

Instagramming Heritage: Exploring Museum Nasional Indonesia Role and Representation of Cultural Objects

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ABSTRACT

Museum Nasional Indonesia (MNI) is a home to thousands of cultural heritage objects, ranging artifacts to human remains from all over Indonesia. As a knowledge-producing institution, it plays a crucial role in creating narratives and representations of its collection, especially in communicating their cultural object's significance to the public through social media. With the reopening of MNI in 2024, after a year-long closure for reconstruction, and the repatriation of cultural objects from the Netherlands, it is timely to examine how the museum creates narratives of its collection in what marks a significant year. The question will be how the museum creates narratives and represents its collection as a national institution. It aims to explore the narratives conveyed by the objects featured on MNI's Instagram account and how these narratives are shaped and represented as a national institution within Indonesia's broader cultural and political context. Furthermore, this research explores how the museum's Instagram content reflects its role as a national institution, contributing to the broader conversation on whether it adopts a universalist or relativist approach to cultural heritage.

This research will employ content analysis and critical discourse analysis to address the research question and interpret data from Museum Nasional's Instagram account. Content analysis will serve as the primary method, as the study seeks to identify patterns in the Instagram content by categorizing posts. In total 82 Instagram posts from @museumnasionalindonesia in the period of January - October 2024 were classified into different categories based on the post's theme and how it connects to broader meanings, especially in terms of visual aspects and content texts. Content analysis is essential for answering the research question by examining the messenger, message, target audience, intent, method used, and impact paying attention to visual elements, cultural contexts, and motifs. It also involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data to identify underlying patterns and insights (Patton, 2002), focusing on the dominant themes in the MNI Instagram account.

This research is primarily driven by the perspective of Drotner and Schröder (2017), who support the assertion made by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). They state that social media can impact all five fundamental functions of a museum: acquisition, conservation, research, exhibition, and communication (International Council of Museums 2007, as cited in Drotner and Schröder 2017). Additionally, given Museum Nasional's role as a national institution, this research will examine how this role is represented in their Instagram content, particularly within the cultural and political context of Indonesia.

To address the research question, this study will examine concepts related to museums as knowledge-producing institutions and national entities, specifically focusing on their connection to cultural capital from the perspective of Museum Nasional Indonesia (MNI) as a national institution (McDonald, 2003). As an Ideological institution, the museum plays a crucial role in crafting narratives and displaying its collections (Vergo, 1989; Völker, 2017). This includes the importance of sharing the significance of cultural objects on social media, which helps communicate their value to local communities—who are the true owners of this heritage—and to the broader audience of Museum Nasional. This study examines whether MNI Instagram reflects its institutional paradigm as universalist or relativist. Evanoff (2004) describes the universalist approach as seeking common ground through the belief that basic forms of rationality, knowledge, and values are universally valid, while the relativist view contends that these concepts are culturally specific, leading to no possibility of universal agreement and advocating for the acceptance of cultural diversity.

The findings suggest five themes that support this argument: Balancing Education and Promotion, Institutional Identity vs. Cultural Narratives, Object-Centric Representation vs. Cultural Storytelling, National Narrative Through Repatriation and Revitalization, The Dilemma of Universalism and Relativism. These themes reveal that MNI's Instagram content predominantly reflects its identity as a national institution by showcasing cultural objects in educational and promotional contexts. However, these representations often lack deeper cultural narratives. Additionally, the Museum Nasional's Instagram presentation emphasizes its identity as a national institution by using consistent templates that feature logos and visuals showcasing government involvement, museum development initiatives, and repatriation as a national achievement. This approach reflects a universalist perspective on cultural heritage, frequently overlooking the multicultural narratives of Indigenous peoples and local communities and the broader stories that these objects represent within Indonesia's diverse culture, raising questions about the role of a national institution in a multicultural country.

To summarize, while MNI's Instagram successfully conveys its role as a national institution, it failed to portray Indonesia's multicultural identity and the diverse voices of local communities. This study acknowledges its limitations, such as the exclusion of Instagram Stories, cross-media analysis with websites or other platforms, and comprehensive cultural and historical fact-checking of the contents. Future research might focus on these areas to have a more thorough understanding of MNI's media representation.

In the end, this research recommends that MNI's Instagram content include more voices from local communities, stories from visitors, and acknowledgment of the origins of its collections. By actively featuring stories and testimonials from visitors, MNI can foster a more engaging and relatable online presence. Additionally, the institution must acknowledge and highlight the origins of its collections, which would provide context and deepen the audience's understanding of the cultural significance behind the artifacts. Such inclusive representation could better balance institutional identity with cultural diversity. Therefore, MNI can more effectively fulfill its role and purpose as a national institution, ensuring that it resonates with a broader audience and reflects the diverse narratives within the communities it represents.

Keywords: *Museum Nasional, Instagram, Universalist, National Institutions, Cultural Object Narration and Representation*

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