

The Sociology of Ska Music in Grisness Culture: Expression, Creation, and Appreciation in Arts Education

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Abstract:

The development of popular music, particularly the ska genre, has given rise to unique and contextual expressions of youth culture. One notable phenomenon is Grisness Culture, a ska band founded by a group of university friends in Semarang in 2015, which has since evolved into an active player in the local music ecosystem. This study aims to analyze the expression, creation, and appreciation of Grisness Culture's music, while linking it to Pierre Bourdieu's sociological concepts of habitus, capital, and field. The research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design through observation, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that although Grisness Culture is structured as a band, it functions as a cultural agent within the ska music field, shaped by a habitus rooted in social and campus cultural backgrounds. They mobilize social, cultural, and symbolic capital to strengthen their position in both the local and national music arenas. Their artistic practices reflect the dimensions of expression, creation, and appreciation, while simultaneously fostering character values such as cooperation, creativity, responsibility, and courage. This study recommends that formal arts education should be more open to community-based practices in order to build contextual, inclusive, and transformative learning.

Keywords: Grisness Culture, ska music, sociology of musik, arts education

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INTRODUCTION

Music is an integral part of human life. It serves not only as entertainment but also as a medium to express emotions, identity, and social values. In Indonesia, popular music has undergone dynamic developments from the colonial era to the current age of digital globalization.

One genre that is particularly interesting to examine from a sociological perspective is ska music, which originated in Jamaica in the 1960s. This genre not only presents fast rhythms and distinctive brass instruments but also serves as a channel of expression for young people seeking to voice social concerns and foster community solidarity.

Amid the rise of digital music genres and the entertainment industry, the ska band Grisness Culture emerged as an alternative community. This alternative community revitalizes ska music with a strong local character, blending ska's musical elements with the collective spirit of community. Grisness Culture is a ska band from Semarang, established in 2015. It began with a group of university friends who initially played music for fun, but gradually gained wider recognition and eventually released an album. The band has engaged in various activities, such as performing on ska community stages in several cities, promoting their work through radio, and even appearing on local and national television. Despite its rapid growth, Grisness Culture has consistently preserved its collective spirit and community values, making it an integral part of community-based music practices.

On the other hand, arts education still faces significant challenges in responding to the diversity of community music practices such as Grisness Culture. Arts curricula often focus on formal and academic approaches that provide limited space for the expression of alternative communities. As a result, many forms of art rooted in local cultural traditions do not receive proper recognition within the education system. This creates a gap between the world of education and everyday life.

The phenomenon described above is closely related to the growing awareness among younger generations of cultural identity amid the currents of globalization and digitalization. Communities such as Grisness Culture provide a concrete example of how music can serve as a medium for expression, a means to strengthen solidarity, and a space for inclusive appreciation. However, there has been relatively little scholarly research that deeply connects such community music practices with the development of arts education in Indonesia.

Several previous studies have examined music as a space for social identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2018) cultural practice in arts education (Hess, 2019), and the significance of community arts in fostering students' critical participation (Wright, 2019). However, there has been little research specifically addressing ska music communities in Indonesia, such as Grisness Culture, in relation to arts education and through the lens of music sociology as proposed by Bourdieu. This represents the research gap that this study seeks to address.

The urgency of this research lies in the need to develop a more comprehensive understanding of community music practices as relevant, contextual, and transformative learning resources. By exploring the activities of expression, creation, and appreciation within Grisness Culture, this study provides a reflection for the field of education to design arts learning that is more dynamic and rooted in everyday life.

Theoretically, this study employs Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of music approach, particularly his concepts of habitus, capital, and field (Soderman, J., Burnard, P., & Trulsson, 2015). Habitus refers to the musical habits and styles shaped by social backgrounds. Capital encompasses the resources possessed by the community, including social capital (networks), cultural capital (knowledge), symbolic capital (reputation), and economic capital. Meanwhile, the field represents the arena in which the music world becomes the space of competition for Grisness Culture.

The novelty of this study lies in its perspective of viewing community music—often considered marginal or alternative—as a valuable source of knowledge in arts education. Grisness Culture is not merely producing music for entertainment, but also conveying messages, fostering togetherness, and creating flexible spaces for learning. This offers a new perspective on how the arts can be learned not only within the classroom but also in real-life contexts.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the forms of expression, processes of creation, and patterns of appreciation within the community music practices of Grisness Culture. This analysis is conducted through Bourdieu's sociology of music framework to reveal how

musical habitus, the distribution of capital, and struggles within the musical field shape the community's socio-cultural dynamics. Furthermore, this study aims to examine the implications of these practices for the development of more inclusive and community-based arts education.

Thus, the findings of this research are expected not only to provide new insights for the academic sphere but also to offer practical inspiration for teachers, lecturers, and arts curriculum developers. Community-based music groups such as Grisness Culture can serve as concrete examples of how arts education can become more open, contextual, and aligned with the needs of today's younger generation.

METHODS

This research employs an interdisciplinary approach that combines music sociology, arts education, and Pierre Bourdieu's social theory as a lens to examine how the practices of expression, creation, and appreciation within Grisness Culture evolve and can be understood as a complex phenomenon in arts education. A qualitative analytical method is applied to provide detailed and in-depth explanations of the artistic practices carried out by Grisness Culture.

The research design employed in this study is a case study, with Grisness Culture from Semarang as the research subject. A case study was chosen to obtain detailed and comprehensive information on a single object of study. In this research, Grisness Culture is positioned as a representation of community music practices that are unique and relevant within the context of music sociology and arts education.

The research was conducted across various activity spaces of Grisness Culture, including rehearsal venues, performance stages, recording studios, ska music community gatherings, promotional platforms, and social media. The researcher also participated in several activities of Grisness Culture members, such as discussions within the Semarang ska music community, to gain insights into how musical practices evolve through their daily routines.

Data collection was carried out using observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observation involved participating in Grisness Culture's activities to understand the interactions among members during their musical processes. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with the research subjects, namely all members of Grisness Culture, as well as several individuals involved in the production and promotion processes of the group. A semi-structured interview format was chosen to allow flexibility while maintaining focus, enabling the collection of more open and in-depth information. Finally, document analysis was conducted using photos, videos, song recordings, social media posts, and news or media articles. This documentation served to support the data obtained from observation and interviews while also providing a comprehensive picture of Grisness Culture's development over a specific period of time.

The collected data were analyzed thematically using Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field. The analysis focused on Grisness Culture's activities, including expression, creation, and appreciation, examined through the lens of arts education. To ensure data validity, the researcher employed source and method triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and document analysis to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the information obtained. Through this design and approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of Grisness Culture's musical practices and their implications for arts education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Grisness Culture represents a form of community music that grows from social roots. The name originated from the universities where its members studied—UPGRIS and UNNES—which, when combined, form "Grisness." The word Culture signifies the values and traditions that serve as a foundation for their artistic work. Grisness Culture was officially established in September 2015 by eight members who used their free time as a means of musical expression, creating works that eventually led to the release of an album and gaining recognition among the wider public. This

aligns with Denora (2016) view that community music can be understood as a “technology of emotion” that shapes everyday social experiences.

In this study, the practices of Grisness Culture are examined through Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework of habitus, capital, and field. The habitus of Grisness Culture members is shaped by their educational background, campus social interactions, and a supportive environment that serves as a learning space. Continuous learning activities that evolve into regular practices within Grisness Culture can be understood as habitus. Bourdieu explains that the concept of habitus is the result of the accumulation of individual and collective learning and socialization (Fashri, 2014: 93)

In terms of capital, Grisness Culture possesses several forms that support its development. First, cultural capital is reflected in the skills and abilities of its members. Their musical abilities, supported by formal music education that grants them diplomas and theoretical knowledge, represent a form of cultural capital owned by Grisness Culture. As explained by (Mutahir, 2011) cultural capital includes the totality of intellectual qualifications produced formally or inherited through family background, such as diplomas, acquired knowledge, cultural codes, speech styles, writing abilities, manners, and social interactions. In addition, Grisness Culture also holds economic capital in the form of financial resources and musical instruments, which serve as media for practice. According to Fashri (2014), economic capital encompasses means of production (such as machinery, land, and labor), material assets (including income and objects), and money.

Furthermore, social capital refers to the relationships maintained by Grisness Culture. In their musical practices, the group has engaged in promotional activities through various media outlets such as Suara Merdeka, Tribun Jateng, Dapur Lette, DCDC, Mave Magz, as well as radio and television. These networks have enabled Grisness Culture not only to survive but also to grow. As Huang (2019) explains, the meaning of social capital can be understood as the contacts, social networking and relationships an individual can be part of or operate.

Each form of capital is interconnected and collectively sustains the existence of Grisness Culture. The cultural capital they possess generates public trust, which in turn leads to frequent invitations to perform at various events, thereby producing financial resources as economic capital to further their development. This process also expands their networks and relationships, strengthening their social capital. These three forms of capital ultimately generate symbolic capital in the form of recognition within both local and national music arenas, achieved through media exposure, stage performances, and song production. This symbolic capital serves as a key resource in navigating the competitive world of music (Prior, 2018).

The musical field they engage in is not limited to local stages but also extends to social media, radio, and even national television. Within this field, Grisness Culture not only sustains its existence but also builds its bargaining power with other cultural actors. This supports Bourdieu’s theory that fields of action are sites of struggle where social agents strive for different forms of capital that give them a position and a place in the social structure (Costa, C., & Murphy, 2015)

The musical expression of Grisness Culture is evident in their energetic vocal style, the distinctive use of brass instruments, and the lyrical meanings embedded in their songs. Their ska music carries a romantic nuance, often narrating the love story of one of the members, with each song interconnected to form a complete album titled *Kembang Pujaan*. This form of expression not only reflects musical aesthetics but also opens a space for cultural participation. In line with Small’s perspective (as cited in De Villiers & Oellermann, 2024), community music enables “musicking,” which is inherently collaborative and participatory. The following is their first album, presented as a manifestation of Grisness Culture’s musical expression.



Figure 1. Grisness Culture Album
Source: Grisness Culture, 2025

In terms of creation, Grisness Culture undergoes a creative process that is closely tied to social interaction and reflection on the surrounding cultural context. This process draws upon the cultural and symbolic capital they already possess. Activities such as songwriting, stage arrangement, and digital distribution strategies serve as concrete manifestations of their creative capacity. Burnard, P., & Murphy, (2013) note that creative practices within music communities can foster the growth of social creativity.

Appreciation for Grisness Culture comes not only from local audiences attending their concerts but also from digital audiences through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify. These positive responses demonstrate that their works can transcend the boundaries of the community and reach a broader audience. Such appreciation is not merely a form of entertainment consumption but also a recognition of the cultural values and collective identity they represent (Hesmondhalgh, 2018).



Figure 2. YouTube Comments
Source: Asmarani, 2025

From an educational perspective, the practices of Grisness Culture have the potential to serve as a model for community-based arts learning. Their activities of expression, creation, and appreciation can be applied as a contextual approach within arts education. According to Hess (2019), arts education should not merely emphasize technical aspects but also foster social praxis, collective values, and an understanding of local cultural contexts.

Through their musical activities, Grisness Culture also cultivates character values such as cooperation, discipline, confidence in performing, a spirit of collaboration, and openness to criticism. These values are not taught formally but emerge naturally through ongoing musical

processes. This supports the view that community-based arts can holistically shape character.

Thus, Grisness Culture is not only significant within the realm of alternative music but also makes a meaningful contribution to arts education. They demonstrate that music communities can create a creative ecosystem that is both competitive and educational. Through a sociological analysis using Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital, and field, it becomes clear that community music practices are not merely about survival but can evolve into a model of arts education that is transformative and culturally relevant.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Grisness Culture, as a ska music community that emerged from campus friendships, has developed into a cultural actor that not only performs music as entertainment but also conveys values, identity, and social meaning. Grisness Culture also holds a significant position within the alternative music field, particularly in the city of Semarang. The trajectory of Grisness Culture's musical practices can be comprehensively understood through Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of music framework—namely habitus, capital, and field.

Habitus is shaped by social interactions, educational backgrounds, and musical experiences that began in childhood and continued through university, enabling the members of Grisness Culture to develop distinctive musical tastes that influence both their style and their creative output. Grisness Culture also possesses various forms of capital: cultural capital in the form of musical skills and intellectual knowledge; economic capital in the form of instruments and financial resources to support their practice; social capital through networks and relationships with various stakeholders that foster the group's growth; and symbolic capital in the form of recognition of Grisness Culture within the alternative music field.

The artistic practices of Grisness Culture reflect three key dimensions of arts education: expression, creation, and appreciation. They express themselves through lyrics, musical style, and authentic stage performances. In the process of creation, they employ collaborative strategies and make use of digital technology in line with contemporary developments. Public appreciation—both directly and through online media—demonstrates that their works are received and valued as part of the cultural identity of urban youth communities.

Furthermore, the artistic practices of Grisness Culture have a significant influence on shaping the character of each member. Their musical activities cultivate values such as friendliness and communication, curiosity, respect for others, discipline, responsibility for individual roles, creativity, and courage to perform. Thus, Grisness Culture is not merely a producer of art and entertainment but also serves as a non-formal educational space that contributes to the character formation of young generations in a contextual, collaborative, and participatory manner.

In the context of arts education, this study emphasizes the importance of positioning community music as an alternative learning resource, as it can provide students with authentic and relevant experiences connected to their everyday lives while still offering educational value. Through the lens of sociology and arts education, this research presents a new understanding that Grisness Culture, as a community-based music group, has the potential to serve as a bridge between the arts, society, and education in a holistic manner.

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