distancing recovery by taking immediate action. Recovering plans inevitably fall behind. Although registered performers such as Alcazar and KAAAN show performers have at least earned a small amount of financial support, local folk performers who are unregistered yet happen to be whole-life performers, are being forgotten.

In general, local folk artists have their own style of performance, based on their region and background. Among them are *Mor Lam* – a northeastern concert-style performance, *Menora* – a southern-style dance-drama, *Nang-ta-lung* – a shadow puppet theatre, *Likey* – a popular folk theatre, *Luk-thung* – a folk concert performance, *Lakorn Chatri* – traditional folk theatre. There are others, too.

To perform, this kind of troupe will do a roadshow around the country for a whole year. To engage them, an organiser must contact them six months or a year before a scheduled appearance. The signed agreement will be made, together with a payment deposit. Commonly, this concert-tour business gets paid by the job. The troupe runs by revolving money for paying wages, equipment and stage settings, and at the same time for repairing or investing in new stuff. When the virus arrived, these shows were forced to postpone or even to cancel. With a postponement,

the troupe at least knows a future income is guaranteed. However, if the host decides to cancel, returning the deposit may lead to a financial crisis because money has often been spent in advance. With the shrinking of income and unexpected debt, troupes have been disbanded.

This pandemic has frozen the performing arts ecosystem, from micro to macro scale. While being left out of aid from government organisations, many folk artist troupes have streamed a charity performance via a personal account or a Facebook page. One of the online promotional platforms is a Facebook page titled *Sueb-san lae Anurak Lakon Chatri Phetchaburi* (Inheriting and conserving the *Phetchaburi Lakon Chatri*). This social medium allows the *Lakorn Chatri* community to live-stream their pandemic performance. Unlimited audiences can access the show easily, for free. If there are any donations, the money can be transferred directly to the troupe.

To digitalise the physical stage, special techniques and equipment are needed as an additional investment. Since camera view has replaced the audience’s sight, the performers need to know the arts of composition as well as the arts of performing. To serve the netizen, minimising production by reducing the characters or shortening the performance is part of the adapting process.

### Should the Live Go Online?

Regarding the essence of live performance, Phelan (1993) remarks that stage performance is defined through its non-reproducibility. The nature of performance deteriorates as it is enfolded in technological reproducibility. His statement was supported by Causey (2006), who stressed that reproducing the entire live stage to digital form may devalue its essence. Art is said to be a non-repeatable phenomenon of the now. However, it cannot be denied that only the performers’ physical appearance can thoroughly create the brilliant atmosphere of a live show.

The phenomenon of the folk theatre above shows that converting the live performance to streaming theatre leads to issues for the traditional performer. The main concern is the performance’s nature. Local folk theatre is by tradition an interactive media that allows the performer to act freely and engage in dialogue with onlookers. Relations between artists and their audience are intimate. Teasing bystanders with double-meaning



words or jokes are part of the manipulation. Audience engagement plays a significant role in the artist's performance. It indicates his/her success or failure. Altering the traditional setting to the flat screen isolates the face-to-face interaction, the soul of folk performing. In addition, being gazed at or monitored by the camera, the traditional performer may act uncomfortably. Instead of a vivid presentation, the show may be passionless or lifeless. Confronted by uncommon practices, a live stage performance may become less palatable when digitized.

To engage with the audience, some performance companies utilise digital platforms for broadcasting recorded live performances. This strategy seems possible for the music or dance, but not for stage plays.

*"Offering the free full-show or streaming the previous artworks may undervalue the artistic or touristic value of a performance or a theatre".* Santi Torwiwat, who has had 10 years' experience as a resident director and director for stage plays at Muangthai Ratchadalai theatre, said that to fully take on the message of the play, a sense of involvement is essential. The significance of stage theatre comes with being "live" and an audience feeling part of the moment. To sense what's taking place, spectators need their perceptions to follow the story from the beginning to the end. A stage play may not represent only entertainment, as with a dance or concert performance, but it may convey some important messages that onlookers need to crystalize. Viewing a play in a theatre allows the audience to observe, feel and experience the entire production individually. Shifting their perspectives into a camera angle for an e-theatre may devalue its essence. To uphold artistic values, providing social distancing in a show schedule can also disturb critical appreciation. In his opinion, digital channels can be used for engaging customers, marketing communication or publicising creative content such as the behind-the-scenes features, the artist or director interviews, or any pre-production footage, but not for presenting or reproducing the artwork. (Kolb, 2005; Carmona & Torres-Toukoumidis, 2021).

Converting a complete theatre performance to a live-streamed show may devalue the essence of the physical stage. Nevertheless, to engage audiences during the Covid-19 crisis, constructing a new connection through 'digital staging' and adapting the traditional proscenium should be considered. The study by Miles (2017) defines digital staging

as the generative force of technology in aiding shape, produce and amalgamate the digital-physical performance. It recognises the capability of technology as a structural contribution to a hybrid experience, with various dimensions of performance. This new space can establish co-constructed performances that shift audiences from passive consumers to active collaborators. It brings the audiences closer and strengthens their new experience. The concept of hybrid performance, or in other words, digital staging, was initially projected in the Thai music performance industry. By merging the innovative technology and creative brainstorming, new concert forms have been introduced. Among them is the All-Around Delivery project, At home festival, Online Music Festival, Delivery concert, Hybrid concert, *Tuk tuk* Fest, and Hotel Fest.

All Around Delivery project is a virtual charity music performance in the campaign entitled *Talad-Jai* (Care market) aimed at collecting and delivering donations and raising funds for hospitals during the Covid-19 crisis. This project is organised by a non-profit organisation named *Kaolonlakao*. Led by famed rocker 'Toon Body Slam' or Artiwara Kongmalai. Various show programs from different vocal guests have been live-streamed via the Facebook page *Kao* to embolden and entertain the distancing audience and quoting the hashtag #StandTogether.

At Home Festival by Fangjai is another model that serves the live-music online via Facebook and YouTube. This show is not for public charity, but for the vocalists themselves. Artists will play their music from their house or studio. With easy listening and a casual style, this platform allows the performers to have a dialogue with the stay-home audience freely. There is no concert script, but the improvised conversation follows the audience's reaction.

Another new model that sustains the music performance ecology is the Online Music Festival, presented by Leo Thailand. Three main online events, Leo EDM, Leo Night Live and Leo Live Music have been virtualized every night at 7pm via the Leo Facebook page. By imitating a nightly live party, this cyberspace forms the 'pub online' where singers, musicians and deejays affected by the closing of entertainment venues can earn some income. With a digital platform, this virtual party can reach their distanced fans everywhere.

These three models above are the new normal concert forms that entertain audiences at a distance. Interestingly, there is another form that



minimises the scale of concert hall performance to home entertainment. 'Jetrin Delivery Concert' by Jetrin Wattanasin, a Thai pop musician, is delivered for an intimate group of up to 25 persons in order to practice social distancing and avoid the gathering of people.

To incorporate the live component as well as the 'physical distancing' in performance, a new experimental concert called 'Hybrid concert Serie 1: The Empire of Dance' has been presented. This model aims to target the online and offline viewers by organising a live concert and at the same time, the digital stage as well. For the live audience, seats are distanced up to two metres apart. For the quarantined audience, the JBL earphone is equipped for the sound.

By playing with the distancing concept, the amazing *Tuk Tuk Festival* Powered by Chang Music Connection is the first ever new normal Thai-style concert that involves driving in 200 *tuk-tuks* as seating for social-distancing purposes. Hence, the audience can enjoy the seven-hour concert feast without worrying. The concept of distancing can also be seen in the form of the "Hotel Fest" where the audience can enjoy the music performance from their veranda, three persons per each veranda. This free exclusive concert will be soon conducted with the motto of 'New Experience, New Concert, New Normal'.

Covid-19 has also inspired artists to shape new forms of performance. These can be appreciated several ways: as a solo performance, a monologue, a soliloquy and also as virtual projects. In a conceptual framework, this aspect has been interpreted and conveyed into Covid-19 artworks. Artists have adapted their artworks for the online showcase as entertainment for healing society. At the same time, some reflect the situation, criticising the politics and raising their voices. (Santoki & Parekh, 2020).

"Co-with-Urs", a collaborative project among Thai *Silpathon* artists across the nation, is one example of converting the message from this pandemic into musical-dance-drama forms. The 10 masterpieces have reflected various of pandemic themes such as self-isolation, the struggling stay-home feeling, domestic violence, husband-wife relations, social-isolation, pre and post Covid-19: a voice performance, loneliness, sarcastic story, political criticism, and also Buddhist teachings such as 'Everything changes' and "The Trinity", the Buddhist Cosmology.

The case studies above exemplify digital staging that hybridizes the traditional component with digital technology in various forms.

It is interesting that although the new creation of digital performance prioritises entertainment content, the marketing message is substantially embedded. The non-physical stage, virtually broadcast, represents a compelling "new normal" marketing. It strengthens relationships and builds a virtual community from the traditional audience, adding new spectators.

## New Normal Performance VS New Normal Marketing

The emergence of the digital age is making a change in marketing culture and art. Advanced technology offers a new channel for a marketing strategy, and for promotion and dialogue with customers. Interactive activities beyond content can build a strong bond between the targeted customer, the artist, and the show company. According to Cuenca (2015), this bond provides countless benefits in marketing the arts. The priority is to develop customer loyalty. The cultural consumer will subsequently revisit, repurchase tickets, and significantly share positive experiences, promoting and extending to larger potential audiences. With this platform, the show company can directly access the audience, not only the existing or traditional audience, but also the digital consumers who actively interact and engage as viewers, subscribers, followers, and supporters on the virtual channel.

Data gained by the case studies above shows that, apart from being entertainment for relieving uneasiness during quarantine, the various forms of online theatres are also a new normal in arts marketing. Live-stream performance – such as a short clip or sample of a performance – can be a promotion to attract an audience for an upcoming show. Postings can be designed to interact with existing customers and future audiences. The hashtag strategy that ties in with the performance's clip helps in strengthening and cultivating the connection and builds a community. Offstage activities such as the edited footage of production discussion, interviews with the production crew, director's notes, relevant photos including shots of production preparation, performance rehearsals and stage set-up can be selected to stimulate the potential audience's emotions.

To recapitulate, reproducing the entire live stage performance without alteration may unsuitable for the Covid-19 situation. Alternatively,



hybridising content and the component of the performance between the traditional and digital as the “new normal” can offer a new experience, for both performer and audience. In addition, with the advantages of technology, the “new normal” performance itself can be converted into a marketing tool for the “new normal” marketing strategy.

## Conclusion

Coronavirus has made distancing necessary in various aspects of human life. In interpersonal and social interaction, close contact is no longer permitted. In the economic view, business has been frozen. The virus has forced humans to communicate online. Non-face-to-face platforms have replaced live events. The internet and digital media have become crucial during this distancing period. This phenomenon provides both benefits and disadvantages. In the negative, it may distort or misrepresent the value of the live component. However, it also can be a positive force for human activities. In distancing, the concept becomes a source for innovation, where creativity and inspiration interact.

In the Thai performing arts industry, the disease has attacked the economic structure. Nonetheless, in the arts themselves, this epidemic motivates the performing community to show off their ideas. The ‘distancing action’ can project new, creative art forms. A virtual stage can be used as an experimental platform to disseminate ideas. It can be an alternative way to produce a contemporary art form. Plus, the content of the live performance that relates to traditional knowledge or local wisdom can be archived and converted into a digital art form.

Focusing on the economy and marketing strategy, even though this virus makes distancing essential in the economy, the widening space may be utilized as an emotion-driven marketing strategy for customer retention. The use of digital mixed media can become a managing asset for relations. Likewise, the emergence of cyberspace, online marketing and viral culture can engage a global audience and world market at any time. Distancing turns the crisis to new forms of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), such as providing free entertainment during the lockdown to relieve stress and tension. This shows how the online space has filled the gap and united people in the marketing world.

However, to challenge this epidemic, the government should not hold its distance. Taking immediate action to sustain the performing arts ecology is essential. The performing arts business should be integrated with economic and social regeneration strategies. A stimulus package for reviving and strengthening arts in the long-term should be urgently planned.

In conclusion, although Covid-19 has gapped distances, on the other hand it has bound people closer together with compassion. It gives us a distance about which to think and act appropriately. Even though this virus has disrupted all activities to varying degrees, it has not affected humanity. Covid-19 has changed people to become more mindful and to care for each other. It has created a sense of community and brought us closer together. This is the lesson and the new normal of human kind from Covid-19.

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# Mataya Flash Mob @ Semi-Pedestrian Malioboro: An Observation of Renewal Strategies to Promote Wayang Wong Dance Drama

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## ABSTRACT

The technology advancement in the lifestyles has presented challenges in preserving traditional dance conservation. Cultural preservation authority, such as the Palace of Yogyakarta, needs to be innovative in renewing and maintaining the traditional dance heritage. One of the innovations that have been implemented is a Flashmob performance, which was conducted on July 2019 in the Malioboro street. The performance itself received great appreciation from locals, national, as well as international audiences. The performance also triggers several Flash mob acts with similar dance (*Beksan Wanara* dance). It presents a good opportunity to witness how the dance could gain its popularity swiftly. Hence, this research analyses the renewal strategy to popularize the court dance via Flash mob performance. With the observation as well as description on the event, it leads into an analysis of the comments shown on the video recording of the event in Youtube. Secondary data from the publications related to the event was also analyzed. There are 15 themes have been identified around the viewer's responses to the flash mob performance video. The themes fit well with the comprehensive framework of traditional dance renewal strategy, which constructed on the arena theory, theory on the use of technology and cultural materials, and the artistic legitimization theory. Thus, a dance authority could strengthen the public awareness on dance heritage by incorporating their authority as the guardian of the tradition, collaborating with the audience community, subsequently using the opportunities given by the information technology to dance, using dance resources effectively, and framing the event with the shared ideology of the authority and the community.

**Keywords:** Dance Drama, *Beksan Wanara*, *Wayang Wong*, Kraton Ngayogyakarta Hadiningrat, Renewal Strategies