

## Production, Reproduction, and Commodification of Historical Knowledge in Medan in Digital Media and Commercial Practices

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the transformation of historical knowledge in Medan City through the interrelated dimensions of production, reproduction, and commodification within a contemporary context. The expansion of digital media and the creative economy has displaced the exclusive authority of academic institutions, enabling historical knowledge to circulate through non-academic actors, institutional platforms, and commercial practices. Employing a qualitative design, the research utilizes critical discourse analysis to investigate digital content on YouTube and Instagram, alongside commercial representations of Medan's history, with a focus on content creators, government-managed accounts, and the local culinary industry as primary empirical sites. The analytical framework integrates Michel Foucault's concept of power-knowledge relations and Pierre Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *cultural capital*, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of how authority and meaning are negotiated. The findings indicate a decentralisation of epistemic authority, wherein historical narratives are increasingly shaped by visually, participation, and popular mediation, thereby cultivating new forms of *habitus* in the public understanding of the past. This transformation reconfigures the epistemic structure of history, blurs the boundary between intellectual and popular history, and calls for sustained interdisciplinary engagement to safeguard scientific integrity.

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### INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the study of history has undergone a substantial transformation alongside the rapid development of digital technologies, social media, and the expansion of the creative economy. These shifts have reconfigured not only how historians write history but also how they produce, disseminate, and circulate it within the public sphere. Historical knowledge no longer remains confined to academic institutions; instead, diverse non-academic actors actively shape narratives about the past across multiple platforms. This condition requires scholars to understand history not merely as a scientific discipline but as a dynamic social and cultural practice embedded in broader societal processes (Bourdieu, 1991; Chaiklin, 2011; Daston, 2017). The redistribution of epistemic authority across actors and media reflects a wider transformation in how historical meaning is constructed and validated.

The emergence of public history further consolidates this transformation by positioning historical knowledge within the domain of public consumption through media such as film, digital platforms, historical tours, and cultural products. Practitioners present history not only as an analytical and chronological account but also as visual, narrative, and interactive content accessible to broader audiences. These developments blur the distinction between intellectual history, which prioritizes critical reflection, and popular history, which emphasizes engagement and accessibility (Giroux, 2004; Lacapra, 1980; Popkewitz, 1997; Swartz, 2003). Consequently, historical practice increasingly shifts from text-based and archive-centred modes toward visual and experiential forms of representation (Baer, 2001; Fendler, 2017; LeMahieu, 2011). This transition reorients historical knowledge toward communicative reach and cultural relevance without entirely displacing its analytical function.

Medan provides a particularly significant context for examining these dynamics, given its complex historical formation, shaped by colonial legacies and multi-ethnic interactions (Panjaitan et al., 2025; Sudarmadji et al., 2018; Tarigan et al., 2017). The city's layered historical experiences, reflected in both archival records and urban spaces such as the Kesawan area and the *Tugu Guru Patimpus*, create a dense field of symbolic resources. This complexity renders Medan especially susceptible to commodification, as its colonial infrastructure, plantation economy, and cultural



diversity provide material for selective curation for tourism and creative industries. Unlike cities with more homogeneous narratives, Medan's fragmented past enables competing representations to be simplified, visualised, and commercialised in digital and public domains. These representations remain inherently non-neutral, as they continuously reflect intersecting social, cultural, and political interests.

Digital media now dominate the production and dissemination of historical knowledge about Medan. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram enable various actors to construct and disseminate historical narratives in visually engaging, widely accessible formats. In this environment, historical content functions not only as a means of education but also as a medium for entertainment, identity formation, and economic value creation. Actors transform academic texts into fragmentary, visual, and participatory digital content, allowing audiences to engage with the past through mediated experiences. This transformation highlights the central role of digital environments in shaping contemporary historical consciousness. It also demonstrates how media logic influences both the form and reception of historical narratives.

The expansion of the creative economy further intensifies the commodification of historical knowledge. Actors increasingly mobilize historical narratives as symbolic resources in product branding, heritage tourism, and culture-based industries (Moore, [2014](#); Pletsan, [2022](#); Shakya & Vagnarelli, [2024](#)). In this context, history functions not only as a means of understanding the past but also as a strategic instrument for generating economic value and constructing market identity (Wertsch, [1997](#); Wood, [2009](#)). These practices transform the past into a commodity that can be produced, packaged, and exchanged within the logic of cultural capitalism. As a result, historical knowledge becomes embedded within systems that prioritize visibility, consumption, and differentiation. This condition underscores the growing interdependence between cultural meaning and economic production.

Despite these developments, studies of local history in Indonesia continue to focus predominantly on reconstructing events and chronological narratives. Scholars have not sufficiently examined how historical knowledge is produced, reproduced, and commodified within contemporary socio-cultural contexts. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how power relations, media dynamics, and economic interests shape public interpretations of the past. This perspective shifts analytical attention from the question of "what happened" to "how history is produced and used" in specific contexts. Situated within debates on public history and digital knowledge production, this study challenges the conventional separation between academic and popular history. It argues that both domains are deeply intertwined within contemporary digital and economic structures.

This article analyzes the transformation of historical knowledge in Medan City through the interconnected dimensions of production, reproduction, and commodification. It examines how actors beyond academic institutions actively produce historical knowledge, how digital media and popular culture reproduce it, and how the creative economy commodifies it within contemporary settings. This approach foregrounds not only historical content but also the processes, practices, and institutional dynamics that shape its circulation. By doing so, the study highlights the shifting locus of epistemic authority in historical knowledge production. It also demonstrates how historical narratives operate within broader socio-cultural and economic frameworks.

This research applies Michel Foucault's perspective to examine the relationship between knowledge and power in the production of history, while employing Pierre Bourdieu's framework to analyse how society reproduces and consumes history through *habitus* and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, [2004](#); Foucault, [2020](#)). These theoretical approaches enable a critical examination of history as both a discursive formation and a social practice embedded within structured power relations. The analysis reveals how historical meanings are constructed, negotiated, and legitimized across multiple arenas. It also emphasizes the role of media and social actors in shaping epistemic authority. This framework provides a robust foundation for interpreting the transformation of historical knowledge in contemporary contexts.

This article integrates intellectual history and popular history to develop a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding historical knowledge in the digital age. It contributes to interdisciplinary historical scholarship by demonstrating how digital circulation and commercial practices reshape the epistemic structure of history. The study encourages critical reflection on maintaining scientific integrity while expanding access to historical narratives. Medan serves not only as an empirical case but also as a representative site that illustrates how society produces, reproduces, and utilises history in everyday life. This perspective underscores the need for a balanced and critically informed engagement with the evolving forms of historical knowledge.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research design to examine the transformation of historical knowledge in Medan City across the interrelated dimensions of production, reproduction, and commodification. It focuses on analyzing meaning, representation, and discursive practices that cannot be quantified, thereby requiring interpretive engagement with texts, visuals, and their socio-cultural contexts. The study adopts critical discourse analysis as its primary framework to investigate how media platforms construct and represent historical knowledge (Carvalho, [2008](#)). It applies Foucault's perspective to interrogate the relationship between knowledge and power in shaping historical discourse (Foucault, [1980](#)). It uses Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital* to examine how individuals produce and consume historical meanings in everyday life (Bourdieu, [2004](#)). These theoretical approaches enable a critical analysis of history as both a discursive formation and a socially embedded practice.

Operationally, the study conducts discourse analysis at both textual and visual levels to uncover how meaning and power operate within digital historical representations. At the textual level, it analyzes linguistic elements such as word choice, narrative structure, thematic emphasis, and evaluative or persuasive language to identify how historical meaning is constructed. At the visual level, it examines imagery, camera framing, editing techniques, spatial representation, and symbolic elements that shape audience perception. The analysis interprets these components to reveal how power relations manifest through processes of selection, omission, and framing across digital platforms. This dual-level approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of how discourse operates within contemporary media environments. It also captures the dynamic interplay between narrative construction and visual representation.

This study draws on both primary and secondary data sources to support its analysis. Primary data consist of digital content representing historical narratives of Medan City, particularly from YouTube and Instagram, including videos from the Ghandy November channel, tourism-related content from the Indomaret channel, and Instagram reels produced by the Medan City *Bappeda* on the Kesawan area. The study also examines commercial representations of history, such as those presented by *Bolu Stim Menara* on its official website. Secondary data include academic literature, books, and scholarly articles relevant to history, public history, and cultural political economy (Charnysh et al., [2023](#)). The research collects data through documentation and digital observation (Chand, [2025](#)) over the period from January to December 2023 to capture contemporary dynamics in digital historical content. Researchers select and archive data based on criteria related to historical relevance, media context, and levels of public engagement.

The study analyzes data through three systematic stages: data reduction, categorization, and interpretation (Grimm, [1988](#)). It first identifies key themes emerging from the data, including forms of historical representation, the use of symbols and spatial references, and narrative structures. It then categorizes these findings into three analytical dimensions: production, reproduction, and commodification of historical knowledge. Finally, it interprets the data using the established theoretical framework to reveal the interplay between knowledge, power, and social practices embedded in historical representations. This structured process ensures analytical rigor and coherence. It also facilitates a deeper understanding of how historical knowledge circulates within contemporary digital environments.

The study ensures validity through source triangulation by comparing multiple data sources, including digital content, institutional narratives, and commercial representations (Natow, [2020](#)). Researchers conduct interpretation reflexively by considering the socio-cultural context surrounding the production and consumption of historical knowledge in Medan. The study acknowledges the inherently interpretive nature of discourse analysis and situates the researcher's perspective within a critical framework informed by historical and social theory. This reflexive stance recognizes that interpretation may shape the reading of textual and visual materials while maintaining analytical transparency. In terms of ethical considerations, the study relies exclusively on publicly accessible digital content and avoids the use of private data or direct interaction with individuals. It remains attentive to issues of representation, context, and platform dynamics to minimise the risk of misinterpretation or decontextualization.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This study demonstrates that historical knowledge in Medan is no longer produced exclusively within academic institutions but has undergone a substantial transformation through the active involvement of non-academic actors, digital media, and the creative economy. These shifts manifest through three interrelated processes—production,

reproduction, and commodification—which collectively form a new ecosystem of historical knowledge in the public sphere. The findings indicate that epistemic authority has become increasingly decentralized, enabling diverse actors to participate in shaping narratives about the past. This transformation redefines the boundaries of historical knowledge by integrating media logic, public engagement, and economic interests. It also reflects a broader shift in how society constructs, circulates, and consumes historical meaning.

### The Production of Historical Knowledge in the Digital Era

The contemporary production of historical knowledge in Medan reveals a significant shift in both actors and media. While academic historians and formal institutions such as universities and state archives previously dominated this domain, digital content creators now actively contribute through platforms such as YouTube. One notable example is the Ghandy November channel, which explores the history of ethnic migration in Medan, particularly the arrival of Javanese and Chinese communities. This shift illustrates how digital platforms function as alternative arenas for historical production and dissemination. It also highlights the growing influence of non-academic actors in shaping public historical discourse.



Figure 1. History of the Arrival of Javanese and Chinese People in Medan (*Sejarah Kedatangan Orang Jawa dan Tionghoa di Medan*)

Source: Ghandy November YouTube channel

The video shown in Figure 1 features Dirk A. Buiskool, a Dutch historian and long-term resident of Medan, who draws on direct engagement with descendants of prominent historical figures, such as Tjong A. Fie. First broadcast on July 4, 2022, the video has accumulated 4,239 views and 30 comments, indicating strong audience engagement. Buiskool constructs the narrative through his epistemic authority, which derives from access to social memory and genealogical networks rather than relying solely on archival documentation. This approach demonstrates that historical knowledge production increasingly integrates lived experience with documented sources. It also reflects a shift toward more relational and network-based forms of epistemic validation.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the presence of a Dutch historian as a central knowledge authority reveals the persistence of colonial epistemic structures, in which Western actors continue to occupy privileged positions in defining and legitimizing local historical narratives. This condition may reproduce asymmetrical power relations rooted in colonial history, particularly when authority emerges from access to elite networks and historically accumulated archival capital. At the same time, Buiskool's long-term engagement with local communities and his use of vernacular sources complicate these hierarchies by incorporating local memory into historical discourse. This dual position illustrates that

power–knowledge relations operate as dynamic and negotiated processes rather than fixed structures of domination. It also shows how colonial legacies are simultaneously reproduced and reconfigured within contemporary digital spaces.

This phenomenon demonstrates the democratisation of historical knowledge production, in which authority no longer resides exclusively within academic institutions but extends to diverse actors operating in digital environments. However, this openness also introduces challenges related to subjectivity and selectivity, as digital narratives often bypass rigorous academic verification. Historical production thus becomes a discursive practice shaped by ongoing negotiations among scientific authority, personal experience, and audience expectations. The increasing use of audiovisual formats further enhances the accessibility and communicative appeal of historical content. Consequently, historical knowledge in the digital era functions not only as scholarly information but also as engaging media content shaped by the logic of visibility, narrative, and audience interaction.

### Reproduction of Historical Knowledge in Popular Culture

Historical knowledge produced is subsequently reproduced in popular culture through various digital platforms, where actors actively transform it into visual and narrative forms accessible to broader audiences. This process does not merely replicate information but reconfigures history into an experiential medium shaped by storytelling, imagery, and audience engagement. Such reproduction expands the reach of historical knowledge while simultaneously altering its form and meaning. It positions history within everyday consumption practices, thereby integrating it into popular cultural circuits. This shift reflects the growing influence of digital media in mediating how society encounters and interprets the past.



Figure 2. Wandering in Search of Tourism and History in Medan City (*Berkelana Mencari Wisata dan Sejarah di Kota Medan*)

Source: Indomaret YouTube channel

First broadcast on May 3, 2024, the video has accumulated 4,336 views and 195 comments, indicating substantial public engagement. The YouTube video *“Berkelana Mencari Wisata dan Sejarah di Kota Medan”*, uploaded by the Indomaret channel in 2024, exemplifies how historical knowledge is reproduced through the lens of digital tourism. The video presents history not as a structured chronological narrative but as part of an exploratory travel experience that blends education with entertainment. For example, the narrator states, “Kesawan is one of the most iconic historical areas in Medan, full of heritage buildings and culinary attractions,” thereby framing history primarily as a site of leisure and consumption. This narrative foregrounds aesthetic appreciation and tourism value while overlooking deeper historical tensions embedded in the site.

The reproduction of historical knowledge also appears in the video *“432 Years of Medan and Forgotten History,”* which highlights prominent landmarks such as the *Tugu Guru Patimpus* and the Medan Area Monument. In this context,

these sites function as visual anchors that reinforce historical narratives and symbolize the city's identity. Content creators emphasise recognisable physical spaces to make history more tangible and relatable to audiences. This approach enhances visual engagement but often simplifies complex historical processes. It demonstrates how spatial representation becomes central to the reproduction of historical meaning in digital media.

Government institutions also play a significant role in reproducing historical knowledge through digital platforms. The official Instagram account of the Medan City Development Planning Agency (*Bappeda*), for instance, produces short-form video content portraying the Kesawan area as the city's historical core. A typical caption describes Kesawan as "a historic district that reflects the glory of Medan's past and its multicultural heritage," emphasizing harmony and urban heritage. This narrative constructs a celebratory image of the past while omitting critical aspects such as colonial-era racial segregation and economic stratification. Such selective representation reflects a discursive strategy that privileges marketable and harmonious histories over conflictual or exclusionary ones.

This form of reproduction through social media demonstrates a fundamental shift in how people access and understand history. Audiences no longer engage with history primarily through linear and analytical texts but through short, visually engaging, and easily shareable digital fragments. This transformation prioritizes emotional resonance and visual appeal over critical interpretation, thereby reshaping historical understanding. From a discourse-analytical perspective, this simplification operates through selective amplification, in which certain narratives gain prominence while others—particularly those addressing inequality and colonial power—remain marginalised. As a result, history increasingly functions within consumer culture, where its value lies in visual attractiveness and relevance to everyday experience.

### Reproducing Historical Knowledge through Digital Narratives of City Commemoration

One form of historical knowledge reproduction in digital space appears in the video titled "432 Tahun Medan dan Sejarah Yang Terlupakan" (432 Years of Medan and Forgotten History), uploaded by the YouTube channel Ghandy November on July 9, 2022, which has garnered 2,723 views and 27 comments, indicating notable public engagement with digital historical content.



Figure 3. 432 Years of Medan and Forgotten History (*432 Tahun Medan dan Sejarah yang Terlupakan*)

Source: Ghandy November YouTube channel

The content above was produced to commemorate Medan's 432nd anniversary, which symbolically functions as an important moment for rearticulating the city's historical narrative. In this video, the creators present history not as a chronological textual account but through a visual approach that depicts the current condition of several historical

sites in Medan. The featured locations include Titi Gantung, the *Tugu Guru Patimpus*, the Lili Suhairy Statue, and the Medan Area Monument, also known as the Apollo Monument. This approach positions urban space as a medium through which historical meaning is communicated. It also emphasizes the experiential dimension of history in digital representation.

These findings suggest that the reproduction of historical knowledge in digital media tends to prioritise the visualisation of historical space and materiality over in-depth analytical interpretation. Historical sites function as symbolic representations of the past that audiences can directly access through visual experience. This process reduces history to observable “physical traces” that can be documented and shared across digital platforms. The emphasis on visibility strengthens audience engagement while simplifying complex historical narratives. It also indicates a shift in how historical knowledge is constructed and communicated.

Furthermore, the use of the city’s anniversary as a narrative frame demonstrates a process of historical ritualization, in which actors selectively re-present the past to reinforce collective urban identity. In this context, the discourse of “forgotten history” operates as a strategic narrative device to attract public attention and encourage cultural awareness. This framing constructs a sense of urgency and relevance around historical preservation. It also aligns historical narratives with contemporary identity-building processes. Such practices reveal the intersection between memory, representation, and public discourse.

However, this form of reproduction also reveals a tendency toward simplification. The complexities of Medan’s history, including its social dynamics, conflicts, and structural transformations, remain insufficiently explored and are often replaced by more accessible visual representations. This condition highlights how digital culture transforms history into popular visual content that prioritizes engagement and accessibility over analytical depth. It also demonstrates how selective representation shapes public understanding of the past. Consequently, certain dimensions of history may become marginalized or overlooked.

This video illustrates that the reproduction of historical knowledge in Medan functions not only as an educational medium but also as a cultural practice that actively shapes collective memory. Historical narratives become embedded in participatory, visual, and symbolic digital experiences. This transformation repositions history from a purely scientific discipline into a form of public consumption. It also reflects broader changes in how societies engage with and interpret historical knowledge. The findings underscore the need for critical awareness in navigating digital representations of history.

### **Reproduction and Institutionalization of Historical Narratives through Government Social Media**

The reproduction of historical knowledge in Medan City extends beyond individual content creators to include active participation by government institutions through social media platforms. One illustrative example appears in the Instagram Reels content published by the Medan City Development Planning Agency (*Bappeda*), titled “*Kesawan: Jejak Sejarah Kota Medan yang Tak Terlupakan.*” This content frames the Kesawan area as the historical nucleus of Medan’s urban development since the late nineteenth century. The narrative emphasizes Kesawan’s role as an early commercial hub in East Sumatra. It portrays it as a space historically inhabited by merchants, colonial administrators, and a multi-ethnic urban population. Through this representation, the city’s past becomes anchored in a specific geographical space that symbolically connects historical continuity with present-day identity.

These findings indicate that government-led reproduction of historical knowledge operates through selective and curatorial processes that privilege narratives aligned with official identity formation. The framing of Kesawan as a site of “unforgettable historical traces” constructs a discursive narrative that encourages the public to perceive history as a valuable legacy requiring preservation and recognition. This representation positions Kesawan not only as a historical landmark but also as a collective memory space imbued with educational and symbolic significance. At the same time, such narratives tend to foreground harmonious and celebratory aspects while downplaying more complex or contested historical realities. This selectivity reflects the state’s institutional role in shaping public historical consciousness.

The use of social media as a dissemination medium demonstrates how government institutions adapt to the logic of digital communication. Historical content is packaged in short-form visual formats, such as reels, which prioritize aesthetic appeal, concise storytelling, and visual immediacy. This strategy enables broader audience engagement, particularly among younger users who consume information through digital platforms. However, this mode of

presentation also risks reducing historical complexity into simplified, normative narratives that prioritise accessibility over analytical depth. It illustrates how digital mediation reshapes both the form and substance of historical communication.



Figure 4. Kesawan: An Unforgettable Trace of Medan’s History (*Kesawan: Jejak Sejarah Kota Medan yang Tak Terlupakan*)

Source: Instagram account of the Medan City Development Planning Agency (Bappeda)

The government’s role in reproducing history also reflects a broader process of institutionalizing collective memory, in which state actors determine which narratives are deemed legitimate and worthy of dissemination. In this context, history functions not only as a body of knowledge but also as an instrument for legitimizing urban identity and heritage-based development agendas. The case of Kesawan demonstrates that the reproduction of historical knowledge in Medan operates as a discursive construction shaped by intersecting interests of identity, aesthetics, and institutional authority. This process transforms history into a public narrative that not only represents the past but also actively shapes how individuals interpret urban space, cultural heritage, and their own position within the city.

### Commodification of Historical Knowledge in the Creative Economy

The findings reveal that historical knowledge in Medan has been commodified within the framework of the creative economy (Rambe et al., 2025). One prominent example appears in *Bolu Stim Menara*. This local cake business not only sells culinary products but also constructs a historical narrative on its official website titled “From *Tanah Deli* to a Metropolitan City.” The company draws inspiration from the *Tirtanadi Tower*, a significant urban icon, and integrates this symbolism into its branding strategy. Established in 2021 with an official store in the city centre, *Bolu Stim Menara* promotes locally produced cakes made with authentic Medan ingredients while simultaneously imbuing historical meaning into its products. This approach demonstrates how businesses actively transform historical narratives into symbolic assets that enhance product identity.

The branding strategy employed by *Bolu Stim Menara* illustrates how historical symbols function as sources of added value that extend beyond material attributes. By associating its products with the *Tirtanadi Tower* and the broader historical trajectory of Medan, the company creates emotional and cultural resonance with consumers. This process enables consumers to engage not only with the physical product but also with the narrative and identity it represents. In this context, history operates as a cultural commodity that can be produced, packaged, and marketed within contemporary economic systems. The integration of narrative and product highlights the strategic role of history in shaping consumer perception and market differentiation.

This commodification reflects a broader shift in the relationship between history and capitalism, in which historical knowledge becomes a monetizable resource embedded in the logic of the creative economy. Cultural and symbolic values increasingly serve as key drivers of economic production, positioning history as a central element in branding, tourism, and creative industries. However, this process also raises critical concerns regarding authenticity and representation, as historical narratives are often simplified to align with market demands. Such simplification may obscure the complexities, conflicts, and contested dimensions of the past. Consequently, commodification operates not only as an economic strategy but also as a cultural practice that shapes how society interprets historical knowledge.



Figure 5. Writing on the History and Origins of Medan City from Bolu Menara

Source: Website bolumenara.co.id

The results further demonstrate that historical knowledge in Medan transforms through three interconnected processes: production, reproduction, and commodification. The production of knowledge no longer remains exclusive to academic institutions but involves diverse actors operating across digital and commercial domains. The reproduction of history through digital media converts it into a visual and interactive component of popular culture. At the same time, commodification positions it as a source of economic value within cultural capitalism. These dynamics collectively redefine the function and circulation of historical knowledge in contemporary society. They also indicate the increasing integration of media, culture, and economy in shaping historical narratives.

These processes collectively blur the boundaries between intellectual history and popular history, challenging traditional distinctions between academic and public forms of knowledge. History no longer operates solely as a scholarly discipline but emerges as a social, cultural, and economic practice subject to continuous negotiation. In this context, Medan serves as a significant case that illustrates how historical knowledge exists simultaneously as information, experience, and commodity. This transformation underscores the need to critically examine how historical narratives are constructed, circulated, and consumed. It also highlights the importance of maintaining analytical rigour in increasingly mediated and commercialised historical practices.

## Discussion

The transformation of historical knowledge in Medan City reveals a decisive shift from relatively closed academic practices to an open, fluid, and competitive digital public sphere. The findings show that formal institutions such as universities and archives no longer monopolize the production of historical knowledge, as non-academic actors now actively contribute through platforms such as YouTube. Figures like Dirk A. Buiskool function as sources of epistemic legitimacy within this emerging landscape, where authority derives not only from academic credentials but also from visibility, narrative construction, and access to social memory. This reconfiguration signals a redistribution of epistemic authority across diverse actors and media environments. It also underscores the growing role of digital mediation in shaping how historical knowledge is validated and circulated.

This phenomenon aligns with Foucault's (1980) conception of knowledge as inseparable from power relations. In the Medan context, historical "truth" emerges not as a fixed entity but as a product of ongoing negotiation within

competing discursive practices. Content creators, independent historians, and government institutions each contribute to constructing historical narratives shaped by distinct interests and perspectives. As a result, historical knowledge operates as a contingent, mediated construction shaped by power, media logic, and audience engagement. This perspective reframes history as an active process of meaning-making rather than a passive representation of past events.

**Table 1. Comparison between Popular History and Academic History and Their Contributions to Intellectual History**

Aspect	Popular History	Academic History	Contribution to Intellectual History
Definition	History produced and consumed by the general public through popular media (YouTube, films, social media, heritage tourism)	History produced within academic settings using scientific methods and historiographical standards	Demonstrates the spectrum of knowledge production from formal to non-formal domains within intellectual history
Main Actors	Content creators, communities, influencers, government institutions, and creative industries	Historians, academics, researchers, and educational institutions	Expands the subjects of intellectual history beyond academic elites to broader social actors
Purpose	Public education, entertainment, identity formation, and often commercial interests	Critical knowledge production, scholarly analysis, and theoretical development	Integrates reflective and communicative functions within intellectual history
Methodology	Narrative, visual storytelling, not always based on strict scientific methods	Historiographical methods, source criticism, archival research, systematic analysis	Enriches intellectual history with narrative and public communication approaches
Form of Presentation	Visual, audiovisual, concise, accessible, and engaging	Academic texts, journal articles, monographs, systematic and argumentative	Shifts intellectual history from text-based to multi-format (digital and visual) expressions
Sources	A combination of historical facts, collective memory, lived experiences, and interpretive flexibility	Primary archives, official documents, and validated scholarly literature	Highlights the plurality of sources in historical knowledge production
Validity	Relatively fluid, depending on the narrator's credibility and public reception	High validity through peer review and methodological verification	Raises debates on authority and legitimacy in intellectual history
Audience	General public, non-academic, cross-generational	The academic community and educated readers	Broadens the reach of intellectual history into the public sphere
Narrative Characteristics	Simplified, emotional, visual, sometimes fragmentary	Complex, analytical, critical, and contextual	Produces a hybridization between analytical and representational narratives
Relation to Power	Influenced by media logic, market forces, and popularity	Influenced by academic institutions and scholarly traditions	Reinforces Michel Foucault's notion that knowledge is inseparable from power relations
Economic Dimension	Strong (commodification, branding, heritage tourism)	Limited (academic publishing, research funding)	Demonstrates that ideas and knowledge also carry economic value
Social Function	Shapes popular historical awareness and collective identity	Produces critical knowledge and in-depth interpretation	Connects intellectual reflection with social practice
Strengths	Broad accessibility, engaging, rapid dissemination	Accurate, rigorous, methodologically grounded	Their combination enriches intellectual history
Limitations	Risk of simplification, bias, and distortion	Limited accessibility, often confined to academic circles	Highlights the need for integration within intellectual history
Epistemological Implications	Knowledge as public consumption	Knowledge as scientific production	Produces a hybrid form of knowledge in contemporary intellectual history

Source: Processed from various sources by the authors

The comparison presented in Table 1 demonstrates that popular history and academic history do not function as opposing domains but rather as interdependent and complementary forces in shaping contemporary intellectual history. Academic history contributes methodological rigor, critical analysis, and epistemological depth, while popular history enhances accessibility, engagement, and social relevance. Their interaction produces a hybrid form of knowledge that integrates analytical precision with communicative reach. This synthesis expands the scope of intellectual history beyond academic elites to include broader social actors and practices. It also reinforces the argument that historical knowledge today operates across multiple formats, audiences, and institutional contexts.

In this context, intellectual history cannot be confined to the study of ideas within academic elites. However, it must also encompass how those ideas are produced, circulated, and consumed within the public sphere (Calhoun, 2010). The interaction between popular and academic history generates a hybrid form of knowledge in which history

operates simultaneously as critical reflection, cultural practice, and economic resource (Nordgren, [2017](#)). This production process is followed by the reproduction of historical knowledge in visual and accessible formats, particularly through digital media (Nelson, [2000](#)). Content featuring sites such as the *Tugu Guru Patimpus*, the Medan Area Monument, and the Kesawan area demonstrates how history is represented through concrete, recognisable spatial forms. This transformation converts textual narratives into widely accessible visual experiences that broaden public engagement. It also reshapes historical understanding by privileging images, emotions, and experiential interaction over critical analysis.

Bourdieu's ([2004](#)) framework provides a useful lens to interpret these dynamics through the concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital*. Digital media functions as a new arena in which historical *habitus* forms shape how individuals recognise, interpret, and consume historical knowledge in everyday life. In this context, knowledge no longer derives solely from intellectual depth but from the ability to engage with and display historical symbols in social settings. For example, consuming historical YouTube content about Medan enables urban youth to demonstrate familiarity with local heritage and position themselves as culturally informed individuals. Visiting sites such as Kesawan or recognizing landmarks featured in digital narratives similarly constitutes objectified cultural capital expressed through spatial awareness. These practices indicate that historical engagement increasingly operates as a form of social distinction embedded in everyday cultural performance.

The act of consuming products such as *Bolu Stim Menara*, which are marketed through historical narratives, further illustrates how symbolic cultural capital functions in practice. Consumers who purchase and share these products—often referencing their historical associations with the *Tirtanadi Tower*—actively perform cultural awareness and local identity in contexts such as social media and gift exchange (Zhang et al., [2015](#)). This behavior demonstrates that historical consumption extends beyond passive reception and becomes a performative practice through which individuals accumulate and display distinction. However, such reproduction remains selective, as dominant narratives tend to align with media logic and institutional interests while marginalizing more complex or contested histories. This selectivity highlights the discursive processes that shape public historical consciousness. It also underscores the role of representation in determining which aspects of history gain visibility.

Furthermore, this study shows that historical knowledge in Medan operates not only through production and reproduction but also through commodification within the creative economy. The case of *Bolu Stim Menara* demonstrates how businesses strategically employ historical narratives to enhance product value and strengthen brand identity. By linking products to symbolic local references such as the *Tirtanadi Tower*, companies transform history into a marketable resource that integrates meaning, memory, and consumption. This transformation shifts history from a domain of knowledge into a commodity that can be packaged and sold as experience and identity. It also reflects broader changes in how cultural symbols function within economic systems. The commodification process thus reveals the intersection of history, culture, and market logic.

This pattern extends beyond a single enterprise and spans various sectors of Medan's creative economy. Heritage-themed cafés and restaurants in the Kesawan area, for instance, incorporate colonial architectural elements, vintage interiors, and historical imagery to construct atmospheres of nostalgia and authenticity. These establishments actively market Medan's historical identity as a consumable aesthetic experience, transforming urban heritage into a commercial asset. Similarly, tourism and culinary industries integrate historical narratives into branding strategies, promotional materials, and spatial design. These practices reinforce the structural role of history as a strategic resource within the city's economic landscape. They also illustrate how historical representation becomes embedded in everyday commercial environments.

This commodification reflects the broader logic of cultural capitalism, where economic value derives not only from material production but also from symbolic meaning (Sayer, [2003](#)). Historical narratives function as resources that enable differentiation and enhance market appeal within competitive industries (Suddaby et al., [2010](#)). However, this process also carries epistemological implications, as narratives are often simplified to meet market expectations. Complex historical realities—including conflict, inequality, and structural transformation—are frequently reduced to linear and affirmative representations (Carroll, [1990](#)). This simplification reshapes how audiences perceive and understand the past. It also raises critical concerns regarding authenticity and representation.

The integration of production, reproduction, and commodification demonstrates the hybridization of intellectual and popular history in contemporary Medan. Boundaries between these domains continue to blur as historical

knowledge circulates across academic discourse, digital media, and commercial practices (Jensen, 2016). History no longer functions solely as a scientific discipline but as a dynamic social, cultural, and economic practice subject to continuous negotiation. Medan provides a concrete case that illustrates how the past is actively produced, reproduced, and utilised across diverse contemporary contexts. This transformation underscores the need for critical engagement with the evolving forms of historical knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that historical knowledge in Medan has undergone a fundamental transformation from a relatively closed academic practice to an open, dynamic, and multi-layered public arena. The analysis of production, reproduction, and commodification shows that history is no longer an objective representation of the past but a social construction negotiated through relations of power, media, and market forces. The decentralization of epistemic authority through digital platforms, the shift toward visual and participatory forms of historical consumption, and the integration of history into the logic of cultural capitalism collectively indicate a significant epistemological shift. This study bridges intellectual and popular history within the framework of the political economy of knowledge, demonstrating that contemporary historical knowledge is shaped not only by scholarly methods but also by digital circulation and commercial practices.

This study suggests the need for more critical engagement in the production and dissemination of historical knowledge in digital and public spaces. Actors involved in historical representation, including content creators, institutions, and industries, should maintain a balance between accessibility and analytical depth to prevent oversimplification and distortion of historical complexity. The findings also indicate the importance of strengthening interdisciplinary approaches that combine historiography, media studies, and cultural analysis to ensure that the popularization of history does not undermine its scientific integrity. At the same time, this study acknowledges its limitation in focusing primarily on content producers without directly examining audience reception, which may affect the comprehensiveness of its interpretation.

Future research is encouraged to incorporate audience-centred approaches, such as interviews, surveys, and ethnographic methods, to explore how historical knowledge is interpreted, internalised, and used in everyday life. Comparative studies across different cities or regions would also provide a broader understanding of how local contexts influence the commodification and circulation of history in digital environments. Expanding the range of empirical objects, including diverse industries and platforms, would further strengthen the analysis of structural patterns in the political economy of historical knowledge in contemporary society.

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