

Digital Historical Communication Archaeology Framework for Youth Interpretation of Java War Heritage in Indonesia

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Abstract

Historical heritage institutions struggle to communicate complex historical meanings in digital environments. Existing digital heritage practices often prioritize technological presentation and accessibility, while giving limited attention to relationships among artifacts, curatorial authority, historical discourse, and audience interpretation. This study develops the Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA) Framework to examine how Java War heritage meanings are produced, mediated, and negotiated through interactions among heritage objects, institutions, digital media, and youth audiences in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative Research and Development (R&D) approach within a constructivist-critical paradigm, this study investigates three heritage institutions in Yogyakarta through artifact observation, document analysis, digital content analysis, semi-structured interviews, expert validation, and limited model testing. Data were collected from three museum managers, four history teachers, and twenty-nine young participants. The findings reveal six interconnected dimensions of DHCA: materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation. This study contributes a communication-centered framework that integrates heritage studies, digital remediation, and participatory interpretation. DHCA provides an analytical perspective for understanding the negotiation of historical meaning while recognizing the need for further longitudinal validation across different heritage contexts.

Keywords *Digital heritage, Historical communication, Java War heritage, Youth participation, Heritage interpretation*

INTRODUCTION

Historical communication is understood not only as information transmission but also as a process of producing, negotiating, and reconstructing meaning. Carey (2009) describes communication as a symbolic practice that creates shared realities, while Hall (1997) highlights the role of representation in constructing meaning. Smith (2006) argues that heritage is produced through social practices and authorized discourse. In digital contexts, meaning is shaped by platforms, representations, and audiences. Digital systems influence the circulation of cultural information (Van Dijck, 2013), and digital heritage experiences emerge through interactions among technology, identity, symbolism, and public engagement (Wang & Meng, 2024).

Building on this theoretical debate, this study aims to develop the Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA) Model as a communication-centered framework for examining how historical meanings of the Java War are produced, mediated, and interpreted through interactions among artifacts, heritage institutions, digital media, and young audiences. Rather than assuming that digital technology automatically improves historical understanding, this

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research investigates the relationships among material heritage, curatorial representation, digital mediation, discourse formation, and audience interpretation. The study focuses on how historical meanings are constructed across different communication environments and how young audiences participate in interpreting historical narratives.

Despite growing interest in digital heritage, several research gaps remain. Previous studies have often emphasized technological transformation, preservation, and accessibility, while the interplay among artifacts, institutional authority, digital mediation, and audience meaning-making remains underexplored. Digital heritage studies also tend to examine museums and audiences separately, limiting understanding of how institutional narratives interact with public interpretation. Furthermore, youth participation is often treated as a target of historical communication rather than as active interpreters who negotiate and reconstruct meanings. This research contributes by proposing DHCA as a preliminary analytical framework that connects heritage communication, critical heritage studies, digital remediation, and youth interpretation through an empirical examination of Java War heritage communication.

The urgency of this research stems from how younger generations encounter historical information. Contemporary youth increasingly access history through digital platforms, social media, and visual content rather than solely through formal educational institutions. However, [Wineburg \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that access to digital historical information does not automatically produce historical understanding because users still require contextual reasoning, source evaluation, and critical interpretation. This reality creates challenges for museums and educational institutions in communicating complex historical narratives through digital environments.

The Java War (1825–1830) offers an important case for examining these challenges because it encompasses complex narratives about colonial power, identity, religion, social conflict, and collective memory. [Carey \(2008\)](#) explains that the Java War cannot be reduced to a military conflict but must be understood within broader political and social transformations in nineteenth-century Java. In Yogyakarta, this historical narrative is communicated through various forms, including museum collections, dioramas, manuscripts, and digital platforms. However, each medium involves different processes of selection, contextualization, and interpretation, creating opportunities for both deeper understanding and the simplification of historical meaning.

This study employs a qualitative Research and Development (R&D) approach within a constructivist-critical paradigm. Data were collected through artifact observation, document analysis, digital content analysis, and semi-structured interviews with museum managers, history teachers, and young participants, followed by expert validation and limited model testing. The analytical process uses thematic analysis to identify relationships among materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation.

This paper consists of five sections. The first presents the theoretical debate, research gaps, and objectives. The second outlines the DHCA theoretical foundation, including communication, heritage authority, and digital mediation. The third explains the methodology, and the fourth presents findings on the construction of historical meaning of the Java War and DHCA development. The final section discusses contributions, implications, limitations, and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Archaeology of Knowledge to Archaeology of Communication

Historical communication studies have shifted from viewing history as a fixed record of past events to understanding it as a process of constructing meaning. [Carey \(2009\)](#) argues that communication functions as a cultural practice through which societies create shared meanings rather than merely transferring information. This perspective is reinforced by [Hall \(1997\)](#), who

explains that representation does not simply reflect reality but actively constructs meaning through signs, language, and cultural classification. However, while Carey emphasizes communication as a social process and Hall focuses on representational systems, both perspectives offer limited explanation of how institutional authority determines which historical meanings become dominant. [Foucault's \(1972\)](#) archaeology of knowledge addresses this limitation by examining how knowledge is shaped through discourse formations, institutional structures, and systems of classification. Nevertheless, Foucault primarily explains the production of knowledge rather than the circulation, mediation, and interpretation of historical meanings among audiences. Therefore, this study connects the archaeology of knowledge with communication theory by proposing that historical meanings should be examined through the relationships among artifacts, institutions, media, and audiences.

The connection between knowledge production and communication is increasingly relevant in digital heritage environments. Unlike traditional heritage communication, which often positions museums as primary authorities, digital platforms introduce new actors and spaces where historical meanings are reproduced and negotiated. Digital heritage environments increasingly transform museums from repositories of collections into participatory communication spaces where users engage with historical materials through multiple digital experiences ([Giannini & Bowen, 2022](#)). [Van Dijck \(2013\)](#) explains that digital platforms influence how cultural information becomes visible, distributed, and consumed through technological and social mechanisms. Similarly, [Parry \(2019\)](#) argues that digital transformation has shifted museums from static repositories to communication environments where collections interact with technologies and users. However, digital accessibility does not automatically generate historical understanding. [Wineburg \(2018\)](#) emphasizes that historical thinking requires contextual reasoning, source evaluation, and critical interpretation. Therefore, digital heritage communication should not only examine technological capabilities but also analyze how technology mediates relationships among historical evidence, institutional narratives, and audience interpretation.

Heritage Authority, Critical Heritage Studies, and Audience Participation

Heritage studies offer a critical perspective on how historical meanings are selected and legitimized. [Smith \(2006\)](#) argues that heritage is not simply inherited from the past but produced through social practices and authorized heritage discourse, in which institutions influence which narratives, objects, and memories receive recognition. Recent heritage studies emphasize that heritage-making involves negotiation between institutional authority and community voices, and that participation may challenge established narratives ([Harrison et al., 2020](#)). This perspective contrasts with traditional museum approaches that often present heritage collections as neutral representations of historical reality. While institutional authority remains necessary to maintain historical accuracy and provenance, critical heritage studies highlight that authority is constructed through selection, classification, and interpretation. In this context, museums are not only preservation institutions but also communication actors that shape public understanding of history.

Contemporary heritage research increasingly challenges the separation between institutional authority and audience interpretation. [Falk and Dierking \(2016\)](#) explain that visitors construct meaning through interactions among personal experiences, social contexts, and museum environments. This approach differs from authorized heritage discourse by positioning audiences as active meaning-makers rather than passive recipients. Recent studies further support this perspective by emphasizing youth participation in heritage management. [Zhang et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland \(2021\)](#) argue that youth participation requires attention to purpose, position, perspective, and power relations, while [Cauvin and Dalal \(2025\)](#) emphasize that public

history requires broader participation and negotiation of historical authority. However, audience participation does not mean replacing expert authority; rather, it requires balancing historical evidence, institutional responsibility, and public interpretation. Therefore, DHCA positions audience participation as a process of meaning negotiation within relationships among heritage institutions, digital environments, and young audiences.

Digital Remediation and the Development of DHCA Framework

Digital heritage research shows that technological transformation affects not only access to historical materials but also the process by which meanings are produced. [Bolter and Grusin \(2000\)](#) define remediation as the process by which new media reshape previous forms of representation rather than simply reproduce them. In museum contexts, digital platforms can expand access to collections but may also transform the relationships between artifacts and audiences. Digital interpretation requires integrating technological design with cultural context because digital experiences influence how visitors construct relationships with heritage objects ([Mortara et al., 2020](#)). [Wang and Meng \(2024\)](#) demonstrate that digital museum experiences emerge from interactions among technological agency, cultural symbolism, visitor identity, and public engagement. However, their perspective primarily emphasizes visitor experience, whereas critical heritage approaches emphasize questions of authority, representation, and power. Integrating these perspectives suggests that digital heritage communication requires analysis beyond technological effectiveness.

Drawing on these theoretical discussions, DHCA is positioned as a communication-centered framework that connects materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation. Unlike technology-oriented digital heritage models that primarily emphasize preservation and accessibility, DHCA focuses on how historical meanings are constructed, mediated, and negotiated among multiple actors. The framework also differs from purely institutional heritage approaches by recognizing audiences as participants in interpretation. Nevertheless, because the present study relies on qualitative and cross-sectional evidence, DHCA should be understood as a preliminary framework that requires further validation through comparative and longitudinal studies. This positioning responds to the need for a balanced understanding of the relationship between theoretical development and empirical evidence in digital heritage communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative Research and Development (R&D) approach within a constructivist-critical paradigm. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on understanding how historical meanings are constructed, mediated, and interpreted within specific cultural and social contexts rather than measuring causal relationships between variables ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). The constructivist perspective recognizes that meanings are developed through interactions among individuals, experiences, and social environments, while the critical perspective enables examination of how historical narratives are selected, represented, and communicated through institutional and digital structures ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2018](#)).

The R&D approach was used to develop the Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA) Model through empirical investigation, theoretical integration, expert validation, and limited user testing. The DHCA dimensions, consisting of materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation, were initially developed from theoretical perspectives on communication, heritage studies, representation, and digital mediation. These dimensions were then examined and refined using empirical findings from artifacts, institutional narratives, digital content, and audience interpretations. Therefore, DHCA is

positioned as an empirically informed preliminary framework rather than a fixed model established before data collection.

The research was conducted at three heritage institutions in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Museum Benteng Vredeburg Yogyakarta, Museum Monumen Pangeran Diponegoro Sasana Wiratama, and Museum Sonobudoyo Yogyakarta. These sites were selected through purposive sampling because they represent different forms of Java War heritage communication, including artifact exhibitions, historical interpretation, memorial spaces, manuscript resources, and digital heritage presentations ([Patton, 2015](#)).

The participants consisted of 36 individuals selected through purposive sampling, including three museum managers, four history teachers, and twenty-nine young participants, comprising students and university students. Museum managers provided information on curatorial practices, artifact representation, and institutional narratives. History teachers contributed perspectives on historical interpretation and educational communication. Meanwhile, young participants provided insights into digital engagement and the interpretation of Java War historical narratives.

Data were collected through artifact observation, document analysis, digital content analysis, semi-structured interviews, expert validation, and limited user testing. Artifact observation examined material characteristics, provenance information, exhibition arrangements, and interpretive strategies related to Java War heritage. Document analysis focused on exhibition texts, institutional narratives, historical descriptions, and supporting materials. Digital content analysis examined Java War-related materials published on institutional websites and social media platforms to identify patterns of digital representation and historical mediation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with museum managers, history teachers, and young participants to explore how historical meanings were produced, communicated, and interpreted. The interviews focused on artifact interpretation, institutional narratives, digital experiences, and the relationship between official historical explanations and audience understanding. Expert validation involved communication and history experts who evaluated the DHCA framework's conceptual consistency, historical relevance, and applicability. Limited user testing was conducted to assess the clarity and usability of the developed model.

Data were analyzed using [Braun and Clarke's \(2021\)](#) thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and meanings in the qualitative data. The analysis process included data familiarization, initial coding, development of thematic categories, review of themes, and interpretation of relationships among DHCA dimensions.

The coding process involved four coders to strengthen analytical consistency and reduce individual interpretation bias. Each coder reviewed relevant transcripts, observation notes, documents, and digital materials to identify patterns related to materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation. Differences in interpretation were discussed through collaborative review until agreement was reached on coding categories and thematic boundaries.

Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation, comparing observations, documents, interviews, and digital content analysis ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2018](#)). This approach identified both consistencies and differences across museum narratives, educational perspectives, and youth interpretations. Expert validation and user testing were used to refine the DHCA framework based on conceptual feedback and empirical applicability.

Because this study employed a qualitative cross-sectional design, the iterative dimension of DHCA is interpreted as a potential process of meaning negotiation rather than as empirical evidence of long-term transformation. Further longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether audience interpretations influence future heritage representations and institutional

communication practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Empirical Findings: Historical Meaning Construction through Heritage Communication

This study demonstrates that the historical meanings of Java War are constructed through interactions among artifacts, heritage institutions, digital media, and audience interpretation. The analysis identified six interconnected dimensions of Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA): materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation. These dimensions emerged from observations of artifacts, document analysis, digital content analysis, and interviews with museum managers, history teachers, and young participants.

The empirical findings indicate that artifacts do not convey historical meaning on their own. Material objects gain significance through provenance information, exhibition arrangement, and interpretive narratives. Similarly, digital content expands access to historical resources but requires contextual explanation to prevent oversimplified interpretations. The relationship among these findings is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Empirical Findings Across DHCA Dimensions

DHCA Dimension	Data Source	Empirical Finding	Interpretation
Materiality	Artifact observation	Objects function as historical evidence within exhibitions	Meaning emerges through contextual interpretation
Provenance	Documents and interviews	Historical origin strengthens artifact significance	Authenticity supports historical understanding
Curatorial Representation	Museum observation and manager interviews	Institutions organize narratives through selection and presentation	Museum authority influences historical framing
Medium	Digital content analysis	Digital platforms increase accessibility	Digital formats transform communication contexts
Discourse	Teacher and institutional interviews	Historical narratives emphasize selected values and actors	Representation involves selection and interpretation
Audience Participation	Youth interviews	Young audiences compare museum and digital sources	Meaning is negotiated through interpretation

The findings also reveal differences between institutional narratives and youth interpretations. Museum narratives generally emphasize historical continuity, national significance, and established interpretations of the Java War. By contrast, young participants tend to connect historical materials to personal identity, digital experiences, and contemporary relevance. These differences demonstrate that audiences are not passive recipients but active interpreters of heritage communication.

Table 2. Comparison Between Institutional Narrative and Youth Interpretation

Aspect	Institutional Narrative	Youth Interpretation

Historical Figure	Pangeran Diponegoro represented within national historical narrative	Interpreted as symbol of courage, identity, and personal inspiration
Artifact Meaning	Evidence of historical events	Visual connection between past and present
Digital Media	Extension of museum communication	Initial source for exploration and comparison

These findings indicate that historical meaning emerges through interaction rather than from a single authoritative source. Figure 1 illustrates the DHCA process.

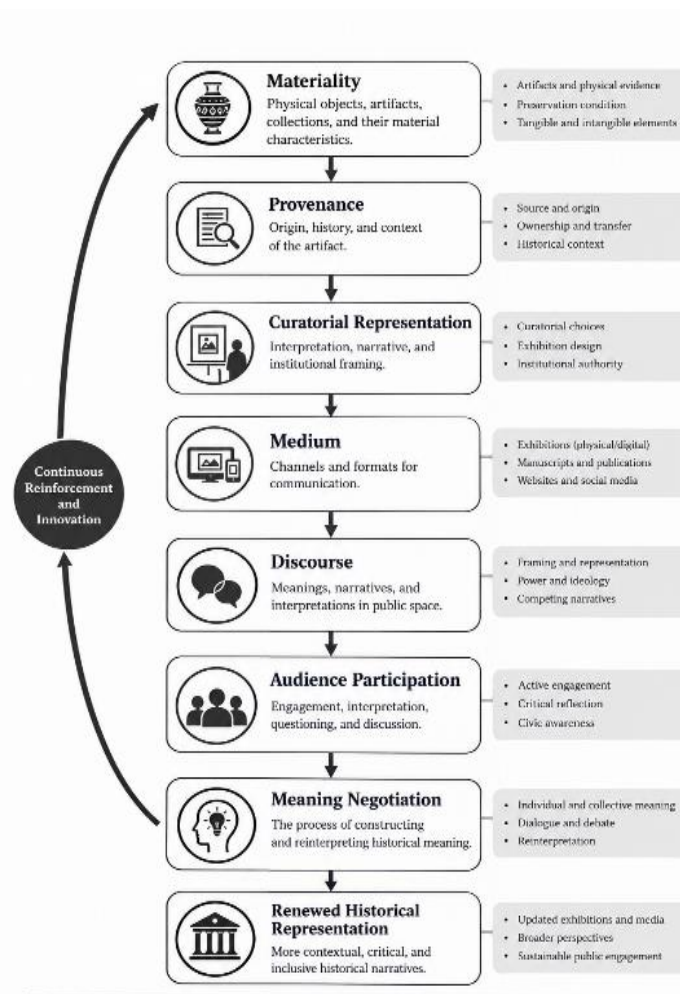


Figure 1. The Digital Historical Communication Archaeology Model (DHCA Model)

Figure 1. Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA) Meaning Negotiation Framework

The DHCA model shows that historical meaning is not constructed through a linear communication process. Instead, it emerges from interconnected relationships among historical artifacts, institutional interpretation, digital mediation, and audience participation. The model indicates that each dimension influences the others, creating a process of continuous negotiation of meaning between heritage authority and public interpretation.

Discussion: DHCA as a Potential Iterative Communication Framework

The findings support Carey's (2009) argument that communication functions as a cultural

process of constructing meaning rather than as simple information transmission. The interpretation of Java War heritage shows that artifacts become meaningful through relationships among objects, institutional narratives, and audiences. This finding aligns with [Hall's \(1997\)](#) representation theory, which holds that meaning is produced through systems of signs and cultural interpretation. However, unlike approaches that view representation primarily as institutional construction, the present study shows that audiences also participate in reconstructing historical meanings.

The findings also align with [Foucault's \(1972\)](#) archaeology of knowledge by showing that historical narratives are shaped by institutional practices, classification, and discourse formation. Museum institutions exercise authority through collection management, exhibition design, and historical explanation. However, the youth interpretation findings demonstrate that this authority is not absolute, as audiences negotiate meanings through educational experiences and digital environments. This extends Foucault's perspective by emphasizing communication processes after knowledge production, in which meanings continue to circulate and transform.

This finding relates to [Smith's \(2006\)](#) concept of authorized heritage discourse, which explains how heritage institutions influence which narratives become legitimate. However, the present study contrasts with a purely institution-centered understanding by showing that digital environments create additional spaces for interpretation. The relationship between museum narratives and youth perspectives reveals a negotiation between institutional authority and audience participation ([Niklasson & Högborg, 2021](#)). Therefore, DHCA does not reject heritage authority but examines how authority interacts with public interpretation.

The findings further support [Falk and Dierking's \(2016\)](#) argument that visitors construct meaning through interactions among personal experiences, social contexts, and museum environments. However, DHCA extends this perspective by incorporating digital environments as additional spaces for historical interpretation. Young participants in this study used digital media not only to access information but also to compare sources and develop personal interpretations. This finding aligns with [Wineburg's \(2018\)](#) argument that digital access alone does not guarantee historical understanding because critical contextualization remains necessary.

Regarding digital transformation, the findings align with [Bolter and Grusin's \(2000\)](#) concept of remediation, which holds that new media reshape earlier forms of representation rather than simply reproduce them. Digital platforms change how historical materials are accessed, circulated, and interpreted. This perspective is supported by [Van Dijck \(2013\)](#) and [Carrozzino and Bergamasco \(2022\)](#), who argue that digital platforms influence cultural information through technological structures and user interactions. Therefore, DHCA differs from technology-centered approaches because it positions digital media within a broader communication relationship involving artifacts, institutions, discourse, and audiences.

Nevertheless, the iterative dimension of DHCA requires careful interpretation. The present study provides evidence of interaction and negotiation among heritage actors but does not demonstrate long-term transformation of institutional narratives. Therefore, DHCA should be understood as a framework that enables iterative meaning negotiation rather than an empirically proven longitudinal process. Future studies should examine whether youth interpretations influence future museum representations across different historical contexts.

Overall, DHCA contributes by integrating material heritage, curatorial authority, digital mediation, discourse, and audience participation into a communication-centered framework. Unlike previous approaches that examine preservation, technology, or visitor experience in isolation, DHCA explains how historical meanings develop through relationships among multiple actors and communication environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This study developed the Digital Historical Communication Archaeology (DHCA) Model as a preliminary framework for understanding how historical meanings are constructed, mediated, and negotiated in heritage communication environments. The findings show that Java War heritage interpretation is not produced solely by artifacts or institutional narratives but emerges from interactions among materiality, provenance, curatorial representation, medium, discourse, and audience participation. By integrating heritage studies, communication theory, and perspectives on digital mediation, DHCA offers a communication-centered approach that explains the relationship between heritage authority and audience interpretation.

Theoretically, this study extends previous heritage communication approaches that primarily emphasize preservation, institutional representation, or technological accessibility. DHCA highlights that digital heritage communication involves continuous negotiation among historical evidence, institutional narratives, digital platforms, and public interpretations. However, the iterative dimension of DHCA should be understood as a potential process of meaning negotiation rather than an empirically confirmed long-term transformation, given this study's qualitative cross-sectional design. Therefore, further longitudinal research is required to examine how audience interpretations may influence future heritage representations and institutional communication practices.

Practically, the findings suggest that heritage institutions should develop digital strategies that integrate artifact information, historical context, and audience engagement rather than focusing solely on digital visibility. Museums can use digital platforms as pathways that connect online exploration, physical visits, and deeper historical interpretation. In addition, educational institutions may consider collaborative approaches involving museums, teachers, and young audiences to strengthen critical historical understanding.

This study is limited by its focus on Java War heritage at selected institutions in Yogyakarta, which may constrain broader generalization across diverse historical contexts. Future research should apply DHCA to other heritage sites, compare across cultural contexts, and investigate whether participatory digital communication can influence institutional narratives over time. Through these developments, DHCA may provide a foundation for further research on the relationship among heritage, communication, technology, and public meaning-making.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, the qualitative cross-sectional design limits the ability to demonstrate long-term, iterative changes in heritage communication; therefore, DHCA may represent a process of meaning negotiation that requires longitudinal validation. Second, the study focuses on selected Java War heritage institutions in Yogyakarta, limiting generalizability to other heritage contexts. Third, qualitative interpretation may involve researcher positionality, although triangulation and multiple coders were used to strengthen analytical consistency. Future studies should apply comparative and longitudinal approaches to further validate DHCA across different historical and digital heritage environments.

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