

THE ROLE OF INSTAGRAM IN THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF TRADITIONAL BATAK TOR-TOR DANCE (A Case Study On The @zonabatak Account)

**Winda Kustiawan^{1✉}, Fauzul Azmi Daulay², Amelia Lestari Butar Butar³,
Muammar Dzaki Ihsan⁴**

State Islamic University of North Sumatra, Indonesia
windakustiawan@uinsu.ac.id¹, fauzulazmidaulay39@gmail.com²,
amelialestari394@gmail.com³, muammardzaki21@gmail.com⁴

Received: 2025-05-28; Accepted: 2025-06-05; Published: 2025-06-30

Abstract : The development of information and communication technologies has significantly influenced the dynamics of cultural preservation in the digital era. Social media, as one of the products of this era, has emerged as a strategic medium for disseminating local cultural values to a broader, interactive, and more efficient audience. Among these platforms, Instagram stands out due to its strong visual orientation, which allows for creative and engaging cultural messaging, particularly targeting younger generations who dominate social media usage. In the context of Batak culture, the Tor-Tor dance represents an intangible cultural heritage with deep symbolic, spiritual, and social values embedded in traditional community structures. This dance functions not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a medium of communication between humans, ancestors, and deities. However, globalization and declining interest among youth have threatened its continuity. In response, the use of social media particularly Instagram accounts like @zonabatak has become a strategic means of preserving and promoting this cultural heritage. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine how the @zonabatak Instagram account utilizes features such as photos, videos, captions, stories, and user interactions to generate cultural awareness and disseminate information related to the Tor-Tor dance. The findings indicate that the account effectively presents visual content and contextualizes the dance in traditional rituals and youth education. In addition to conveying cultural knowledge, the account acts as a digital space for education and promotion, reaching audiences from various backgrounds. Interactive features such as comments and story polls further enhance Instagram's role as a participatory and dynamic cultural communication platform. Although certain limitations exist such as inconsistent visual quality the account successfully communicates cultural values, stimulates curiosity, and fosters local cultural pride. Thus, @zonabatak serves as a concrete example of how social media can function as a tool for cultural preservation that aligns with contemporary digital communication practices.

Keywords: Instagram, Culture, Tor-Tor Dance, Preservation, Promotion

Copyright © 2025, Author.

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47453/>

Introduction

The advancement of information and communication technology has had a profound impact on the patterns of cultural distribution in modern society. Social media, as one of the key products of the digital era, serves not only as a channel for cultural exposure but also as a public space for the exchange of knowledge, including local traditions. Instagram, in particular, has emerged as a popular visual-based platform with the ability to disseminate image and video content rapidly and widely. This creates a significant opportunity for cultural actors to introduce traditional heritage to broader audiences, especially younger generations who are active users of the platform. In this context, digitalization offers a promising alternative in addressing the challenges of cultural preservation amid the pressures of globalization (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage. One of these is the Batak culture in North Sumatra, known for its unique traditions, language, and performing arts especially the Tor-Tor dance. This traditional dance is more than a performative art; it serves as a form of spiritual and social expression embedded deeply in the Batak community. However, the survival of the Tor-Tor dance is increasingly challenged by external cultural influences and the waning interest of younger generations in local traditions. Thus, strategic efforts are required to ensure the sustainability and continued relevance of this traditional art (Simanjuntak, 2018).

In the realm of cultural preservation, social media has emerged as a crucial tool for bridging traditional heritage with digital lifestyles. As a visual platform, Instagram allows for the creative packaging of cultural appeal through photos, videos, and short narratives. Cultural-focused accounts such as @zonabatak play an active role in sharing content that reflects Batak identity, including the promotion of the Tor-Tor dance. Through features such as posts, stories, and reels, the account disseminates Batak cultural values to a wider and more diverse audience, particularly younger users. This form of adaptive cultural promotion aligns well with contemporary communication practices (Utami, 2021).

The @zonabatak account consistently showcases Batak cultural content, encompassing various aspects such as art, language, customs, and traditional dances. With a substantial number of followers, this account has become an effective medium to reintroduce the Tor-Tor dance to younger audiences who may not yet be familiar with it. Additionally, the use of engaging narratives and visual presentations contributes to increased interest, appreciation, and community involvement in cultural preservation. Thus, the presence of this account functions not only as an informative platform but also holds significant educational and promotional potential (Manurung, 2020).

Based on this background, it is essential to investigate the role of Instagram in the preservation and promotion of the Batak Tor-Tor dance, using the @zonabatak account as a case study. This research aims to assess the extent to which Instagram can serve as an effective medium for sustaining local cultural identity, and how its visual and narrative strategies can attract public interest. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more relevant and context-sensitive models for cultural promotion through digital media (Nugroho, 2019).

Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to a scientific way of obtaining data with specific purposes and utilities. The term *scientific* indicates that the research activity must be based on scientific principles, namely rationality, empiricism, and systematic procedures (Bungin, 2003). Qualitative research is an approach oriented toward natural phenomena or events. It is foundational and naturalistic in nature, and therefore cannot be conducted in a laboratory setting but rather in the field. As such, this type of research is often referred to as *naturalistic inquiry* or *field study* (Zuchri Abdussamad, 2021).

This study employs a descriptive method, in which data or phenomena are captured by the researcher and supported by evidence. The interpretation of these phenomena greatly depends on the researcher's analytical ability and sensitivity. The theoretical foundation of qualitative methods is rooted in an approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of social realities. This research does not rely on numerical data or statistical analysis, but rather focuses on meaning, process, and subjective experience.

Bogdan and Taylor (1982) define qualitative research as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behavior, with a holistic focus on both context and individuals. Creswell (2009) adds that qualitative research involves several essential steps, such as formulating research questions and procedures, collecting specific data from participants, analyzing data inductively by moving from particular to general themes, and interpreting the data meaningfully.

This study adopts a qualitative approach. As explained by Kirk & Miller, qualitative research is a specific tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on direct observation of people within their own environment and on engaging with them using their own language and terminology (Zuchri Abdussamad, 2021).

Results and Discussion



Figure 1. The Instagram Account @zonabatak

Source: Author's documentation from the @zonabatak Instagram account
<https://www.instagram.com/zonabatak?igsh=dGczdXNncGd0cG11>

The @ZonaBatak Instagram account was established as a response to the urgent need to preserve Batak culture in the digital age. In an increasingly interconnected society through social media, concerns about the fading of local traditions and cultural identities are becoming more apparent. As a digital platform, Zona Batak utilizes Instagram as a primary medium to disseminate knowledge and cultural values of the Batak people to younger generations. The platform functions as an alternative space that integrates information technology with local wisdom, bridging the gap between cultural heritage and contemporary communication practices.

The @ZonaBatak account has amassed a considerable number of followers 231,000 as indicated on its profile many of whom actively engage with its content. These followers are not exclusively from the Batak ethnic group but include individuals from various ethnic backgrounds across Indonesia who are interested in Batak traditions and the entertaining cultural content presented by the account. The profile also reveals that @ZonaBatak maintains a presence on other digital platforms, such as TikTok and YouTube. Furthermore, the profile includes the phrase, “Discover the beauty of Batak culture with us,” which serves as an appealing invitation for new visitors to explore Batak culture.

@ZonaBatak stands out as a commendable cultural account on Instagram due to its consistent efforts in introducing various Batak customs. One prominent tradition featured is the Tortor Dance, a well-known cultural performance in Indonesia, typically performed by the Batak people as a welcoming dance at ceremonial events. The Tortor Dance carries deep spiritual and social meanings, symbolizing respect, celebration, and communication among humans, ancestral spirits, and the Divine. The name “Tortor” is believed to have originated from the sound produced by dancers

stomping their feet on wooden floors of traditional Batak houses emitting a “tor-tor” sound. This dance is regarded as sacred by the Batak community, reflecting gratitude and cultural identity.

In traditional Batak rituals, Tortor is believed to involve ancestral spirits entering stone statues, which then move in a rigid dancing motion. The movements include tiptoe footwork and hand gestures, central to the dance's expression (Agrace, 2011). Tortor is internationally recognized, attracting interest from both local communities and foreign tourists who wish to learn and experience it firsthand. Accompanied by *Gondang* music, Tortor involves full-body movement, emphasizing hand and foot gestures. The dance embodies values of unity, solidarity, and collective harmony (Sari, 2012).

The primary aim of the @ZonaBatak account is to consistently introduce and preserve Batak culture in an engaging manner. By presenting content that includes the Batak language, folklore, traditional music, philosophical values, and inspirational figures from the Batak community, Zona Batak seeks to educate the public without neglecting entertainment aspects. Its use of compelling visual and audio formats serves as a strategy to reach younger audiences, who are generally more drawn to light yet meaningful content. Thus, the account functions not only as a digital cultural archive but also as an informal yet effective educational tool.

The @ZonaBatak Instagram account was launched in 2020, coinciding with the surge in social media usage as a means of communication and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, many communities and individuals began utilizing digital spaces to disseminate cultural, educational, and entertaining information. Zona Batak emerged with the primary goal of preserving and popularizing Batak culture to a broader audience, especially the youth who are well-acquainted with digital platforms like Instagram. Through accessible and creative content, the account aims to serve as a dynamic and relevant representation of Batak culture in the modern era.



Figure 2. The Tor-Tor Dance Performed During a Celebration Event as Posted by the @zonabatak Account

(Source: Instagram account @zonabatak)

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DILYIBBGjf/?igsh=djBIN3Fhbjh3cHE2>



Figure 3. The @zonabatak Instagram Account Also Shares Activities of Children in Sigapiton Aljabata Village Learning the Tor-Tor Dance

(Source: Instagram account @zonabatak)

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DH_A229hW--/?igsh=MTBqMGtzcGMwY2FpcQ==

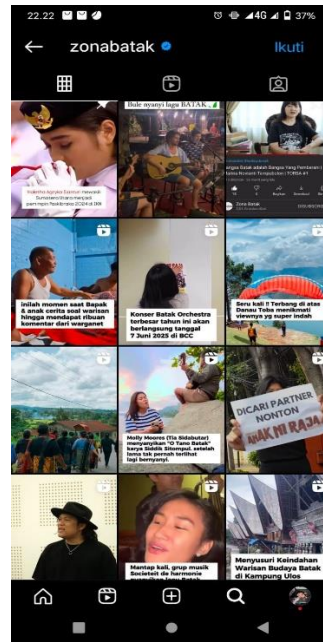


Figure 4. The @zonabatak Instagram Account Also Shares Viral Content Related to Batak Culture

(Source: Instagram account @zonabatak)

<https://www.instagram.com/zonabatak?igsh=dGczdXNncGd0cG11>

Based on observations of the Instagram account @zonabatak, it was found that the account actively uploads content related to Batak culture, particularly the Tari Tor-Tor (Tor-Tor Dance). The presentation is delivered through video and photo posts showcasing the Tor-Tor dance and various traditional ceremonies. The dancers appear graceful in traditional Batak attire, notably adorned with ulos, a handwoven textile that holds deep cultural significance. Despite minimal makeup, the dancers perform the Tor-Tor elegantly. Ulos is a traditional Batak woven fabric, typically used as a shawl, and symbolizes the love and affection between parents and children. Additionally, ulos serves a practical function as a body warmer (Adriana & Fitriani, 2023).

Ulos is an essential element in many major Batak ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and blessings. According to Batak ancestral beliefs, there are three sources of warmth for humans: the sun, fire, and ulos. Among these, ulos is considered the most comforting and pleasing (Astuti, 2019). Historically, the Batak people lived in mountainous regions, hence their deep appreciation for ulos as a source of warmth. The tradition of ulos weaving originated from this need and cultural background.

Each ulos motif carries distinct meanings or symbolic significance. The three primary types of ulos include Ulos Ragidup, Ulos Ragi Hotang, and Ulos Maratur (Sherly & Sukardi, 2015). Ulos Ragidup holds the highest symbolic status due to the complexity of its production process. "Ragidup" means "symbol of life", and therefore, every household is expected to possess it as a symbol of a happy and prosperous life. This ulos consists of three parts: two identical sides woven simultaneously and a separate center section, which is the most intricate in meaning (Tinambunan, 2023).

Ulos Ragi Hotang is traditionally used for individuals perceived as deceitful, with the hope that God will transform them into wise and virtuous people. It is also

given to those experiencing misfortune or to diligent workers. In funerary rituals, this ulos is used to wrap the body or bones during the secondary burial ceremony.

Ulos Maratur, characterized by stripe motifs symbolizing birds or animals in orderly patterns, is typically used as a ulos parompa (blanket for newborns), symbolizing a wish for the family to be blessed with many children, as many as the creatures depicted on the fabric (Abdillah & Irwansyah, 2020).

It is also worth noting that although the @zonabatak account promotes Batak culture, posts specifically featuring Tari Tor-Tor remain relatively infrequent. Instead, the account more often shares content related to other traditional Batak ceremonies such as funerals or community events involving Batak society that have gone viral. As for caption choices accompanying the photos and videos, @zonabatak typically writes captions in accordance with the content, supplemented with hashtags relevant to Batak culture such as #budayabatak.



Figure 4. Mangain tradition, commonly performed during the conferral of a clan name (*marga*) to an individual who is not of Batak descent but wishes to marry into a Batak family.

(Source: Instagram account @zonabatak)

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DJT_zihZTz/?igsh=dmJzeDQ1cnR3OXg4

The @zonabatak Instagram account has proven to be highly effective in introducing and promoting the local culture of the Batak ethnic group, as the account exclusively shares content in the form of videos and photographs related to Batak traditions. This focused approach has garnered appreciation and enthusiasm from its followers on Instagram.

The following are several comments found on @zonabatak's posts:



Figure 5. Selected Comments Featured in Posts from the Instagram Account @zonabatak

(Source: Instagram Account @zonabatak)

The careful selection of content has led followers of the @zonabatak Instagram account to express appreciation through comments of gratitude and enthusiasm. However, it is worth noting that the quality of the visual media still requires improvement, as several photos and videos appear blurred or lack clarity. Despite this limitation, the captivating cultural displays shared by the account continue to attract interest and curiosity among followers, particularly regarding Toba Batak culture and traditional practices such as the Tor-Tor dance.

Instagram has proven to be an influential platform for promoting culture and disseminating information, especially in the digital era where social media is a primary means of communication. The platform allows for the efficient transmission of cultural content such as the Tor-Tor dance to a wide audience without the constraints of time, location, or high costs. Instagram's capacity to present information through visual formats (photos and videos) enables users to access cultural knowledge without being physically present (Reni Nuraeni, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of Instagram as a medium for disseminating and preserving the *Tor-Tor* dance as a cultural heritage is highly effective. The @zonabatak account actively publishes various traditions and cultural practices of the Batak community, including the *Tor-Tor* dance, reaching a broader audience particularly younger generations who are more engaged with digital media. Through the presentation of engaging content in the form of videos, photographs, and additional information, Instagram effectively attracts public attention and serves as a powerful tool for cultural promotion.

Moreover, the interactions that occur in the comment sections and the sharing features of photos and videos play a crucial role in spreading information about the

Tor-Tor dance. These dynamics contribute to the development of collective awareness, especially among young people, regarding the importance of cultural heritage. Therefore, social media not only functions as a source of entertainment but also as an educational platform that facilitates learning and discovery about cultural elements that might otherwise remain unfamiliar.

References

- Adriani, A., & Fitriani, N. (2023). Motif dan makna motif tenun Ulos Batak Angkola di Kabupaten Tapanuli Selatan. *Gorga: Jurnal Seni Rupa*, 12(2), 302–309.
- Abdillah, E. A., & Irwansyah, I. (2020). Perancangan infografis pengenalan kain Ulos Batak Toba. *Jurnal Mahasiswa Fakultas Seni dan Desain*, 1(1), 169–182.
- Abdussamad, Z. (2021). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Makassar: CV. Syakir Media Press.
- Kusumastuti, A., & Khoiron, A. M. (2019). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Semarang: Lembaga Pendidikan Sukarno Pressindo.
- Nasution, A. F. (2023). *Metode penelitian kualitatif*. Bandung: CV. Harfa Creative.
- Agrace. (2011). Sejarah suku Batak. Retrieved from <http://agrace2011.blogspot.co.id/2012/06.html>
- Astuti, S. (2019). Eksplorasi etnomatematika kain Ulos Batak Toba untuk mengungkap nilai filosofi konsep matematika. *Jurnal MathEducation Nusantara*, 2(1), 45–50.
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59–68.
- Manurung, F. (2020). Instagram dan representasi budaya lokal. *Jurnal Komunikasi Nusantara*, 8(1), 22–30.
- Nugroho, Y. (2019). Budaya digital dan tantangan pelestarian tradisi. *Cultural Studies Review*, 11(3), 55–68.
- Nuraeni, R. (2019). Pemanfaatan media sosial sebagai media promosi (Studi deskriptif pada Happy Go Lucky House). *Jurnal Common*, 3(1). Bandung.
- Sherly, M., & Sukardi, S. (2015). Makna simbolik kain Ulos pada masyarakat Batak Toba di Palembang. *Kalpataru: Jurnal Sejarah dan Pembelajaran Sejarah*, 1(2), 76–86.
- Simanjuntak, M. (2018). *Tor-Tor dan Ulos dalam ritual adat Batak*. Medan: USU Press.
- Sari, D. I. (2012). *Tari Tortor Batak Sumatera Utara*. Retrieved from <http://www.google.co.id/search>
- Tinambunan, E. R. (2023, October). Ulos Batak Toba: Makna religi dan implikasinya pada peradaban dan estetika. *Forum*, 52(2), 122–142.
- Utami, S., & Wulandari, R. (2021). Digitalisasi budaya lokal di media sosial. *Jurnal Komunikasi dan Media Digital*, 3(2), 45–56.