

Via Vallen Phenomenon: The Emergence of the Queen of Indonesian Dangdut Koplo

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4 Via Vallen Phenomenon: The Emergence of the Queen of Indonesian *Dangdut Koplo*

This article examines the emergence of Via Vallen as the 'queen' of dangdut koplo, an Indonesian genre of popular music, from the perspectives of spectacle and social media. Characterised by sexualised body movement, dangdut koplo was popularised in Indonesia by Inul Daratista in the 2000s. As the new 'queen' of dangdut koplo, however, Via has refused to embody the genre's sexualised style. In this article the authors present a showcase of the ever-growing power of digital technology and social media in Indonesian popular culture. The intensive use of social media has brought Via's music to a wide spectrum of fans, including those who previously refused to listen to dangdut koplo. Anita Sartika Dewi gained her PhD in Applied Linguistics from Monash University, where she is a Research and Learning Coordinator at the Sir Louis Matheson Library. Her research is mostly in the area of intercultural communication, sociolinguistics, language, culture and identity. Edi Dwi Riyanto also gained his PhD in Arts from Monash University and is a lecturer in the English Department of the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia. His research interests include Indonesian pop culture and the resilience of traditional cultures in Indonesian contemporary settings.

Keywords: *dangdut koplo*, Via Vallen, sexualisation, eroticism, spectacle, social media

Introduction

Indonesian Choice Awards 2018 5.0 NET was the fifth event organised by the Indonesian Net television station to present awards to the most creative and outstanding artists. Via Vallen, who was chosen to perform the first *dangdut* show in this event, presented herself in a striking appearance, one that was different from what most people would imagine of a *dangdut* singer. For this performance Via was widely praised for introducing “a notable shift in the music genre’s style and attitude” and representing the “growing Islamisation movement”

which influences not only religious but also social and cultural aspects of everyday life in Indonesia.¹

In 2018 Via was reaching her peak as a *dangdut* performer. Earlier in the same year she received the Most Popular Dangdut Performer from SCTV Awards. In the following years, she received multiple awards from Indonesia and a 2019 Bravo Award from Russia. She has also received numerous awards connected to her use of social media, such as the *Penyanyi Dangdut Tersosmed* (*dangdut* singer who is the most active in social media) and *Fanbase Dangdut Tersosmed* (*dangdut* fan base that is most active in social media) in 2017,² and the Social Media Awards for the Prominent Figure with Positive Sentiment in Social Media in 2019.³ Via became the new trend setter of *dangdut* in Indonesia and in less than five years earned herself the title of queen of *koplo*.⁴

This article addresses Via's relation to *dangdut koplo* by investigating her career from the perspectives of spectacle and social media. It builds on two prior studies of *dangdut*, namely Weintraub's article⁵ and Decker's thesis.⁶ Weintraub reported the emergence of a *dangdut* counter-genre called *koplo* from East Java, noting that in *post-reformasi* Indonesia, the emergence of *dangdut koplo* from East Java illustrates "the discourse and practice of genre formation" and counters the dominant style of *dangdut*.⁷ He observed the emergence of *koplo* reflects a productive relationship between a genre and its counter, noting the fluidity of borders between genres, and the possibility of new genres emerging. Weintraub suggested that "performance defines *dangdut koplo*," as it is characterised by an "eroticized style of dance". This article investigates the ways Via de-sexualised the eroticised character of *koplo* spectacle and how she gained the popularity as a *dangdut* singer without the commonly assumed erotic character.

Decker investigated how gender was performed in *dangdut* by studying three artists.⁸ One artist, Fitri Carlina, has some parallels with Via Vallen and Inul Daratista, the most prominent *koplo* performer at the turn of the millennium; all three are *koplo* performers from East Java. While Fitri's sexualised representation of gender was dictated by the *dangdut* industry, she added another layer of her own, which she controlled through her self-representation on Instagram. In this context, Fitri occupies something like a middle ground, between Inul's eroticised dance style and Via's success in employing social media to negotiate an identity as a *koplo* performer that is both popular and acceptable.

In order to grasp the idea of continuity, change, and the influence of social media on the performance of *dangdut koplo*, the authors employed two methods of collecting data. Direct observation was undertaken to gather information about *dangdut* live performances, especially those that are related to the eroticised dance style that is a vital feature of *koplo* and the interaction between performers and audience. This method was especially important to understand the legacy of *koplo*. Direct observation was carried out in two phases. The first set of observations took place between May and June 2014 at two venues in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, namely the Basiyo building, which is a section of the XT entertainment complex, and Nevada café in Seturan. The second set of observations was conducted in Surabaya, Indonesia, between February and April 2016, where one

of the authors observed performances at wedding receptions that were open to the public. The second method was through indirect observation, which involved collecting information about the impact of digital technology and social media on Via's journey to success. Data was collected from both mainstream mass media and social media, such as YouTube videos and comments on the videos, and Instagram content. Supporting data was collected from newspapers and other publications.

Using Via Vallen as a case study, this article analyses a new context of success for a *dangdut* performer. It expands on previous propositions about the boundaries of *dangdut koplo* being characterised by eroticised dance, and about the roles of media technologies in supporting an artist. It examines Via's transformation of *dangdut koplo* for a broad audience and demonstrates the ever-growing power of digital technologies and social media in Indonesian pop culture.

From dangdut to the domination of erotic koplo

The name of the most popular music in Indonesia, *dangdut*, is an onomatopoeia which can be roughly translated as "thumpety-thump", the sound made by its drumbeat.⁹ From its very beginning, the sound of its drum, which is known as *kendang*, is the heart of this music. An early form of *dangdut* can be found in Melayu music, particularly in the regions of Medan and Padang, Sumatra.¹⁰ In his writing, Frederick noted that performer Rhoma Irama was vital in transforming *dangdut* from a local music into one that was very popular across Indonesia during the 1970s. Since then, *dangdut* spread widely through radio, cassette recordings, and film, and was popularised nationally, becoming as Weintraub observes "nationalized."¹¹ In line with the strongly centralised control of the media in that era, the capital city of Jakarta became the centre of production and set standards of taste and style in *dangdut*.

At the turn of the millenium, *dangdut* underwent a process of re-localisation through the emergence of local *dangduts*. One of the most important local strands of *dangdut* is called *dangdut koplo*. This strand of *dangdut* from East Java is characterised by "its distinctive drum pattern, fast tempo, genre-bending arrangements, and eroticized style of dance."¹² Weintraub proposes two ways to identify *dangdut koplo*: its sound and its spectacle.

The easiest way to recognise *dangdut koplo*, commonly abbreviated as *koplo*, is through its *kendang* sound. Usually, the tempo is faster and the syllable is doubled. The sound is produced by hitting the two sides of the *kendang* drum with left and right hands. This type of drum ranges from the most basic and common *dangdut kendang*, a single drum with two membranes, to a set of two or more *kendangs*. It is common to see a *kendang* player with a set of drums commonly used for rock music, side by side with several traditional *kendangs*. The *kendang* sound comprises five syllables: "dang," "du-ut," "dut," "tak" and "tung." These syllables are also played at a faster tempo. To produce a *koplo* sound, the two-sided *kendang* at the heart of *dangdut* is often accompanied by some other traditional *kendangs*, such as those from *jaranan* (horse dance) and *jaipong* (Sundanese traditional music and dance), and a drum kit. Thus, *dangdut koplo* sets

itself apart by incorporating local and international drums, performing side by side with traditional dangdut *kendang*. These drums allow almost any song to be “koplo-ised” since *dangdut koplo* is more of a “stylistic treatment rather than a body of songs.”¹³ In reality, the degree to which a song becomes *koplo* varies.

The second characteristic of *dangdut koplo* is its spectacle. Because it is mostly experienced as live music, Weintraub argues that “performance defines *dangdut koplo*.”¹⁴ The core visual aspect of the performance of *dangdut koplo* is *goyang*. The literal meaning of *goyang* is to shake; here it means to dance in an eroticised style of movement. This was evident in one of the authors’ direct observation at the Basiyo building of the XT entertainment complex in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where most performers were female and the spectators were predominantly male adults. The Basiyo building offered *dangdut* performance four times a week with almost no indication that the performance would be *dangdut koplo*. Upon entering the building, however, the *koplo* environment was apparent, both in terms of sound and spectacle. The *kendang* sounds were distinctive of *koplo*, although it was often mixed with rock, reggae, and other genres. *Koplo* is capable of intermingling with other genres.

On one occasion at the Basiyo building, the show opened with a performance of six female singers. After their introduction by a male MC, the singers performed in turns, sometimes in pairs. The show ended with all singers performing one song together and standing on stage, just like the opening. One singer wore a tank top and a black miniskirt. The next had a denim pair of hot mini pants and a sleeveless upper body outfit. The upper body outfit was so short that whenever she put her hands up, parts of her belly were exposed. Others performed in sleeveless tops, tights, and mini-skirts, some of which were partly transparent. The sound of the music supported the eroticised dance movements and the ways the performers interacted with the spectators. This created the *koplo* atmosphere, where visual aspects are combined with sounds and interactions between performers and spectators. Eroticism in these scenes coincided with the availability of alcoholic drinks. The audience were drinking, although it was not apparent whether the performers were also consuming alcohol.

Some performances of *koplo* eroticism were also observed in Surabaya, East Java, in various events including wedding receptions. These performances were open to the public and everybody enjoyed them freely, including children. At these kind of events, children can be seen playing around the stage, leaning their bodies onto the stage, or gazing at the female performers. Fifteen and ten years earlier, Heryanto¹⁵ and Weintraub¹⁶ reported on similar situations in which the audience for *dangdut* consists of all members of the community across ages and gender. While the *koplo* singers in Surabaya did not necessarily dress in revealing outfits, the eroticism of the performance came through their movements and physical contact with the audience. Their physical contact, particularly through *nyawer* (the audience’s act of giving money to the performer directly while the show was happening), led to seductive interactions between the singers and audience. These performances were marked by the eroticism of *goyang*, as described by Weintraub: “[T]he scantily clad singer leans back while singing. She raises one foot on top of the drum, exposing her crotch to the audience. Men ogle

her and offer her money, which they will place in her bra, garter belt, and, as I observed in one performance, even her mouth.”¹⁷

While *goyang* appears in *dangdut koplo* performances, Weintraub argues that erotic *goyang* is not solely produced by *dangdut koplo*. Since eroticism has been traditionally practised in Indonesian performance long before *koplo* existed, Weintraub believes that *goyang* is a merging of an older tradition with *dangdut koplo*.¹⁸ Weintraub describes the emergence of *dangdut koplo* as a “counter-genre” against the increasing popularity of *dangdut* in Indonesia led by Rhoma Irama. Instead of going along with the ever-growing national popularity of *dangdut*, people in villages “wanted their *dangdut* raw.”¹⁹ Gradually the “vulgar eroticism” of *dangdut koplo*²⁰ was embraced by mostly lower-class people, resulting in the stereotype that *dangdut koplo* is associated with lower social status. This happened simultaneously with the popularisation and the rapid growth of erotic and fast paced *koplo*.

However, not all parties accepted this eroticised *koplo*. In fact, its eroticism invited significant debates. One famous debate involves singer Inul Daratista. Weintraub describes Inul as the most prominent *koplo* performer at the turn of the millennium. The heated debate about Inul was mostly related to how she used her body in performance. For Weintraub, the debate demonstrated how the “human body invested with diverse meanings and values has powerful implications for discourses about Islam, pornography, women’s bodies, state/civil relations in Indonesia, and changing forms of media.”²¹ Weintraub suggests that Inul’s presence, not only through her body movement but also through her vocal performance, crossed “the lines of respectable moral behaviour”²² set by Islam and the residual standards of the Indonesian New Order. On the other hand, Inul was supported by those who were typically silenced by the Suharto regime, including, among others, the “more liberal press, politicians, women’s rights groups, moderate religious leaders and intellectuals.”²³ They defended Inul’s dancing as an expression of women’s liberalism. Women’s rights groups and the National Commissions on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) supported her by arguing that she suffered from psychological trauma in the name of religion.²⁴

Inul became even more popular, reaching national fame, partly because of this debate. The popularity of her style of *koplo* was characterised as *fenom-inul* (phenomenon and Inul, abbreviated) and *Inulmania*. Those two words represent the impact that Inul had on the development of *koplo*. She opened doors for other performers of eroticised *goyang*, resulting in a wave of *koplo* with eroticised *goyang* as its trait. For almost two decades, her eroticised *goyang* was regarded favourably by the public and dominated the scene of *dangdut* in Indonesia. A list of *dangdut koplo* performers followed Inul’s success, each with a special *goyang* as her brand, such as *goyang gergaji* (saw dance) by Dewi Persik, *goyang patah-patah* (broken dance) by Annisa Bahar, *goyang itik* (duck dance) by Zaskia Gotik and many others. The names for these dances describe the eroticised movements the singers perform. For Decker, these moves were created by *dangdut* performers to “deliberately sexualize themselves” and “sensationalize their acts” to become famous.²⁵ However, Decker observes that the sexualised body

movements demanded by the *dangdut* industry are cleaned up and de-sexualised to meet the “tastes of the middle-class and national laws” when the artists are performing on television.²⁶ As Adji observes, there is a “glass-ceiling” to be surpassed. Hence, there are two expectations – one set up by industry which encourages sexualised performance, and the other is the national “glass-ceiling”²⁷ which requires a compliance to cultural, social, and religious norms. Via has navigated successfully between these two expectations.

Via Vallen and the redrawing of dangdut koplo spectacle

Via Vallen has redrawn the *dangdut koplo* spectacle by not complying with the demand of the *dangdut* industry to sexualise her body. Instead, she brands herself as a *dangdut* performer without *goyang*, taking a very different route to success in the industry. Although Via performed from *kampung* to *kampung*²⁸ prior to gaining national fame, from early on she refused to perform eroticised *dangdut* or be associated with it.

Maulida Oktavia, later known as Via Vallen, was born in 1990. She started her career in music at primary school age. Her father is a local *dangdut* music player who loves Rhoma Irama, a leading exponent of *dangdut*. Via was exposed to *dangdut* since she was young and her father encouraged her to become a *dangdut* performer. Another music scene that attracted Via was performed by the *pengamens* (buskers) at the crossroad in her neighbourhood.²⁹ She was fascinated by the simple and voluntary transaction between performers and spectators. She witnessed the *pengamens*' ability to collect some money, even though their performances were simple. Via imitated the activity of these *pengamens* and was happy to receive money from generous spectators. Busking in Indonesia is controversial and the authorities generally do not allow such activity in most areas, including in Via's neighbourhood. *Pengamens* were seen as beggars, socially and financially marginalised.³⁰ However, the story of Via and these simple and marginalised *pengamens* helped Via's image as a down-to-earth star.³¹

Via began her singing career very early. She started singing in receptions around Sidoarjo and sometimes she performed for a local *orkes Melayu* music group and was paid around Rp. 20,000 (approximately US \$2) per show.³² She also performed often at school music events.³³ Eventually her talent was recognised by Selera Rakyat (SERA, which literally means “people's taste”), a notable *orkes Melayu* in East Java.³⁴ After she joined SERA, her name spread broadly around East Java. Performing in one city after another, Via gained a larger fan base. Her success with SERA led to the creation of Vyanisti, the official Via Vallen's fan base that she inaugurated in 2015. The support of her fan base helped her produce songs under a professional record label, Ascada Musik.³⁵ Her recorded songs and solo album (year) added to her popularity. Ascada Musik Indonesia is a corporation working in the field of record label, artist management, and publication using an online platform for various artists from various genres.³⁶ Ascada produced many of Via's most popular videos on YouTube, such as *Sayang* (Darling) and *Bojo Galak* (My Spouse is Mean).³⁷

Although Via Vallen has been singing *dangdut* since an early age, she also performs pop and rock music. This is evident in some of her song covers such as “Despacito,” “Senorita,” and “How You Like That.” Via is much inspired by the United States band, Evanescence, and Canadian singer, Avril Lavigne. She took the title of Evanescence’s album, *Fallen*, combined with “Via”, the last syllables of her name, to form “Via Vallen,” her stage name.³⁸ Additionally, she was very much influenced by SERA, a band which frequently combines reggae, blues, keroncong, bossanova, and jazz, regardless of its fame as a *koplo* music group. As a result, Via became a famous *koplo* singer who is simultaneously capable of performing various other *koplo*-ised genres of popular music, often in foreign languages such as English and Korean.

Via’s success has reminded the public of her predecessor, Inul Daratista. Both were local *dangdut koplo* singers from East Java who successfully made it to the capital city of Jakarta and became famous national stars. Both are proud of originating from the suburbs surrounding Surabaya, the capital city of East Java: Inul is from Japaran Gempol, about 45 kilometres south of Surabaya, while Via comes from Sidoarjo, 30 kilometres south of Surabaya. While sharing the *koplo* sounds, Javanese language, and neighbourhood with Inul, Via sets herself apart from Inul and the eroticised style of *dangdut koplo*. Whereas Inul was famous for her eroticised *goyang ngebor* (drill dance), Via is popular as a *koplo* performer without any dance move (*tanpa goyang*). The once-dominant eroticism of *dangdut koplo* has recently been replaced by Via’s style of performing *koplo* without the *goyang*. In an online Jawa Pos Group-owned newspaper, *JPNN.com*, a music critic Bens Leo stated that Via’s journey is similar to Inul’s, but some readers disagreed with the article. Edd Dedd Rusdi commented, “*Ya bedalah Min. Satu Modal Suara dan Tampang, Yang Satu Lagi Modal Pantat gede*” (“They are different. One relies on voice and appearance, the other relies on her big butt”).³⁹ Via’s voice and *tampang* (visual image) are recognised by the audience as the factors that make her famous. Via refuses the older erotic image of *dangdut* performers and constructs her own visual image.

Via’s “*koplo* minus *goyang*” style deviates from the association of *koplo* as a dominant *dangdut* style with eroticised dance as a characteristic trait. She proudly declares that she cannot dance and wants to be known as a Javanese *dangdut* performer.⁴⁰ This direct statement indicates a brave decision for a *dangdut koplo* singer to go against the expectations of the industry. As a spectacle, Via presents herself as a singer, not as a dancer.

The way Via dresses also refuses the common expectation that *koplo* should be erotic. For her, revealing dresses are lowly and old fashioned.⁴¹ Instead of going along with the trend, Via distances her own style from the eroticism associated with *dangdut koplo*. Through her choices in self-styling, Via “critiques the social order that objectifies, commoditizes, and sexualize girls.”⁴² She prefers to wear jeans, sneakers, and even a baseball cap, creating the impression of a young, free, urban girl. Her choice to wear a blue suit with a pair of white pants and sneakers during her performance at the Indonesian Choice Award 2018 gave an impression of an active and independent woman. This image has an empowering spirit that contrasts with the commonly held idea of female *dangdut*

singers being objectified women. As Wahyu, a local music critic suggests, Via's decent appearance, as conveyed by her outfit, which does not show her bodily curves, is the antithesis of those highly sexualised appearances by *koplo* performers since the era of Inul Daratista.⁴³ Wahyu believes that people began to get bored with eroticised dances and turned to Via to find something fresh and different.

Via's official music video for "Sayang," produced by Ascada Musik, is an example of "*koplo* minus *goyang*."⁴⁴ There are still some aspects of sensuality such as putting on lipstick and other facial make up, wearing a sleeveless mini dress, and walking by the pool side in one of the scenes. In contrast with Inul Daratista's drill dance, however, Via's sensuality in this song is much more delicate. Similar impressions can also be seen in her other music videos such as "Jerit Atiku" (My Heart Screams),⁴⁵ "Selingkuh" (Cheating),⁴⁶ and "Secawan Madu" (A Cup of Honey),⁴⁷ all of which are visually performed in a non-erotic way.

Via's style of performing has changed the perception of *dangdut* and led to the conversion of fans who previously did not like or even despised the music into becoming *dangdut* fans. A netizen whose account name is Viral Channel, for example, stated that he used to hate *dangdut* because of the *nyawer* tradition of giving money which gives such a derogative image of the *dangdut* performer. Upon viewing Via's video, however, he began to enjoy *dangdut*. Another netizen named Look Lick7 admitted that he almost never listened to *dangdut* before, until he heard his friend's mobile phone streaming Sayang music video on YouTube. His comment on Via's music video on YouTube is as follows:

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*Jujur banget jarang ndengerin musik dangdut. bahkan cenderung gak pernah. suatu hari temen minjem hp. buat streaming youtube. dan tiba2 muncul ini di feeds. penasaran diputer. dan langsung ketagihan [REDACTED].*⁴⁸
 (Translation: To be perfectly honest, I very rarely listen to *dangdut* music, even almost never. one day a friend borrowed my mobile phone to do a streaming on YouTube. and suddenly this appears on feeds. curious to play. and directly addicted).

For these viewers, Via has transposed *dangdut* from its previous status as a dubious or despised genre to it being welcome at almost all levels of society. Unlike Inul Daratista's drill dance which polarised debate about its decency, Via's "*koplo* minus *goyang*" style has received widespread praise for elevating *dangdut* to a respectable position. Bens Leo, a famous music critic, stated that, since 2015, *dangdut* is no longer a "marginal music."⁴⁹ This shift has also led other artists from different music genres to participate in *dangdut*. Trie Utami and Purwacaraka are two highly respected musicians who were never associated with *dangdut*, yet they later participated in *dangdut* performances.⁵⁰ With regards to visual appearance, a famous fashion designer, Ivan Gunawan, offered more glamorous spectacles of *koplo*, moving away from the previously eroticised, scantily clad outfit of *dangdut* performers.⁵¹ Some examples of Gunawan's designs for *dangdut* performers include a long-sleeve jumpsuit for Siti Badriah's performance at the anniversary of Indosiar TV station in 2018⁵² and a long dress with a 'gown accent' for Cita Citata's performance at the MNCTV Dangdut Award 2014.⁵³

However, Via's decent appearance and "minus *goyang*" style do not automatically disavow the old eroticised style. In the observation conducted by one of the authors in Yogyakarta, Central Java and Surabaya, East Java, the eroticised style of *koplo* was still evident, and some performers specifically catered for the adult male audience. The scenes for these styles of *dangdut* include night time entertainment, which to some extent was similar to nightclubs. This indicates that *dangdut* currently offers a wide array of performances according to their audiences such as adult male at night time venues, younger mixed gender at wedding receptions in public, and more general spectators on television and online. It is impossible to depict one single face of *dangdut* in contemporary Indonesia.

By defining her brand of *dangdut* "singer minus *goyang*" and being successful nationally, Via has repositioned the music genre by changing its visual style. She did not sexualise herself first and then clean up later. Instead, from the beginning, she consistently rejected the sexualisation. Her success has been seen as a reflection of the ever-growing Islamisation in Indonesia.⁵⁴ In addition, Via's mediated persona and success have been enhanced by a multi-mode approach involving social media technology. This is addressed in the next section.

Via and digital and social media technology

Via is not the first *dangdut* artist to make the most out of digital social media technology. Decker investigated three artists, one of them is Fitri Carlina, who is similar to Via in that she maintains a non-vulgar appearance and a degree of religiosity in the social media that she controls. According to Decker's analysis, Carlina's social media attempts to present "an alternative face to [her] studio-mediated identity."⁵⁵ Decker notes that social media can be seen as an infrastructure which contributes to change in the *dangdut* landscape. The infrastructure of digital technology and social media extends the fandoms to include women who dominate the online conversation, resulting in a less sexualised style of *dangdut*. While men are perceived as the fans enjoying *dangdut* in public spaces, women are seen as consuming *dangdut* in more private and mediated spaces. Decker sees social media technology as a liminal space illustrated by Fitri Carlina's two personas – one is constructed and dictated by the industry as presented in her YouTube music videos, and the other is under her own control in using Instagram feed. Fitri Carlina represents a duality of gender performance – one is the sexualised body for men, and the other is the humble and family oriented woman for another audience who are mostly women.⁵⁶

We shall illustrate Via's use of social media in promoting her image and music by discussing the production and distribution of "*Sayang*," the song which brought Via into gaining national fame and winning several awards.⁵⁷ During the writing of this article, "*Sayang*" has gained her nearly 195 million viewers as at December 2020.⁵⁸

Sayang embodies a trend that was previously absent in *dangdut koplo*: the emergence of Javanese *dangdut* hip hop and its remix culture. One of the authors became familiar with *dangdut* hip hop while conducting fieldwork in 2014 and

interviewing several Jogjakarta rappers. Marjuki, the leader of Jogja Hip Hop Foundation, the most prominent hip hop group from Jogjakarta, produced an electronic version of the *dangdut* single, “*Kewer-Kewer*,” in 2016.⁵⁹ However, it was NDX and its “*Sayang*” that had a direct influence on Via’s career and her swift ascent to success. NDX is a *dangdut* hip hop group from Bantul Jogjakarta founded in 2011. They make the most out of the affordability and practicability of remix technology, using available computers and software to create music.⁶⁰ Their songs are simple and often use Javanese language. Among their hits are “*Kimcil Kepolen*” (Materialistic Girl), “*Kelingan Mantan*” (Remembering Ex-lover), “*Bojoku Ketlikung*” (My Lover is Taken Away), and “*Sayang*.”

“*Sayang*” is special for at least two reasons: it brought Via to success and it involves many artists before it was performed by Via. “*Sayang*” is based on “*Mirai e*,” the third song of Nagai Aida Album produced by Kiroro in 1988. On August 23, 2010, EllaLittleLuvlyAngel published “*Hou Lai*,”⁶¹ a famous Chinese song performed by Rene Liu which resembles “*Mirai e*.” In 2012 Antonius Sutanto from Indonesia rewrote “*Hou Lai*” into “*Cinta Abadi*” (Love Forever), and in 2013 NDX transformed “*Cinta Abadi*” into “*Sayang*” by adding some rap sections and making it a *dangdut* hip hop song.⁶² “*Sayang*” provides an example of Via as a cover singer and rapping as part of many *dangdut* songs which signifies the legacy of *dangdut* hip hop from Bantul Jogjakarta. Being a cover singer contributes much to her success. Via covers not only Indonesian songs but also foreign songs such as “*Senorita*” (a Latin pop song, originally sung by Shawn Mendes),⁶³ “*Despacito*” (a Latin pop song, originally sung by Luis Fonsi),⁶⁴ and “*Ddu du ddu du*” (a Korean pop song, originally sung by Black Pink).⁶⁵

Via reaches a wide audience through multiple platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Via appears in videos on YouTube uploaded by many different accounts such as remixers, video makers, television stations, and her team or management. Many remixers produced audio albums or compilations,⁶⁶ while video makers recorded and edited Via’s live performances.⁶⁷ Indonesian televisions such as Net TV⁶⁸ and Indosiar⁶⁹ also uploaded videos of Via.

Via has her own YouTube account called Via Vallen Official.⁷⁰ It provides a wide array of Via’s videos, from the most viewed *koplo* cover version of “*Senorita*,”⁷¹ to her vlog of watching World Football Cup in Russia⁷² and her birthday vlog.⁷³ This account also provides information about Via’s contact person and links to Via’s Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts. Via has heavily used Instagram as a means of forging her visual image. Via has used photos and videos as her “social currencies online”⁷⁴ to attract a large number of followers. In December 2020, her Instagram account had 25.6 million followers, which indicates Via’s high social value. Another important aspect is that she controls her own image by filtering and adding captions, making it her personal social media account. Glimpses of her activities from stage performances and winning festivals to performing pilgrimage in Mecca provide a means for Via’s followers to share her personal stories and interests. Via has employed the concept of self-branding and has shown her capability to market herself. By doing so, Via has exercised autonomy over her own images.⁷⁵

1 Undoubtedly, social media has contributed to Via's success. It disrupts mainstream media such as television channels and newspapers from dictating public interests and tastes, and in turns enables a more distributed process in which each individual may respond directly to the performances of the artists. Social media provides a means of music distribution and consumption, as well as "opening the door for local and regional artists."⁷⁶ Via's success in using social media is in line with Jones' suggestion that technology of recording and distributing music plays an increasingly important role, even as the ability to record sound is less significant and has been overtaken by the capability to "transport sound."⁷⁷

Through social media, Via has enabled her fans to consume her music easily. Social media also provides platforms for Via's fans to communicate with her directly, either by commenting, debating, or voting. For instance, a significant number of positive comments are placed on Via's uploaded videos such as "Despacito."⁷⁸ Via is described as a genius for singing "Despacito" by fans who believe that Latin American songs are hard to sing:

*Via Vallen itu JENIUS ... bisa asik bawain semua lagu. itu lagu latin susah gila liriknya buat orang awam, dan saya kira via lah penyanyi dangdut pertama yang bisa nyanyiin.*⁷⁹ (Translation: Via Vallen is GENIUS ... She is cool in singing all those songs. The Latin [American] song is difficult, it's crazy that a common person can sing the lyrics, and I think Via is the first *dangdut* singer who can sing it).

This fan considers that singing a Latin American song is a new initiative for a *dangdut* singer like Via.

Weintraub notes that almost all songs can be *koplo*-ised, which indicates the flexibility of *dangdut koplo*. This flexibility is extended by the availability of digital remix technology. This results in a music genre that is somewhat difficult to identify. Many of her fans see this positively. For example, one of her fans, ErolLR, suggested, "*ini musik apaan sih. Koq keren amat*" ("what music is this? This is so cool").⁸⁰ Another fan, GUEPANE, commented, "*via vallen...andalah magnet dangdut magnet koplo...via vallen, joss gandos...*" ("Via Vallen, you are the magnet of *dangdut*, the magnet of *koplo*...Via Vallen, you are superb)."⁸¹ Via's success points to the wave of digitalisation in Indonesian cultural production. This wave encompasses young people who prefer digital technology and are highly engaged through social media and mobile technology. It is apparent across different sectors of their culture, including the way they enjoy music.

Conclusion

Using Via Vallen as a case study, this article has explored a new context and vehicle of success for a *dangdut* performer. After the domination of erotic *dangdut koplo* featuring Inul in the 2000s, Via Vallen emerged as a new breed of *dangdut koplo* star who inherits the locality of being Javanese yet takes a stand against *koplo* eroticism. Via rose from humble origins to the position of the queen of *koplo*,

while successfully maintaining her decency, and distancing her femininity from being objectified and subordinated. This has brought her to a wide spectrum of fans, including those who previously refused to listen to *dangdut* music because of its eroticism. Her principles and multi-genre talent have contributed to her success in becoming the Queen of *Koplo* without *goyang*. Via has successfully redrawn the boundaries of *koplo* spectacle by rejecting the demand of *dangdut* industry to sexualise herself, and at the same time she has surpassed the “glass ceiling” set by middle-class taste and national laws.

The practice of musical remix and social media technologies have been vital for Via’s success. Her most popular song to date, “*Sayang*,” demonstrates her success with mixed-genre music and remix technology facilitated by NDX. The remix technology has also provided Via with opportunities to sing any kinds of songs from all over the world. Via’s fame is heavily supported by the existence of social media on the Internet. It is not only her that uploads her music video on various platforms; her fans, television stations, and others also do so.

Social media opens a new connection between music artists and their audience. While the *dangdut* industry often encourages sexualised body representation of *dangdut* performers, Instagram and other social media platforms enable artists to control their own image. Via’s self-branding and marketing aim to build popular acceptance for her music. In turns, this also means that more and more Indonesians are connected in using social media to participate online in popular culture.

¹ Alberta Natasia Adji, “Applying Burn’s Kineikonic Mode to a Dangdut Music Performance: Via Vallen’s *Sayang* at the 2018 Indonesian Choice Awards 5.0 NET,” *IAFOR Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 5. Following the convention in Indonesia, we refer to Via Vallen by her first name.

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³ Agus Adhari, “Keren, Via Vallen Kembali Sabet Penghargaan Social Media Awards 2019,” October 5, 2019, <https://www.jagodangdut.com/artikel/3345-keren-via-vallen-kembali-sabet-penghargaan-social-media-awards-2019>.

⁴ Lambertus Hurek, “Via Vallen Ratu Dangdut Koplo Paling Fenomenal Asal Sidoarjo,” December 3, 2017, <https://radarsurabaya.jawapos.com/read/2017/12/03/31081/via-vallen-ratu-dangdut-koplo-paling-fenomenal-asal-sidoarjo>; Azizah Pamugarwati, “Profil Via Vallen, Si Ratu Pop Koplo yang Bawakan Theme Song Asian Games 2018,” March 3, 2020, <https://entertainment.kompas.com/read/2020/03/03/200426566/profil-via-vallen-si-ratu-pop-koplo-yang-bawakan-theme-song-asian>.

⁵ Andrew Weintraub, “The Sound and Spectacle of *Dangdut Koplo*: Genre and Counter-genre in East Java, Indonesia,” *Asian Music* (Summer/Fall 2013):160-197.

⁶ Andrea Louise Decker, “Performing gender to dangdut’s drum: Place, space, and infrastructure in Indonesian popular music,” Masters thesis, University of California, Riverside, 2016.

⁷ Weintraub, “The Sound,” 160-197.

⁸ Decker, “Performing.”

⁹ William H. Frederick, “Rhoma Irama and The Dangdut Style: Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Popular Culture,” *Indonesia* 34 (1982): 105.

¹⁰ Frederick, “Rhoma,” 106.

- ¹¹ Weintraub, "The Sound," 162.
- ¹² Weintraub, "The Sound," 160.
- ¹³ Weintraub, "The Sound," 171.
- ¹⁴ Weintraub, "The Sound," 175.
- ¹⁵ Ariel Heryanto, "Budaya Pop dan Persaingan Identitas," in *Budaya Populer di Indonesia: Identitas Mencair di Masa Pasca-Orde Baru*, ed. Ariel Heryanto (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2012), 30.
- ¹⁶ Weintraub, "The Sound," 177.
- ¹⁷ Weintraub, "The Sound," 177.
- ¹⁸ Weintraub, "The Sound," 177-178.
- ¹⁹ Weintraub, "The Sound," 181.
- ²⁰ Bettina David, "Seductive Pleasures, Eluding Subjectivities: Some Thoughts on Dangdut's Ambiguous Identity," in *Sonic Modernities in The Malay World*, ed. Bart Braendregt (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 249.
- ²¹ Andrew Weintraub, "Dance Drills, Faith Spills: Islam, Body Politics, and Popular Music in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *Popular Music* 27, no: 3 (2008): 367.
- ²² Weintraub, "Dance," 388.
- ²³ Weintraub, "Dance," 388.
- ²⁴ Abhiseka, 2003 in Weintraub, "Dance," 381.
- ²⁵ Decker, *Performing*, 2.
- ²⁶ Decker, *Performing*, 2.
- ²⁷ Adji, "Applying," 20.
- ²⁸ In this context, *kampung* is a common term used to describe poor neighbourhoods.
- ²⁹ Asep Syaifullah, "Via Vallen Sudah Ngamen di Jalanan Sejak SD," May 2, 2018, <https://hot.detik.com/celeb/d-4000354/via-vallen-sudah-ngamen-di-jalanan-sejak-sd>.
- ³⁰ Max Richter, *Musical Worlds in Yogyakarta* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 34.
- ³¹ Via enjoys numerous publications and videos on this subject. Most comments would praise her as a humble star e.g. "Mbak jenengan pun artis tetep mboten sombong, gelem akur karo Anak jalanan" (Sis, you are a famous artist but you are not arrogant, you are willing to get along with street children) by Ahmad Fadli in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVC12Cp4lhI>.
- ³² Yazir Farouk and Puput Pandansari, "Miris, Via Vallen Pernah Dibayar Rp 20 Ribu Sekali Manggung," October 27, 2017, <https://www.suara.com/entertainment/2017/10/27/155351/miris-via-vallen-pernah-dibayar-rp20-ribu-sekali-manggung>.
- ³³ Erina Wardoyo, "Ini alasan Via Vallen digandrungi pecinta dangdut tanah air," October 6, 2017, <https://www.idntimes.com/hype/entertainment/erina-wardoyo/alasan-kita-suka-via-vallen-1/6>.
- ³⁴ It is unknown whether Via has chosen *dangdut koplo* as her genre by herself or following the genre of SERA.
- ³⁵ This is a record label that handles pop artist such as *Dadali* and *Papinka*.
- ³⁶ Ascada Music Indonesia, <http://ascadamusik.com>
- ³⁷ Ascadamusik, "Via Vallen - Bojo Galak (Official Music Video)," March 2, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQUp3_rDBE.
- ³⁸ Gogor Subyakto, "Bukan Goyangan, Via Vallen Ingin Dikenal Sebagai Pedangdut Jawa," October 1, 2017, <https://www.kapanlagi.com/dangdut/bukan-goyangan-via-vallen-ingin-dikenal-sebagai-pedangdut-jawa-efea47.html>.
- ³⁹ Subyakto, "Bukan," 2017.
- ⁴⁰ Subyakto, "Bukan," 2017.
- ⁴¹ Syaifullah, "Via," 2018.
- ⁴² Emme Maguire analyses video blogger Jenna Marbles in these terms in "Self-branding, Hotness, and Girlhood in The Video Blogs of Jenna Marbles," *Biography* 38, no. 1 (2015): 82.
- ⁴³ Hurek, "Via," 2017.
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- ⁴⁶ Ascadamusik, "Via Vallen - Selingkuh (Official Music Video)," January 27, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KvXXXBqfiQ>.

- ⁴⁷ Ascadamusik, "Via Vallen – Secawan Madu (Official Music Video)," February 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmsxwy8czz8>.
- ⁴⁸ Ascadamusik, "Via Vallen – Sayang," 2017.
- ⁴⁹ Lani Diana Wijaya and Mitra Tarigan, "Bens Leo: Musik dangdut tak lagi musik pinggiran," November 14, 2017, <https://gaya.tempo.co/read/1033426/bens-leo-musik-dangdut-tak-lagi-musik-pinggiran>.
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- ⁵² Dhefa Mauren Roos Mary, "Kenakan baju karya Ivan Gunawan jadi dambaan Siti Badriah sejak lama," October 11, 2018, <https://www.kapanlagi.com/dangdut/kenakan-baju-karya-ivan-gunawan-jadi-dambaan-siti-badriah-sejak-lama-62e6db.html>.
- ⁵³ Evi Elvira, "Cita Citata bangga pakai kostum Ivan Gunawan," December 11, 2014, <https://lifestyle.okezone.com/read/2014/12/11/194/1078121/cita-citata-bangga-pakai-kostum-ivan-gunawan>.
- ⁵⁴ Adji, "Applying," 27.
- ⁵⁵ Decker, "Performing," 13-14.
- ⁵⁶ Decker, "Performing," 14.
- ⁵⁷ Female Dangdut Most Popular Singer from Indonesia Dangdut Awards 2017, Favourite Musician in Insert 2018 and many others.
- ⁵⁸ Ascadamusik, "Via Vallen – Sayang," 2017.
- ⁵⁹ Edi Riyanto, "Celebrity and Komunitas: The Rise and Fall of the Jogja Hip Hop Foundation" (PhD diss., Monash University, 2017), 91.
- ⁶⁰ A limitless remix can be done by using computer hardware that costs less than \$500, supported by free software and seamless sources of sounds and music from the Internet. A little knowledge as an 'engineer' is sufficient because of the rapid development and wide availability of computer hardware and software. In the context of NDX, practicality and affordability have provided opportunities to produce hip hop remixes. The urge to remix also allows NDX to appropriate other texts and mix those texts with others. Facilitated by the relatively cheap Internet, NDX, which was located in Southern Yogyakarta, Central Java was able to find and appropriate many sound samples for Vallen, who was situated quite a distance away in East Java.
- ⁶¹ EllaLittleLuvlyAngel, "Hou Lai with Lyrics," August 22, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D-AudpA4-M>
- ⁶² Muhammad Andika Putra, "Riwayat Lagu 'Sayang': dari Jepang, Taiwan, hingga Via Vallen," March 22, 2018, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/hiburan/20180321200440-227-284863/riwayat-lagu-sayang-dari-jepang-taiwan-hingga-via-vallen>.
- ⁶³ Via Vallen Official, "Via Vallen – Senorita Koplo Cover Version (Shawn Mendes feat Camila Cabello)," July 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x33jR2muos4>.
- ⁶⁴ Via Vallen Official, "Despacito – Luis fonsi feat justin bieber Dangdut Koplo – Cover by Via Vallen (ONE TAKE VOCALS)," July 8, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9ff0myaA8w>.
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- ⁶⁶ Waspada Bravo, "LAGU VIA VALLEN FULL ALBUM 2020," March 12, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsZOG0IXZaM>; Pustaka Musik, "VIA VALLEN VERSI DJ REMIX BREATBEAT 2018," June 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLTGFjCVtIE>.
- ⁶⁷ Defa Production, "Bojo Galak – Via Vallen OM.SERA Live Gor Purbalingga," September 13, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vh1AFHkvJ3E>; Eko gamevideography, "VIA VALLEN – KORBAN JANJI – NEW MONATA – RAMAYANA AUDIO," March 7, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVqjDP7UIGQ>.
- ⁶⁸ Netmediatama, "Via," 2018.
- ⁶⁹ Indosiar, "Konser Luar Biasa: Didi Kempot dan Via Vallen – Suket Teki," January 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohafmIAYj4>.
- ⁷⁰ Via Vallen's official YouTube channel link is https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaHVygCd_tAPmvxVZ85DbDw. She joined YouTube on December 21, 2015 and by August 12, 2020 her channel reached 325,686,256 viewers and 2,690,000 subscribers.
- ⁷¹ Via Vallen Official, "Via Vallen – Senorita," 2019.

⁷² Via Vallen Official, "Via Vallen Nonton semi final PIALA DUNIA di Russia #vLog," July 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv98txQr9k0>.

⁷³ Via Vallen Official, "Buka kado versi CEPAT ala Via Vallen," October 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tgG65ignSw>.

⁷⁴ Yuheng Hu, Lydia Manikonda, and Subbarao Kambhampati, "What we Instagram: a first analysis of Instagram photo content and user types," (presentation, the Eighth International AAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Palo Alto, CA, June 1-4, 2014), <https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/view/8118/8087>.

⁷⁵ Rendani Liu and Ayoung Suh, "Self-branding on social media: an analysis of style blogger on Instagram," *Procedia Computer Science* 124 (2017): 12-20.

⁷⁶ Hurek, "Via," 2017.

⁷⁷ Steve Jones, "Music and The Internet," *Popular Music* 19, no. 2 (2000): 217.

⁷⁸ Via Vallen Official, "Via Vallen – Despacito," 2017.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Opera Swara Genta, "Via Vallen (OM Sera) – Ditinggal Rabi – Official Lyric Video," 2017.

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